

► The gender pay gap in Bangladesh

Trends, causes and policy options



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Trends, causes and policy options

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► Foreword

The most recent ILO Global Wage Report 2024–25 highlights that although real wages have shown a modest recovery worldwide, wage inequalities remain entrenched — particularly for women and workers in lower-paid positions. The report reinforces the urgent need to strengthen equal pay legislation, enhance wage-setting mechanisms and adopt targeted policies to reduce gender-based discrimination in the labour market. These global insights frame an important backdrop for Bangladesh’s continued efforts to build a more equitable, inclusive and prosperous society.

The gender pay gap (GPG) remains one of the clearest indicators of underlying inequalities in the world of work. Its causes are multifaceted – ranging from the undervaluation of sectors in which women are concentrated to persistent barriers that limit women’s access to leadership roles and the unequal distribution of unpaid care responsibilities. Addressing these gaps is not only a moral necessity but a strategic investment in sustainable and inclusive economic development and social cohesion.

International momentum to close the GPG continues to grow. Global commitments, such as Sustainable Development Goals target 8.5, which calls for the achievement, by 2030, of “equal pay for work of equal value”, and the 2025 Doha Political Declaration, provide a strong framework for national action. Initiatives like the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) offer valuable platforms for exchanging best practices, from legislation on pay transparency to care policy reforms, offering valuable insights for national action.

Bangladesh, among other nations, has started providing the GPG with the required attention. For instance, the observance of International Equal Pay Day reflects the growing commitment of concerned stakeholders to raise awareness around this societal and labour challenge. The Government’s commitment is reflected in the Five-Year Strategic Framework for Reform and Development (2026–2031), which places explicit attention on wages and gender equity in the labour market. Its policy directions on pay transparency and payroll equity further underscore the importance of addressing gender pay disparities through evidence-based policy and institutional action. In addition, Bangladesh has joined a pioneer group of countries in collaborating with the ILO to conduct research on the GPG, reflecting a will to address the issue through an informed and evidence-based approach.

This report offers one of the most comprehensive national analyses to date of the scale, drivers and implications of gender-based wage disparities. Drawing on the 2023 labour force survey and extensive consultations with the Government, employers, workers and experts, the study finds that the monthly GPG in Bangladesh stands at 22 to 25 per cent, meaning that women earn roughly 750 to 780 taka (Tk) for every TK1,000 earned by men. A detailed analysis shows that this gap is largely unexplained by differences in education, experience or occupation, pointing to the role of structural factors and discrimination.

The report also situates wage disparities within the broader labour-market context: women remain under-represented in wage employment, concentrated in lower-paying sectors and less likely to occupy managerial or high-skilled positions. At the same time, Bangladesh’s legal landscape is evolving, including through the 2025 amendments to the Bangladesh Labour Act. These reforms, combined with global normative commitments, such as the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (No. 111), provide a strong foundation for further progress.

Building on national evidence and global policy experiences, this study presents a set of practical, actionable policy options tailored for Bangladesh. These include strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, broadening the legal definition of remuneration to align with international standards and adopting evidence-based reforms. These proposed reforms include enhanced wage-setting mechanisms, improved care policies, expanded protections and targeted measures to address structural discrimination.

The ILO commends the Government of Bangladesh and our social partners for their leadership and continued commitment to advancing gender equality, promoting women’s economic empowerment and reducing the GPG. We extend our sincere appreciation to the researchers and members of the tripartite Research Advisory Group, whose collaboration has greatly enriched this analysis.

It is our hope that this report will serve as both a reference and a catalyst for sustained, coordinated action. Closing the GPG is not only a moral imperative — it is a strategic investment in Bangladesh’s future. The ILO remains fully committed to supporting the country’s efforts to ensure that all women and men can participate in the world of work on equal, fair and dignified terms.



Max Tuñón

Director

ILO Country Office for Bangladesh

► **Executive summary**

THE GPG IN BANGLADESH

► Executive summary

Women are substantially less present than men in wage employment

The report shows that gender inequalities in employment remain substantial. In 2023, the female employment rate in Bangladesh was 40.2 per cent, compared to 77.9 per cent for men, yielding a gender pay gap (GPG) of 37.7 percentage points. Moreover, only 19 per cent of employed women work as wage employees, compared to 48 per cent of employed men. As a result, women represent only 17 per cent of all wage employees in the country. Among those who are in wage employment, women are over-represented in manufacturing and household activities, while they account for only 6.2 per cent of managerial positions — one of the lowest shares in the South Asian region.

The GPG in Bangladesh stands slightly lower than in some neighbouring countries¹ and higher than the global average

Using data from the country's labour force survey for 2023, the analysis shows that wage differences between women and men in Bangladesh remain significant. When measured using monthly wages, women earn between 22 and 25 per cent less than men. This translates into women receiving, on average, 750 to 780 Bangladeshi takas (Tk) for every Tk1,000 earned by men. These gaps are slightly higher than the global average but lower than values observed in neighbouring Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The GPG widens sharply with age — reflecting the constraints many women face after childbirth — and narrows with higher levels of education, suggesting that educational attainment mitigates but does not eliminate gender wage disparities. The gap is substantially higher among informal workers than among those in formal employment, underscoring the role of legal compliance and enforcement in reducing wage inequalities.

The vast majority of the GPG is unexplained by observable factors²

The results also highlight that the GPG is largely unexplained by observable differences between women and men in wage employment. Specifically, a decomposition of the GPG shows that at all points of the wage distribution, the majority of the gap cannot be attributed to differences in education, occupations or sectors of employment. Rather, the GPG is mostly unexplained, suggesting that discrimination — either direct or indirect — most likely plays a central role. Two structural forces appear particularly important. First, sectors with a relatively high share of female wage employment tend to offer lower average wages for all workers, echoing international evidence on the undervaluation of feminized sectors. Second, women in wage employment report spending almost four times more weekly hours on household chores than men, which affects their ability to work longer hours and pursue higher-paid roles.

The legal and policy framework promotes gender equality, but implementation gaps exist

Bangladesh has taken important steps to strengthen its policy and legal framework on gender equality. The Constitution guarantees equal rights between men and women, while the Bangladesh Labour Act includes provisions requiring equal wages “for work of equal nature or standard or value”. Recent amendments have also extended legal protections to domestic workers and expanded maternity leave. Nonetheless, policy implementation gaps remain in place. The interpretation of the equal pay clause is narrow; minimum wage coverage remains incomplete; and employers continue to bear the full cost of maternity leave, creating disincentives to women's recruitment and promotion. Restrictions on night work and to work in certain occupations further limit women's access to better-paid jobs. Strengthening labour inspection capacity and facilitating access to complaint mechanisms are key tools for the enforcement of existing rights.

¹ Neighbouring countries in which a similar GPG study with the same methodology was conducted.

² Observable factors or features refer to specific measurable characteristics that can be quantified in an observable space.

Stakeholder consultations reveal multiple drivers of the GPG

The stakeholder consultations conducted for this report corroborate the idea of the centrality of structural, cultural and institutional factors behind the GPG. Stakeholders pointed to four main drivers:

- a. gaps in wage-setting systems, limited collective bargaining and weak enforcement of the legislation;
- b. horizontal and vertical segregation across sectors and occupations, as well as gender segregation in access to training;
- c. social and cultural norms that concentrate care responsibilities on women; and
- d. labour market dynamics, characterized by abundant low-cost labour.

While stakeholders expressed partially different views on the specific policies required to reduce the GPG, they agree on the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to reduce wage discrimination and promote equal opportunities between women and men.

Policy options to reduce the GPG in Bangladesh

Based on the empirical evidence, the review of the policy and legislative framework and the stakeholder perspectives, this report presents a set of policy recommendations that could be considered by national partners. These include:

- clarifying and operationalizing the principle of equal pay for work of equal value;
- introducing objective job evaluations;
- adopting a gender-responsive approach to minimum wage-setting;
- reconsidering further the legislation over maternity and paternity leave;
- reviewing existing restrictions on women's employment to avoid that they do act as obstacles to career progression;
- broadening the definition of remuneration to align with international standards;
- expanding flexible work arrangements;
- promoting safety and combating harassment both at the workplace and while commuting;
- using collective bargaining to reduce gender inequalities; and
- reinforcing labour inspection and dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Finally, the report highlights the importance of improving data availability and promoting research on gender wage inequalities to inform evidence-based policymaking.

Together, these measures can support Bangladesh in addressing the structural drivers of the GPG and in moving toward a more equitable and inclusive labour market for women and men.

▶ **1. Introduction**

THE GPG IN BANGLADESH

► 1. Introduction

Around the world, women in wage employment earn, on average, 20 per cent less than men. In most circumstances, this difference – referred to as the gender pay gap (GPG) – cannot be explained by differences between men and women in terms of individual or labour-market characteristics. Rather, the GPG is often unexplained by observable factors and mostly driven by discrimination (ILO 2018, 2024a).³ Gender wage discrimination can take multiple forms, including structural norms and informal practices that limit women's access to opportunities for career advancement as well as lower wages in traditionally female-dominated occupations. Very often, discrimination also extends beyond the labour market. In particular, women often take care of a disproportionate amount of unpaid household care responsibilities. This limits their participation in the labour force (ILO 2024b) and can also result in lower wages among women who combine household care responsibilities with part-time employment.

Reducing the GPG is thus an important policy objective from both an equity (moral duty) and economic development perspective. This goal aligns with the principles set out in a series of ILO instruments. The fundamental Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) – ratified by Bangladesh in 1998 – promotes “the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value” (Art. 2(1)) (also known as equal pay or pay equity). This principle implies that men and women should earn the same remuneration, not only when they perform the same job – referred to as “equal pay for equal work” – but also when they perform two different jobs, provided that the value associated with those jobs is the same. By transcending direct job comparisons, the equal pay principle targets structural gender inequities in the labour market. Convention No. 100, together with its accompanying Recommendation No. 90, provide guidance to Member States on how to implement the equal pay principle, including through the use of objective job evaluations.

Other ILO instruments are also closely connected to the reduction of the GPG. Among others, the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) – ratified by Bangladesh in 1972 – includes a commitment to pursue “equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation” (Art. 2). This includes tackling discrimination with respect to the “terms and conditions of employment” (Art. 1(3)). The Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131) – not ratified by Bangladesh – calls for establishing a system of minimum wages covering all wage earners “whose terms of employment are such that coverage would be appropriate” (Art.1(1)), with the definition of these groups to be made by the national competent authority in consultation with the social partners. The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) – not ratified by Bangladesh – calls for policies that allow men and women with family responsibilities to engage in employment “without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities” (Art. 3(1)). The Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) – not ratified by Bangladesh – affirms the right of a woman to “return to the same position or an equivalent position paid at the same rate at the end of her maternity leave” (Art. 8(2)). The Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) – ratified by Bangladesh in November 2025 – concerns “violence and harassment in the world of work occurring in the course of, linked with or arising out of work” (Art. 3), which reiterates the call for the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

To promote the application of these principles, governments around the world have implemented a series of initiatives, often in coordination with social partners and other members of civil society. These initiatives align with commitments and agreements reached at the multilateral level to reduce the GPG. Among others, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include the commitment to achieve, by 2030, equal pay for work of equal value (target 8.5). This would represent an important step towards reducing the gap between “average hourly earnings of employees, by sex, age, occupation and persons with disabilities” (SDG indicator 8.5.1). The EPIC, a multi-stakeholder coalition to reduce pay differences between men and women that was established in 2017 and is coordinated by the ILO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and UN-Women, has promoted efforts to reduce the GPG and increase awareness around the persistence of gender wage inequalities. G20 declarations have also consistently reaffirmed the commitment of closing the

³ The ILO has defined discrimination as a situation in which “people are treated differently because of certain characteristics, such as race, colour or sex, and this results in the impairment of equality of opportunity and treatment”; see ILO, Identifying Challenges and Possible Policy Responses regarding the Application of the Principle of Non-Discrimination in the World of Work, GB.355/POL/2, 2025, para. 4.

GPG, as part of a broader strategy to promote female empowerment and reduce inequalities in the world of work. For instance, the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration of 2023 pledged to promote initiatives aimed at "closing the gender pay gap and ensuring women's equal access to decent work and quality jobs".⁴ The Doha Political Declaration adopted at the end of the Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025 acknowledged that "[o]n average, women earn less than men and millions of women worldwide are outside the labour force"⁵ and called for implementing policies aimed at "enhancing women's full access to decent work and equal opportunities in the labour market, promoting equal pay for work of equal value".⁶ Against this background, the aim of the present report is to provide a comprehensive picture of the nature of the GPG in Bangladesh and its key drivers, as well as possible policy options that are available to reduce it with the aim of informing a related tripartite national discussion.

This report starts by examining differences between men and women in terms of employment rates, as well as differences in the types of jobs held (section 2). The data shows that although the female employment rate has increased substantially over the last decade, it is still almost 40 percentage points lower than the male rate. In addition, while the majority of men in employment work as wage employees, this is true for only 20 per cent of women in employment, resulting in lower employment and income protection for women in employment. As a result, women represent only 17 per cent of the total number of wage employees in Bangladesh. "Manufacturing" represents the main sector of employment for women in wage employment, followed by "Activities of households as employers" and "Education". In terms of occupation, women are less likely than men to occupy managerial positions and only 6.2 per cent of managerial positions are filled by women – one of the lowest values among South Asian countries. The vast majority of wage employment is of an informal nature, with relatively small differences between men and women. The number of hours worked is slightly higher among male than female wage employees, but the majority of both men and women work full-time.

The analysis of the GPG shows that when this is computed using information on monthly wages, it is estimated between 22 and 25 per cent (section 3).⁷ This means that for every Tk1,000 per month earned by men, women earn Tk750 to Tk780. At this level, the GPG in Bangladesh is slightly lower than values registered in other countries in South Asia, such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka, but higher than the global average. Within each age group in Bangladesh, the GPG widens as workers get older, whereas within each educational level and within occupational categories, the gap shrinks for those with higher education and in high-skilled roles. The GPG is also higher among informally employed individuals compared to those who are formally employed, indicating that compliance with labour legislation can contribute to reducing the GPG. The GPG is positive in virtually all sectors of economic activity, including "Manufacturing of wearing apparels", which is the main sector of employment for female wage employees in the country.

The analysis also explores the reasons behind the GPG. The results show that at all points of the wage distribution, the GPG is mostly not explained by observed differences between men and women in terms of individual or labour-market characteristics. This suggests that the GPG can mostly be linked to the presence of inequity at different stages of life. In particular, the report provides evidence in support of two forms of inequity. First, sectors that employ a relatively high share of women pay lower wages on average to both men and women. Around the world, this has been associated with the presence of a penalty against feminized sectors, whereby jobs that are traditionally regarded as jobs for women are paid lower wages. Second, there is evidence that the unequal division of unpaid care responsibilities between men and women is one of the factors behind the GPG. Specifically, women in wage employment report a much higher number of hours spent doing household chores than men (27.7 versus 7.7 hours per week). Taking care of these household responsibilities, in turn, severely reduces women's capacity to fully participate in the labour market, which also affects their wages.

The review of policies and legislation in Bangladesh (section 4) shows that the Constitution guarantees equal rights between men and women "in all spheres of the State and of public life" (Art. 28). In addition, the Bangladesh Labour Act does include provisions requiring equal wages "for work of equal nature or standard or value" (section 345). However, this clause has been interpreted narrowly in practice. The Minimum Wages

⁴ G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, New Delhi, India, 9-10 September 2023, para. 64 (iii).

⁵ See UN General Assembly, resolution 80/5, Doha Political Declaration of the "World Social Summit" under the title "the Second World Summit for Social Development", A/RES/80/5 (2025), Annex, para. 18 (e).

⁶ See UN General Assembly, resolution 80/5, Annex, para. 30 (s).

⁷ The analysis of the GPG was conducted using data from the country's 2023 labour force survey.

Board is the main wage-setting system in the country, tasked with the goal of determining the minimum wages. However, the Board does not cover all sectors of economic activity and the wage-setting mechanism does not explicitly ensure that the remuneration rates are fixed free from gender bias, and in particular that the work in sectors with a high proportion of women is not being undervalued. While the legislation provides for at least 16 weeks of maternity leave, it establishes that the costs fall uniquely on the employers. This can create disincentives to hire or promote women of childbearing age, thereby potentially contributing to the emergence of gender wage inequalities. In addition, there are still restrictions that prevent women from working under certain conditions (for example, at night) or in certain jobs that require intensive physical work. Although they are intended to protect women, these limitations might reduce their employment and earning potential.

Finally, focused group discussions (FGDs) were held with key stakeholders to collect their opinions on the drivers contributing to the GPG (section 5). The first factor driver of the GPG mentioned by stakeholders refers to structural and institutional factors, including the limited coverage of minimum wage boards and unequal grading systems. The second factor mentioned by stakeholders to explain the GPG refers to horizontal and vertical segregation, with women being confined to lower-paid sectors and occupations. Similarly, the third factor mentioned by stakeholders to explain the GPG relates to cultural norms and the fact that women have a higher share of household care responsibilities, and they are also penalized by safety and harassment concerns that discourage them from taking up certain jobs. Finally, the fourth driver of the GPG mentioned by stakeholders refers to the state of the labour market, in particular the correlation between the abundance of labour supply and the tendency to offer lower wages to categories of worker that are perceived to be willing to accept any wage offer, including women.

Based on the empirical evidence presented, the review of the policies and legislation and the views expressed by stakeholders, the report concludes by proposing certain policy options that could be considered by tripartite partners (section 6). These suggested options are informed by the evidence of “what works” to address the GPG, as determined on the basis of good practices from around the world. For Bangladesh, policy recommendations include:

- clarifying the application of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value;
- adopting objective job evaluations to determine the value of work;
- ensuring that the wage-setting scheme addresses systematic gender inequalities;
- broadening the legal definition of remuneration;
- reviewing legislation concerning maternity (notably the financing scheme) to avoid any disincentives in hiring women;⁸
- reviewing all existing restrictions on women’s employment;
- promoting the use of more flexible working time arrangements to enhance work–life balance;
- tackling violence and harassment in the world of work; and
- using collective bargaining as an instrument to promote women’s employment and wages.

However, these measures will also need to be adequately implemented, which will require the reinforcement of the system of labour inspection, especially when it comes to tackling gender-based discrimination. Similarly, the proposed measures will need to be monitored and evaluated, which will require increasing the availability of data to study the GPG, as well as launching gender-focused research campaigns to inform policymaking.

⁸ The Bangladesh Labour Act amendment ordinance adopted on 17 November 2025 introduced better maternity leave, which aligns to some extent with the options proposed in this report.

► **2. Labour-market trends**

THE GPG IN BANGLADESH

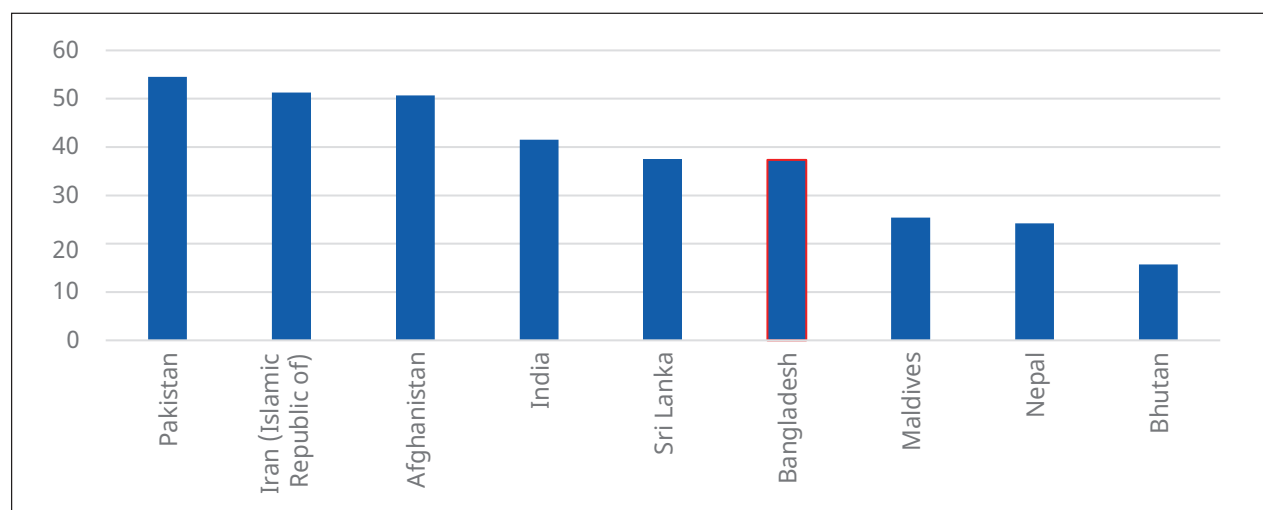
► 2. Labour-market trends

The female employment rate is almost 40 percentage points lower than the male rate

In most countries around the world, the female employment rate is lower than the male employment rate. This is due to a series of obstacles to women's employment, including the unequal division of household care responsibilities, as well as the role played by cultural norms and gender stereotypes (ILO 2024b). In 2023, the female employment rate in Bangladesh was 40.2 per cent, while the male employment rate was 77.9 per cent.⁹ As a result, the gender gap in employment rates was equal to 37.7 percentage points. The gender gap in employment rates in Bangladesh is lower than the average estimated for South Asian countries, which is 44.2 percentage points.¹⁰ Specifically, three countries in the region (Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan) reported lower gender gaps in employment rates, while three other countries (Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan) reported higher gaps. The gender gap in employment reported in Bangladesh, instead, is similar to the values registered in India (41.3 percentage points) and Sri Lanka (37.9 percentage points). The gender employment gap in Bangladesh, however, is higher than the global average, which the ILO estimated at 23.3 percentage points in 2023.¹¹

The fact that the difference between the male and the female employment rate in Bangladesh is lower than the average for South Asian countries is thanks to the increase in the female employment rate over the last decade: while the male employment rate remained roughly stable between 2013 and 2023 in Bangladesh, the female employment rate increased by about 9 percentage points. The increase in the female employment rate in Bangladesh was particularly marked for individuals aged 15 to 24 (12.1 percentage points increase between 2013 and 2023), but a large increase was also observed for individuals aged 25 and above (8.3 percentage points increase). At the same time, the increase in the female employment rate was larger for individuals with intermediate levels of education (17.6 percentage points) but lower for those with less than basic education (8.3 percentage points) and those with basic education (2.2 percentage points). The employment rate of women with an advanced level of education instead decreased by 3.2 percentage points over the same period.¹²

► **Figure 1: Difference between male and female employment rates in South Asian countries, latest available year (in percentage points)**



Note: Data refers to 2021 for Afghanistan and Pakistan; 2023 for Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Islamic Republic of Iran; 2024 for India; 2022 for Sri Lanka; 2019 for the Maldives; and 2017 for Nepal.

⁹ Here and in the rest of this section, the analysis will use the values of the indicators for the population aged 15 years old and above; the data comes from the Bangladesh labour force survey, as elaborated by the ILO Department of Statistics.

¹⁰ According to the ILO classification, Bangladesh belongs to the Southern Asia region, which also includes Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka; however, the reference year differs across countries, as not all countries run regular surveys each year.

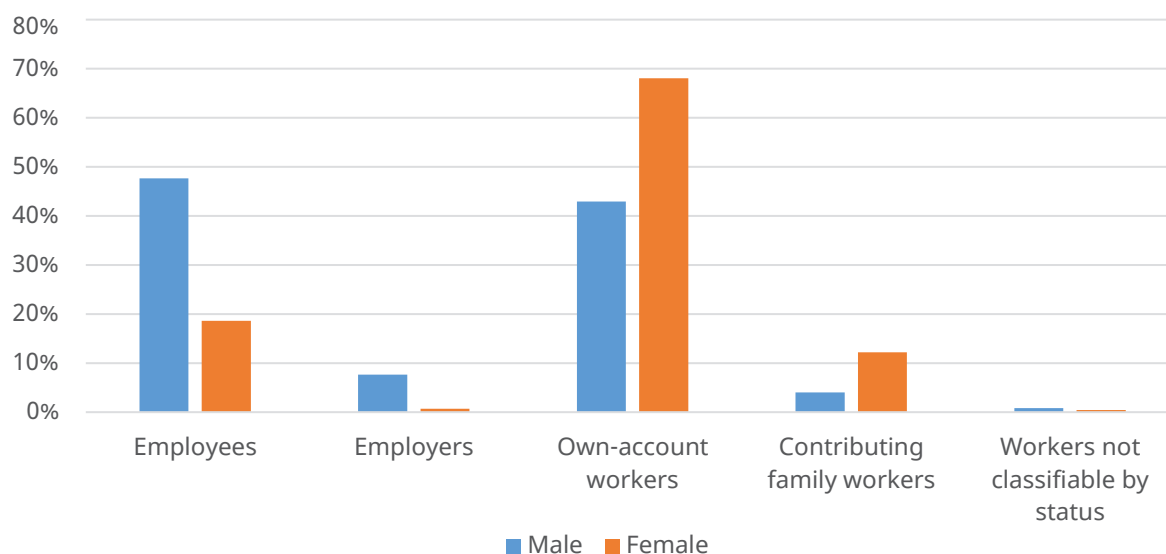
¹¹ Data refers to ILO modelled estimates for 2023 (November 2024 estimates).

¹² Following the ISCED-11 classification: Less than basic corresponds to "No schooling" or "Early childhood education"; Basic corresponds to "Primary education" and "Lower-secondary education"; Intermediate corresponds to "Upper secondary education" and "Post-secondary non-tertiary education"; and Advanced corresponds to "Short-cycle tertiary education", "Bachelor's or equivalent level", "Master's or equivalent level" and "Doctoral or equivalent level".

Women in employment are most likely to work as own-account workers

Given the difference between the male and the female employment rates, women represent about 35 per cent of the entire employed population in Bangladesh, or slightly more than one in every three workers in the labour market. However, men and women in employment are not equally distributed among different employment statuses (figure 2).¹³ Specifically, men in employment work predominantly as wage employees (48 per cent) or own-account workers (43 per cent), with only a minority of them employed as employers (5 per cent) or contributing family workers (3 per cent). Among women in employment, on the other hand, the vast majority work as own-account workers (almost 70 per cent of all women in employment). Only 19 per cent of women who are in employment work as wage employees. A non-negligible share of women, 12 per cent, also work as contributing family workers, while only 1 per cent are employed as employers.

► **Figure 2: Distribution of male and female employment, by status in employment, 2023**



Women account for only 17 per cent of the total number of wage employees

As a result of the gender gap in employment rates and the different distribution of men and women across statuses in employment, women represent only about 17 per cent of the total number of employees in the country or less than one every five wage employees (figure 3).

The share of female wage employees also varies by individual characteristics. First, women represent 18 per cent of wage employees aged 15 to 24 (that is, broadly in line with the overall representation in the population of wage employees) but only 12 per cent of wage employees aged 25 to 54 and 9 per cent of those aged 55 to 64. However, the share of women in wage employment increases again to reach 19 per cent among individuals aged 65 and over.¹⁴

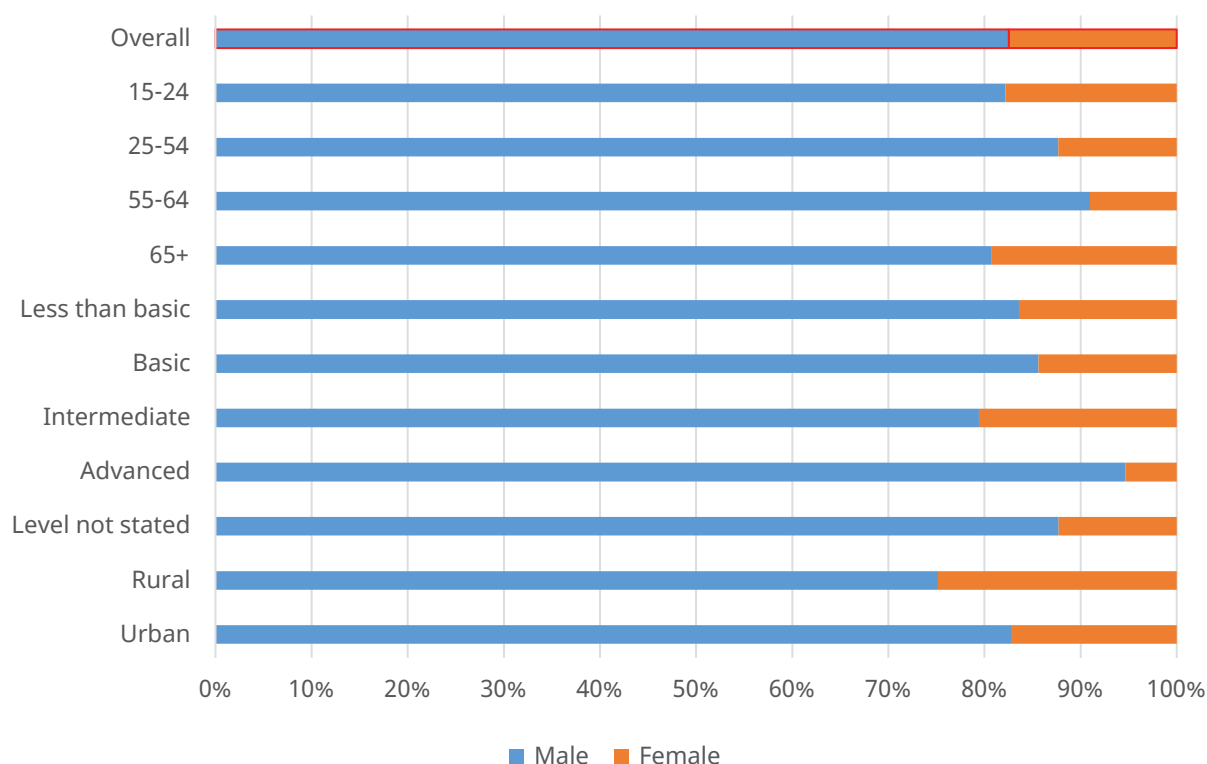
Turning to educational attainment, women represent 16 per cent of the wage employees with less than basic education, 14 per cent of those with basic education, 21 per cent of wage employees with an intermediate level of education and only 5 per cent of those with an advanced education. This means that the vast majority of wage employees with an advanced level of education are men. This is despite the fact that women represent about 35 per cent of all individuals with an advanced level of education in the country (that is, looking at the entire population, irrespective of the employment status). This means that women are less likely to be highly educated than men in Bangladesh and that highly educated women are less likely than highly educated men to be in wage employment.¹⁵ Finally, women represent about 25 per cent of wage employees in rural areas and 17 per cent of wage employees in urban areas.

¹³ This study adopts the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE) 93 classification of status in employment. While this is not the most updated classification (the ICSE-18 classification), the ICSE-93 classification remains the most widely used by statistical offices around the world and is the only one that is available for Bangladesh.

¹⁴ Note that the standard retirement age is equal to 59 in the public sector and 60 in the private sector; as a result, employment rates for individuals aged 60 and above decline significantly.

¹⁵ This is also part of a broader trend that has seen the labour force participation rate of highly educated women decline from 2017 to 2022.

► Figure 3: Share of male and female wage employees, overall and by individual characteristics, 2023



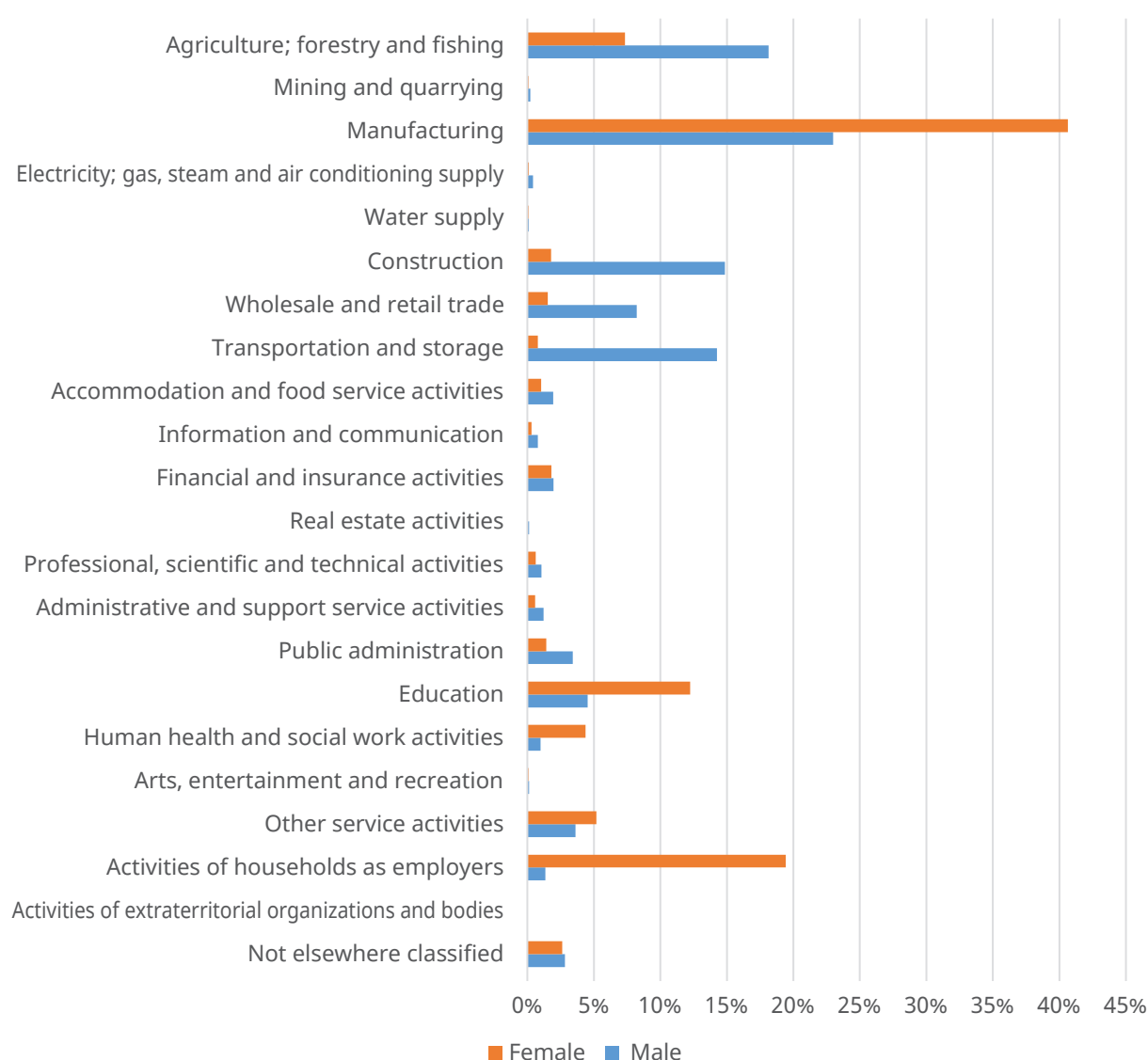
Manufacturing is the main sector of female wage employment

Turning to the distribution of men and women in wage employment across sectors of economic activity (figure 4), “Manufacturing” is the main sector of wage employment for women.¹⁶ Specifically, 41 per cent of female wage employees work in that sector, compared to only 23 per cent of male wage employees.¹⁷ For women, important sectors of employment are also “Activities of households as employers” (19 per cent of total female wage employment), “Education” (12 per cent) and “Agriculture” (7 per cent). For male wage employees, on the other hand, other important sectors of employment are “Agriculture” (18 per cent of total male wage employment), “Construction” (15 per cent) and “Transportation and storage” (14 per cent).

¹⁶ Note that this result applies only because of the focus on women in wage employment. If, instead, the attention is turned towards all women in employment (that is, irrespective of their status in employment), agriculture represents by far the largest sector of employment (that is, accounting for more than 70 per cent of total female employment).

¹⁷ However, this does not mean that there are more women and men in wage employment in “Manufacturing”. Rather, women represent only 27 per cent of wage employees in the sector. This is due to the lower female employment rate as well as the lower likelihood of women working as wage employees, as reviewed above. The only sector that features more women than men in wage employment is “Activities of households as employers”.

► Figure 4: Distribution of men and women in wage employment, by sector of economic activity, 2023



Note: "Water supply" refers to "Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities"; "Wholesale and retail trade" refers to "Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles"; "Public administration" refers to "Public administration and defence; compulsory social security"; and "Activities of households as employers" refers to "Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use".

Women are substantially less likely than men to occupy managerial positions

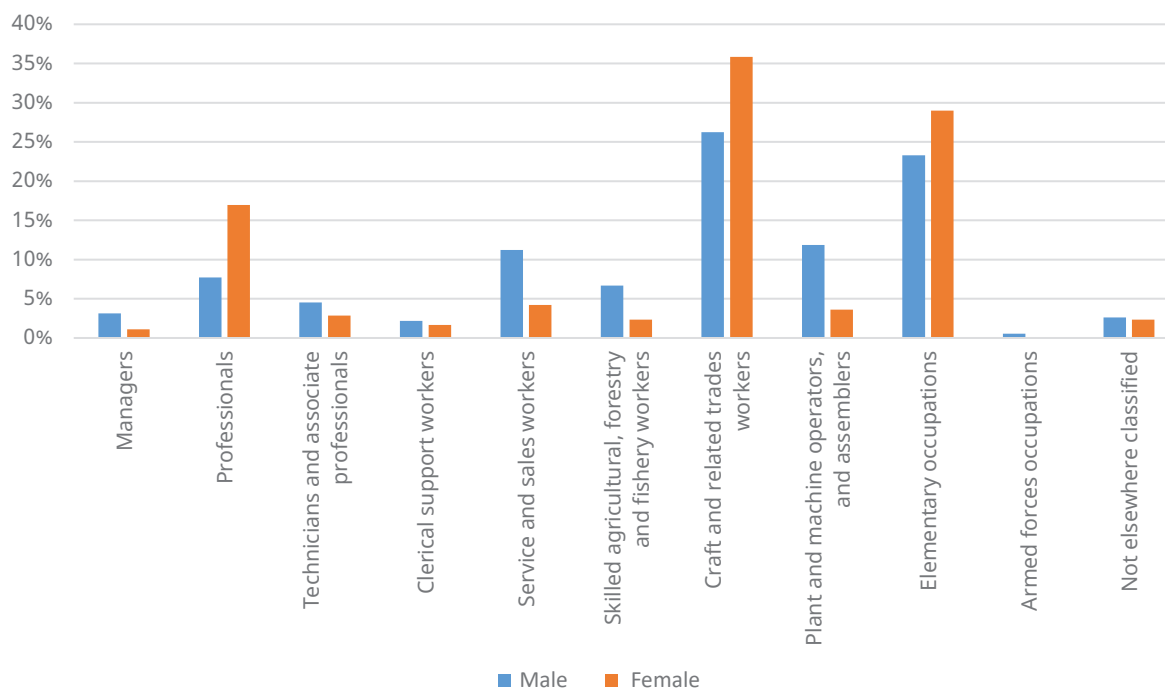
Women and men in wage employment also differ in terms of their distribution across occupations (figure 5). The data reveals that 36 per cent of female wage employees work as "Craft and related trades workers" and an additional 29 per cent in "Elementary occupations". At the same time, 17 per cent of female wage employees work as "Professionals". Taken together, these three occupations account for 82 per cent of female wage employment. Instead, male wage employment is more equally distributed across occupations. In addition, men are more likely than women to work at the top of the occupational distribution (that is, in managerial positions). In particular, this occupation accounts for 3 per cent of male wage employment, compared to only 1 per cent of female wage employment.

As a result, the data also shows that women occupy only 6.2 per cent of managerial positions.¹⁸ This is much

¹⁸ Note that this data refers to overall employment, rather than only focusing on wage employment; if there was an equal number of men and women in employment and equal access to managerial positions between male and female wage employees, this share should be equal to 50 per cent.

lower than the global average, estimated by the ILO at 30 per cent, as well as the average for South Asian countries, at 10.8 per cent. Specifically, data from the latest available year shows that other countries in the region all report higher values (11.7 per cent in India, 13.2 per cent in Nepal, 18.7 per cent in the Maldives, 19.2 per cent in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 23.3 per cent in Sri Lanka and 28.8 per cent in Bhutan), except Pakistan (5.7 per cent) and Afghanistan (4.9 per cent).

► **Figure 5: Distribution of men and women in wage employment, by occupation, 2023**



About nine wage employees out of ten are informally employed

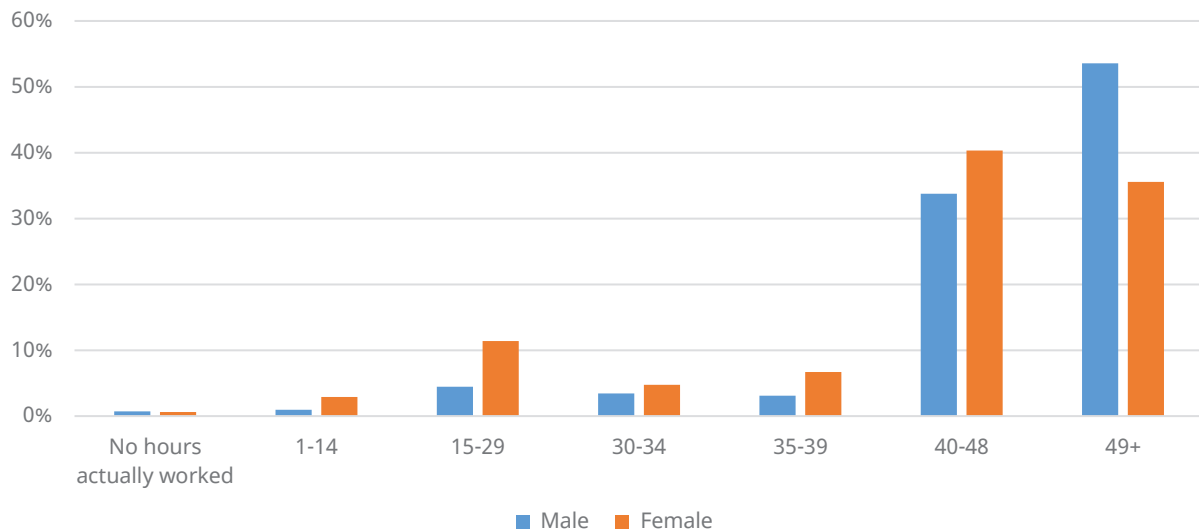
The analysis also looks at differences in the distribution of men and women in wage employment by type of economic unit (that is, informal, formal or household own-use production and community sector, henceforth household sector) and nature of the job (formal or informal employment) (figure 6).¹⁹

The data shows that men in wage employment are slightly more likely than women to be informally employed. However, informal employment represents by far the most common form of employment in the country for both men and women, accounting for almost nine wage employees out of ten (91 per cent of male wage employment and 87 per cent of female wage employment). The pervasiveness of informal employment represents one of the reasons explaining low productivity levels in the country, with productivity growth (measured as the percentage change in output per worker) that has also decreased over the most recent years.

While the rate of informal employment is therefore similar between men and women in wage employment in Bangladesh, there are differences in the distribution of male and female informal wage employees among the formal, informal or household sectors. Specifically, individuals can be informally employed in (a) the formal sector, (b) the informal sector or (c) the household sector. Among men, informal employment takes place primarily in the informal sector (60 per cent), while the formal sector accounts for 38 per cent of the total number of male wage employees who are informally employed and the household sector accounts for only a residual share. Among women, on the other hand, informal employment takes place primarily in the formal sector (52 per cent). The share of informal employment that takes place in the informal sector is much lower (at 26 per cent), but a non-negligible share of informal employment also takes place in the household economy (22 per cent).

¹⁹ The discussion does not cover elements related to the institutional sector of employment (that is, public or private) or the size of the firm, as data for these variables is missing for a non-negligible share of observations.

► Figure 6: Distribution of men and women in wage employment, by unit of production and nature of job, 2023

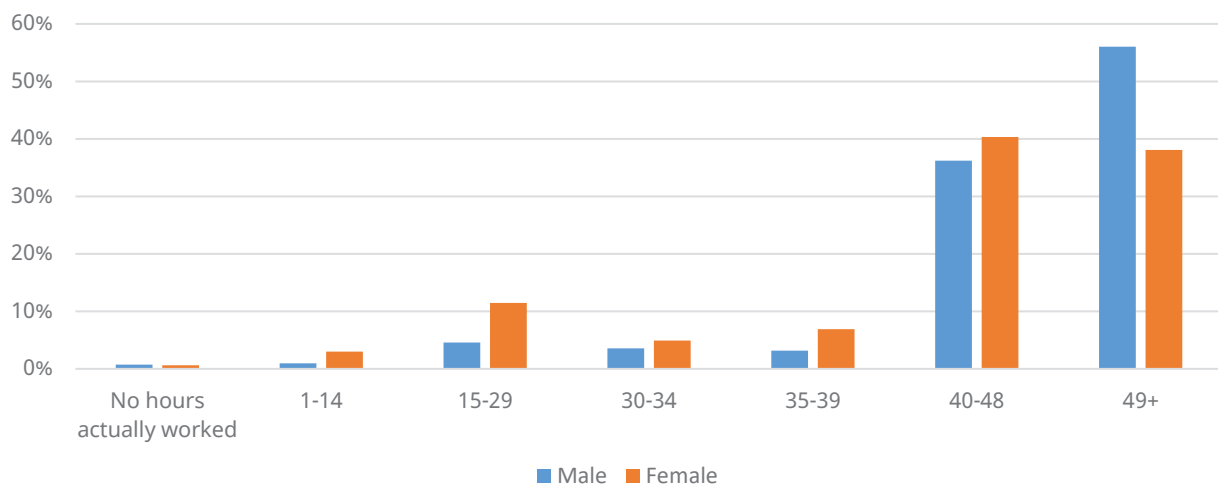


Full-time employment is the most prevalent form of employment among both men and women

The analysis then explores differences in the number of hours worked between male and female wage employees. Very often, women in employment work fewer hours than men because they bear a disproportionate amount of household care responsibilities. This is on top of the disincentive effect that unpaid care responsibilities have on women's labour force participation (ILO 2024b) (that is, women who do not work because of household care responsibilities do not report any information on the number of hours worked). The data reveal that in Bangladesh, men in wage employment work on average 51.9 hours per week, compared to 46 hours worked by women in wage employment. This indicates that the number of hours worked is higher for men than for women. However, women also work a high number of hours and most of them work full-time.

This can also be seen by looking at the distribution of men and women in wage employment by number of hours worked (figure 7). The figure shows that most men and women work at least 40 hours: this is true for 77 per cent of female wage employees and 90 per cent of male wage employees. This is a pattern common to other developing and emerging economies, in which low wages, especially in the informal sector of the economy, force a large share of employed individuals to work either full-time or for excessively long hours (for example, more than 49 hours per week) in order to make ends meet (Lee, McCann and Messenger 2007; Messenger 2018).

► Figure 7: Distribution of men and women in wage employment, by number of hours worked, 2023



The analysis presented so far has highlighted that in Bangladesh, women have a lower likelihood than men to be in employment, as well as a lower likelihood to be in wage employment. As a result, women represent only 17 per cent of the total number of wage employees in Bangladesh. In addition, men and women in wage employment have different individual characteristics and are also distributed differently in terms of sector of employment, occupation, number of hours worked and type of economic unit. These differences have important implications for the following analysis of the GPG, given that this measure is computed only among wage employees. Specifically, the male and female wage employees over which the GPG will be computed differ in terms of their individual and labour-market characteristics, while these differences may also have an effect on their wages. All this calls for adopting different measures to estimating the GPG, which will allow these compositional differences to be taken into account. In addition, this justifies presenting the results on the GPG not only at the level of the entire economy but also separately by different groups of individuals (for example, with the same level of education or working in the same sector of economic activity). Finally, this motivates the presentation of estimates of the GPG obtained using both hourly and monthly wages, as the latter allow for the consideration of differences in the number of hours worked between men and women.

▶ **3. The gender pay gap**

THE GPG IN BANGLADESH

► 3. The gender pay gap

This section starts by presenting the methodology for measuring the GPG and understanding the drivers behind it (section 3.A). The discussion then presents the latest estimate of the GPG (section 3.B). Section 3.C presents differences in the GPG by different groups in the labour market. Finally, section 3.D reviews the results of the analysis aimed at understanding the main reasons behind the GPG.

A. Definitions and methods

Different methods for measuring the GPG exist (ILO 2018).

- **Raw GPG.** The raw GPG is the most common measure of the GPG and is obtained as the difference between male and female wages, expressed as a share of male wages. If male wage employees earn on average 10 coins and female wage employees earn on average 8 coins, the raw GPG at the mean will be equal to 20 per cent (that is, $(10-8)/10$). Following this definition, it is clear that a positive GPG implies that women earn less than men on average, while a negative GPG implies that men earn on average less than women. The benefits of this definition lie in its intuitive understanding and transparent formula. However, the results obtained using the raw GPG are not always informative. This can happen, for instance, if there are substantial differences in the composition and/or distribution of the population of male and female wage employees. This is a situation common to many countries, including Bangladesh, as reviewed above. Consider, for instance, a situation in which most female wage employees have high levels of educational attainments, while most male wage employees have only low educational attainments. In this scenario, female wage employees should earn higher wages, at least based on their higher educational levels. However, the raw GPG will not consider these differences and will simply compute the differences in wages between men and women, irrespective of their educational attainments. As a result, in this hypothetical example, the GPG might be low or even negative, merely because of differences in the characteristics of men and women in wage employment, but would not indicate a fair distribution of resources.
- **Factor-weighted GPG.** The factor-weighted gender pay GPG, introduced by the ILO (2018), aims to address these limitations by comparing the wages of more similar men and women in wage employment. The indicator is computed by dividing the sample of male and female wage employees into more homogeneous subgroups. The GPG is then estimated separately within each of these subgroups (that is, obtaining a raw GPG for each group). The overall factor-weighted GPG is finally obtained by taking a weighted average of the raw GPG estimated for each subgroup, with the weights corresponding to the size of a particular group within the labour market. A key element in the computation of the factor-weighted GPG is the definition of the subgroups. Defining many groups will increase the comparability of men and women within each of them (for example, compare men and women of the same age group and educational level and working in the same sector and occupation). However, there is also a risk that estimates can be imprecise for certain subgroups if the sample size becomes too small, resulting in unreliable estimates of male or female wages in that group. In the present analysis, the factor-weighted GPG for Bangladesh will be computed by defining groups based on (a) age (in ten-year intervals, for a total of five groups); (b) educational attainments (that is, using the differentiation between less than basic, basic, intermediate or advanced); and (c) working time status (that is, part-time or full-time). The intersection of these different characteristics leads to the definition of 40 different cells (for example, where one cell corresponds, as an example, to individuals aged 15 to 24 with less than basic education, working on a part-time basis).

The earnings gap can also be computed for self-employed individuals. However, in this report the analysis will focus only on wage employees and therefore the reference is to the wage gap. This means that the analysis excludes own-account workers, employers and contributing family workers, following the ILO classification of workers by status in employment. While differences in labour income between men and women may exist also for these other categories of workers, the decision to focus on wage employees is related to the fact that for wage employees only, earnings are dependent on the decisions of employers (either directly via bilateral negotiations or through negotiations between employers' and workers' representatives). As a result, earnings differentials can reflect, among other things, discriminatory practices

that need to be addressed.²⁰ In line with this interpretation, in countries in which legislation is in place to reduce gender differences in labour income, such legislation focuses exclusively on wage employees. At the same time, all types of wage employees are included when estimating the GPG. These include (a) formal and informal employees; (b) employees with fixed-term and open-ended (or permanent) contracts; and (c) full-time and part-time employees. This is to ensure that all groups of wage employees are included in the analysis and that the sample used is representative of all forms of wage employment.

Estimates of the GPG will be presented using both hourly and monthly wages.²¹ The GPG estimated with hourly wages provides an immediate way of comparing how much women and men earn for the same amount of time worked. For this reason, when setting the goal of reducing the GPG, SDG indicator 8.5.1 defines the GPG based on average hourly earnings. However, computing the GPG using monthly earnings also provides interesting insights. This is because in Bangladesh – as in most other countries around the world – women work fewer hours than men.

In addition to obtaining a raw and factor-weighted measure of the GPG, the ILO (2018) recommends conducting a decomposition exercise to unveil the drivers behind these wage differences. The decomposition allows for the isolation of an explained component and an unexplained component of the GPG. The explained component refers to the portion of the GPG that can be attributed to observed differences in personal or labour-market characteristics between male and female wage employees (for example, differences in educational attainments or sector and occupation of employment). Whatever part of the GPG cannot be explained by these observable differences, is instead referred to as unexplained and likely related to discrimination.

It is important to note that the explained component of the GPG should not necessarily be interpreted as the part of the GPG that can be considered as fair or justifiable. This is because this explained component of the GPG may already capture differences in wages that reflect personal attributes or labour market characteristics that are, by themselves, the result of inequality between men and women. These differences can include, among other things, the different distribution of male and female wage employees across sectors or working time status (for example, the higher likelihood of part-time employment among women). These differences will enter the explained component of the GPG, but nevertheless may reflect direct or indirect forms of discrimination (for example, the fact that women need to accept part-time jobs in order to accommodate the unequal division of household care responsibilities). For these reasons, the unexplained component of the GPG is often interpreted as a lower-bound estimate of the role of discrimination in explaining the GPG.

B. Estimates of the GPG for Bangladesh

The GPG in Bangladesh is slightly higher than the global average

Panel A of figure 8 presents the latest estimates of the GPG in Bangladesh, using data from the 2023 labour force survey. Here and in the rest of the analysis, the sample is restricted to individuals aged 15 to 64. Results are presented using both the raw and factor-weighted measures, as defined above. In addition, the results are presented using both monthly and hourly wages (left and right parts of the figure, respectively). The raw and factor-weighted measures of the GPG, computed using both hourly and monthly wages, are presented both at the mean and at the median of the wage distribution. The mean GPG is obtained by comparing the average wage of all men and women in wage employment. The median GPG is instead computed by comparing the value located in the middle of the women's wage distribution and the value located in the middle of the men's wage distribution. The two measures of the GPG are generally similar, as mean and median wages are often not too distant from each other. However, the two GPG measures can also differ substantially, for instance in countries with high levels of wage inequality, which lead mean and median wages to differ. For all GPG measures, both in-kind and in-cash payments are considered.

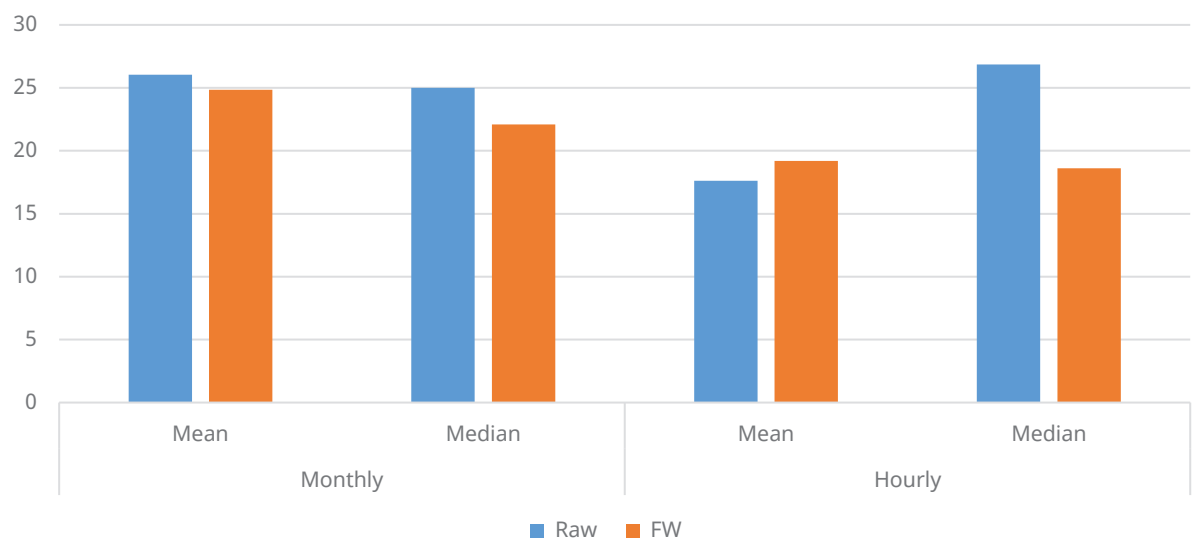
The results show that in 2023, the GPG in Bangladesh was between 22 and 25 per cent, when estimated using monthly wages. This means that for every Tk 1,000 per month earned by men, women earned on average Tk 750 to Tk 780. The factor-weighted measure of the GPG is lower than the raw measure, although the difference between the two measures is quite small in magnitude. The hourly GPG is instead generally lower

²⁰ Consider, for instance, the difference of this situation compared to the one of own-account workers, who set their own wages.

²¹ Hourly wages are estimated by dividing monthly wages by the following product: (number of hours actually worked by the individual during the reference week) × (the average number of weeks in a month).

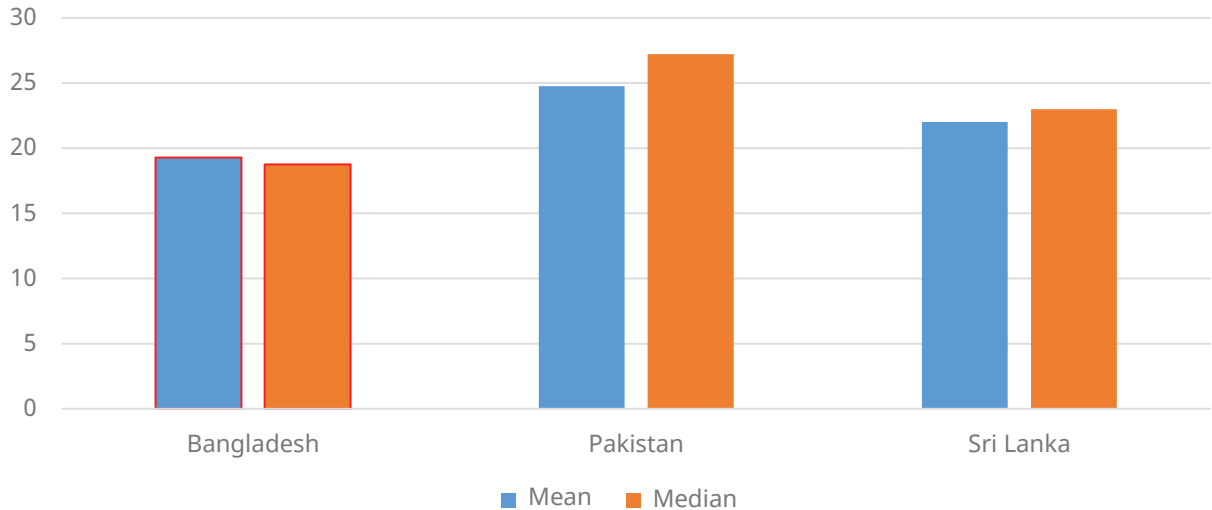
than the monthly GPG. This reflects the fact that as reviewed above, women in wage employment work fewer hours than men. As a result, the GPG computed using monthly wages, which considers both gender differences in hourly wages as well as gender differences in the number of hours worked, is higher than the GPG estimated at the hourly level. This pattern is common to most countries around the world (ILO 2018). However, the difference between monthly and hourly GPG is relatively small (or even negative, as in the case of the raw GPG estimated at the median) in Bangladesh, reflecting the fact that most women in wage employment work full-time, as indicated above.

► **Figure 8: Panel A- Raw and factor-weighted GPG, 2023**



At this level, the GPG in Bangladesh is slightly higher than the values registered on average around the world. Specifically, the ILO estimates that on average, around the world, the GPG is equal to 20 per cent. However, among South Asian countries for which comparable information is available, Bangladesh presents lower values of the GPG compared to what is found in Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Panel B of Figure 8).

► **Figure 8: Panel B- Factor-weighted GPG, using hourly wages**



Note: Data for Bangladesh is obtained from the present analysis and refers to 2023; data for Pakistan is obtained from the ILO (2025) and refers to 2021; data for Sri Lanka is obtained from the ILO (2024b) and refers to 2023.

C. Differences in the GPG by groups in the population

The GPG is higher among older individuals and those with lower educational attainments

Figure 9 presents the GPG for individuals of different age groups.²² The results indicate that the GPG increases sharply with age. Looking at the monthly GPG, this is equal to 16 per cent for individuals aged 15 to 24, before increasing to 22 per cent for those aged 25 to 34, 29 per cent for those aged 35 to 54 and 43 per cent for those aged 55 to 64. When using hourly wages, the pattern is very similar. Overall, this indicates that while young women earn 16 per cent less than men, the gap becomes almost three times as large for individuals aged 55 to 64. Several explanations may lie behind this trend, including the role of childcare responsibilities in reducing women's wages: after childbirth, women who remain in the labour force need to opt for more flexible work arrangements in order to take care of a disproportionate amount of household care responsibilities. This may prevent from progressing in their careers, thus widening the GPG. The analysis in the following section will dig deeper into this possible explanation. An alternative explanation that is still consistent with the data is that differences in educational attainments may be smaller among relatively young individuals than among older cohorts. This explanation seems also to be supported by the data: among individuals aged 15 to 24, women in wage employment have on average higher educational attainments than men in wage employment. The picture is reversed for individuals aged 55 to 64, among whom women in wage employment have lower educational attainments.

► Figure 9: Raw GPG at the mean, by age group

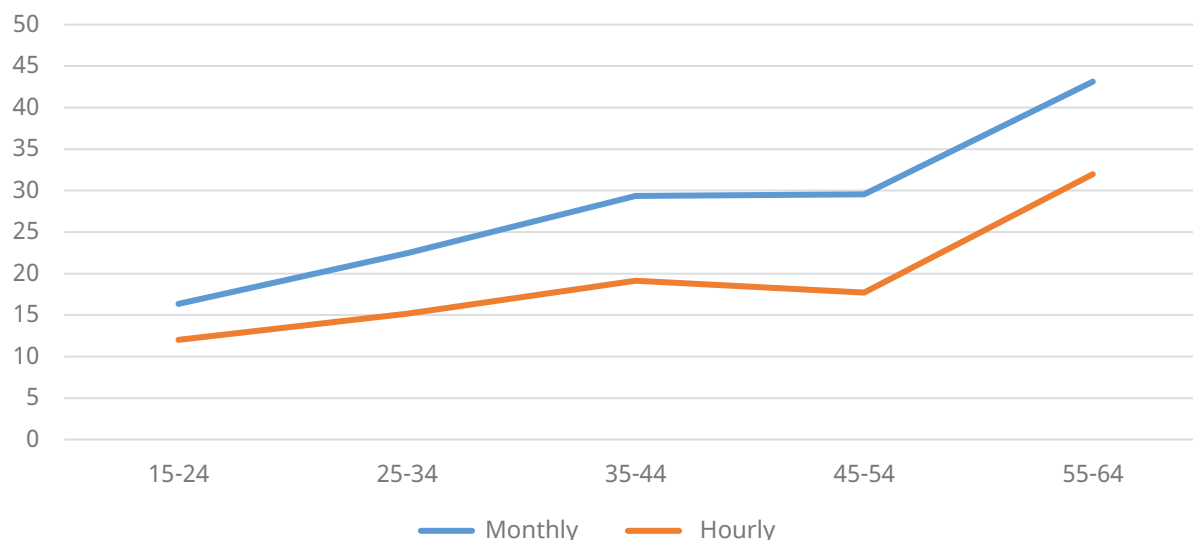
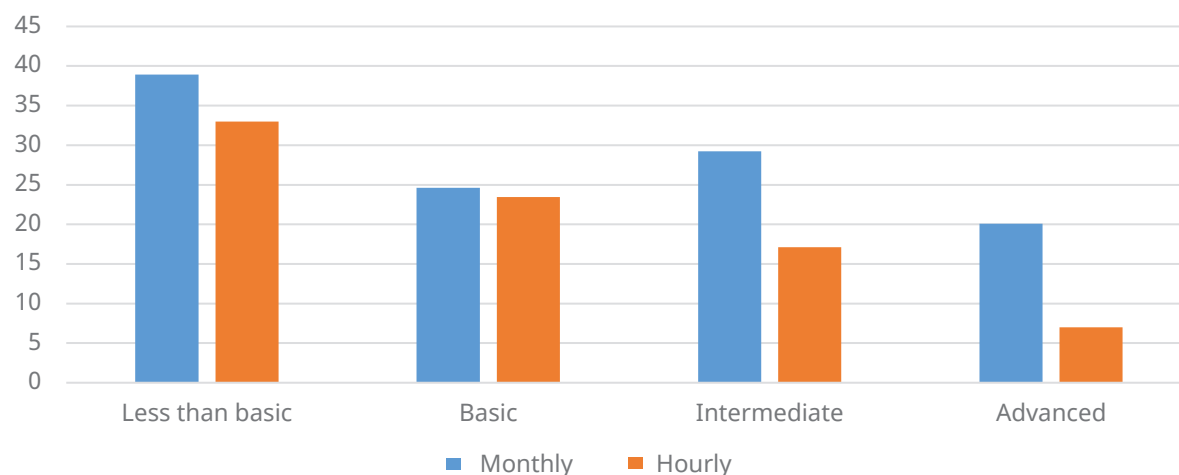


Figure 10 presents the results of the GPG, separately for individuals with the same level of education (that is, less than basic, basic, intermediate and advanced). The findings indicate that the GPG is smaller among individuals with higher educational attainments: for example, women with less than basic education earn on average almost 40 per cent less than men with the same level of education. This gap is halved to 20 per cent among women and men with an advanced level of education. This pattern is common to most countries around the world (ILO 2018), including Pakistan (ILO, 2025). This may reflect, among other things, the fact that acquiring additional levels of education allows women to overcome obstacles to decent work.

²² Here and in the rest of this section, the results of the GPG will be presented using information on both hourly and monthly wages, but only at the mean of the wage distribution and using the raw measure of the GPG.

► Figure 10: Raw GPG at the mean, by educational attainment

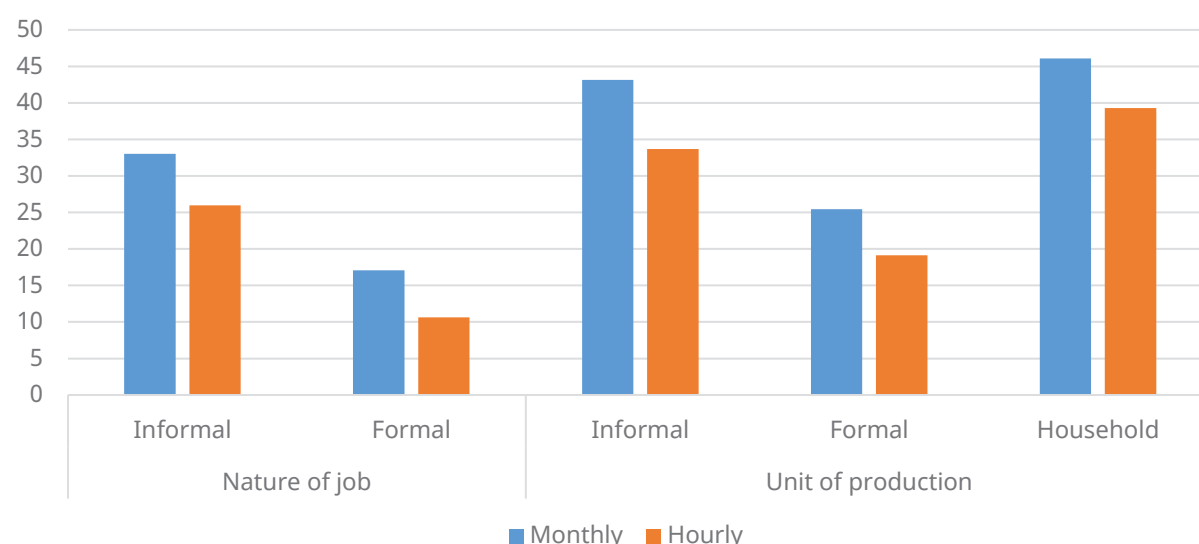


The GPG is lower among formal employees

The analysis then looks at differences in the GPG for workers employed in different units of production (that is, formal, informal or household economy) and with different types of jobs (that is, formal or informal employment) (figure 11). The GPG is much higher among informal employees (for whom the monthly GPG is about 33 per cent) compared to formal employees (for whom the monthly GPG is about half the size, at 17 per cent). This may indicate that, when compliance with the labour legislation is guaranteed, there is less room for discrimination and men and women earn more similar wages.

These differences are also reflected in the differences in the GPG by different types of units of production. Specifically, the GPG is higher in the informal economy (43 per cent using monthly wages) compared to the formal economy (25 per cent). However, the GPG is still high in the formal economy, compared to values registered in other countries.²³ This may reflect the fact that, as discussed in section 3.B above, employment in the formal economy may also be of informal nature. In Bangladesh, the data shows that this phenomenon is extremely relevant. Specifically, even in the formal sector, 78 per cent of male and female wage employment is informal.²⁴ Finally, the GPG is also high in the household economy (at 46 per cent when using monthly wages). This reveals the presence of gender wage disparities in this segment of the labour market as well. However, as noted in section 3B above, this is a segment of the labour market in which only very few men are employed, making the estimate of the GPG not particularly informative.

► Figure 11: Raw GPG at the mean, by labour market group



²³ For instance, in Pakistan, the GPG in in the formal economy is close to zero (ILO 2025).

²⁴ This share is equal to 100 per cent in the informal sector, in which only informal employment takes place.

Virtually all sectors of economic activity present a positive GPG

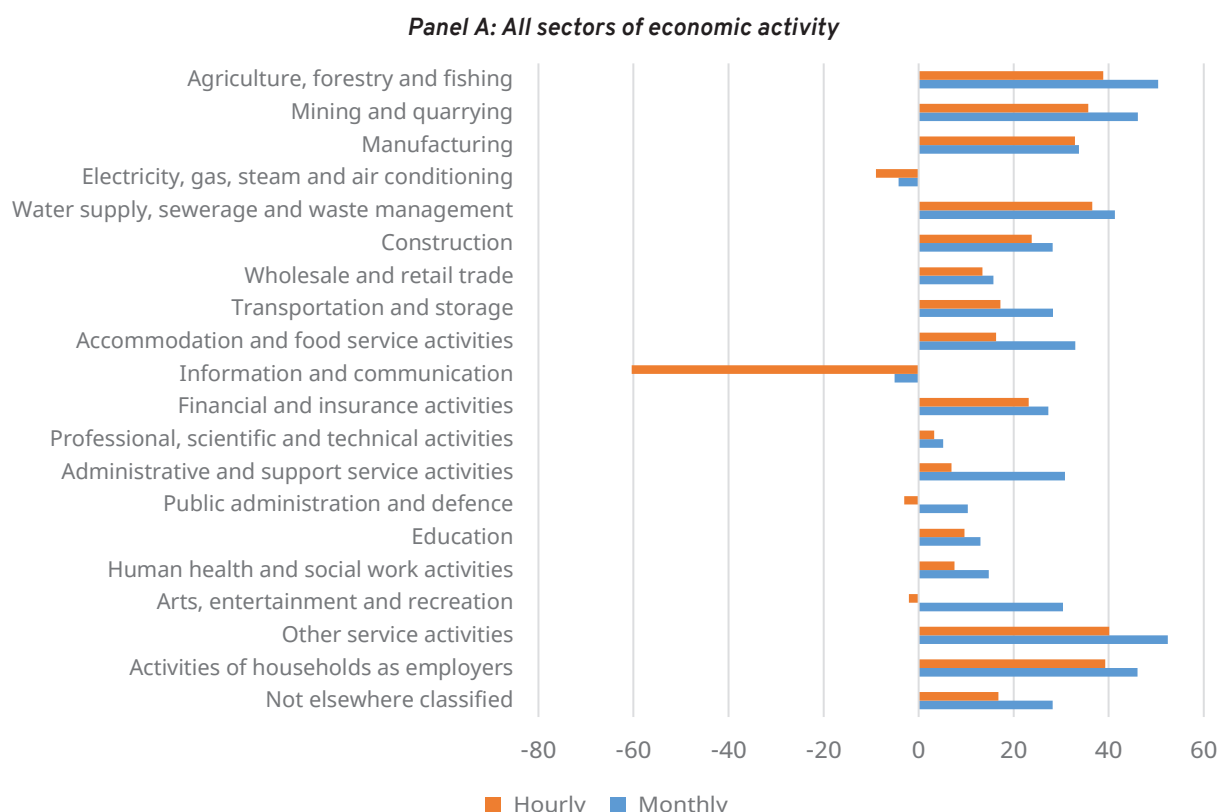
Panel A of figure 12 presents different estimates of the GPG by sector of economic activity.²⁵ The data shows that of the 22 sectors included in the analysis, 20 sectors present a positive GPG when this is computed using information on monthly wages. This means that gender wage differences to the detriment of women are present across virtually all sectors of economic activity. A relatively higher GPG is registered in the “Agriculture” (50 per cent using monthly wages) and “Mining” sectors (46 per cent), which have a relatively low share of female wage employment, as discussed above. However, a high GPG is also estimated in the “Activities of households as employers” (46 per cent) and “Other service activities” (52 per cent) sectors, which present a higher share of female wage employment. Finally, the two sectors in which a negative GPG exists (meaning that women are paid on average more than men) are the “Information and communication” and the “Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning” sectors.

Figure 14 focuses on some specific sectors of economic activity, in particular the five two-digit sectors that constitute the main sectors of female wage employment, namely:

- Manufacture of wearing apparel
- Activities of households as employers of domestic personnel
- Education
- Crop and animal production, hunting and related service activities
- Repair of computers and personal and household goods

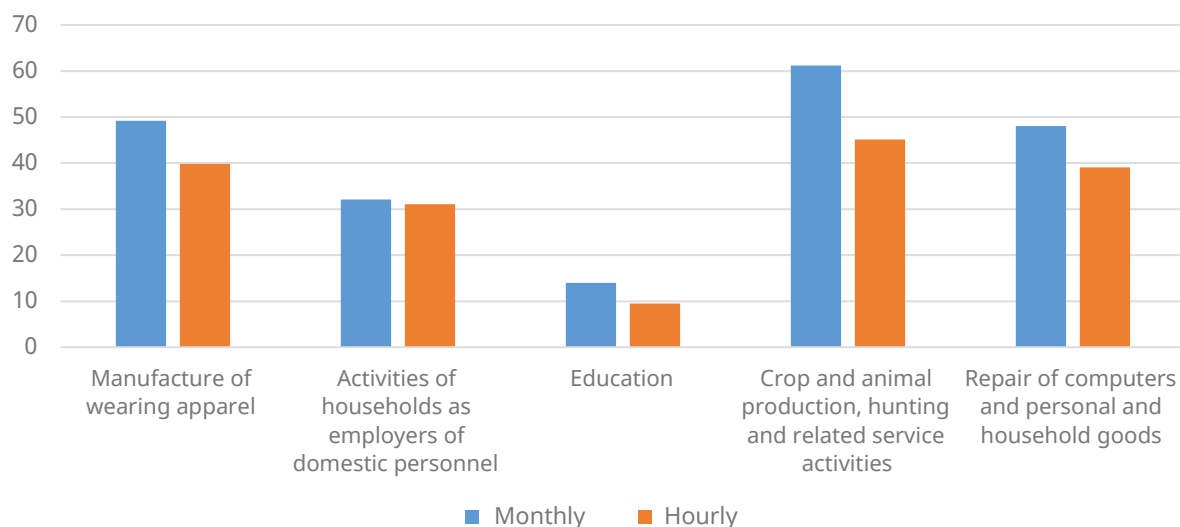
Jointly, these five two-digit sectors account for 70 per cent of total female wage employment. The data shows that the GPG is positive in all these sectors and is indeed often higher than the national average. Specifically, the monthly GPG is equal to 61 per cent in the “Crop and animal production, hunting and related service activities” sector, 49 per cent in the “Manufacture of wearing apparel” sector and 46 per cent in the “Repair of computers and personal and household goods” sector. The GPG is instead in line with the national average in the “Activities of households as employers of domestic personnel” sector, while it is lower than the national average in the “Education” sector. This is in turn in line with the fact that in the “Education” sector, a large share of wage employees work in the public sector, which contribute to reducing gender wage disparities.

► **Figure 12: Raw GPG at the men, by sector of economic activity**



²⁵ The analysis excludes two sectors, “Real estate activities” and “Activities of extraterritorial organizations”, in which there are less than five observations for female wage employees in the 2023 labour force survey, thus making the estimation of the GPG unreliable.

Panel B: Main two-digit sectors of female wage employment

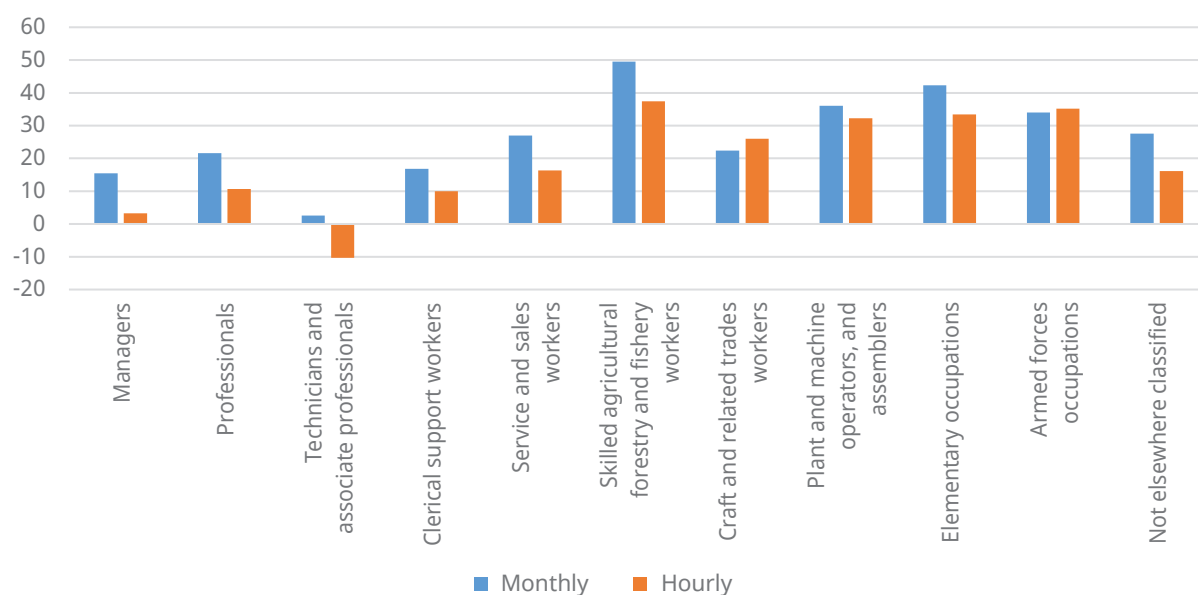


The GPG is higher among low-skilled occupations and at the bottom of the wage distribution

Figure 13 presents the estimates of the GPG by occupation. The GPG is lower among high-skilled occupations, while increasing among medium- and low-skilled occupations. Specifically, the GPG estimated on the basis of monthly wages is 15 per cent for managers and 22 per cent for professionals. The GPG is negative for technicians and associate professionals and 16 per cent for clerical support workers. All other occupations, on the other hand, present values of the monthly GPG above 20 per cent. The GPG is particularly high for skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers (in line with the high GPG in the “Agriculture” sector documented above), as well as among elementary occupations.

Figure A.1 also reports the estimates of the GPG for care workers (working both in the care sector and elsewhere) and other workers in the care sector.²⁶ The data shows that the GPG is relatively low for care workers in the care sector (about 13 per cent when estimated using monthly wages). Other (non-care) workers in the care sector, instead, report a higher GPG, at around 25 per cent. The GPG is also higher for care workers employed by households (46 per cent) as well as for care workers employed in other sectors (49 per cent). This seems to suggest that working in the care sector tends to lower the GPG for care workers. This may be linked to the fact that the data also shows that care workers employed in the care sector are more likely to be formally employed.

► Figure 13: Raw GPG at the men, by sector of economic activity



²⁶ Specifically, care workers can work (a) in the care sector, (b) in households or (c) in other sectors. In the care sector, other (non-care) workers can also be employed (that is, in addition to care workers).

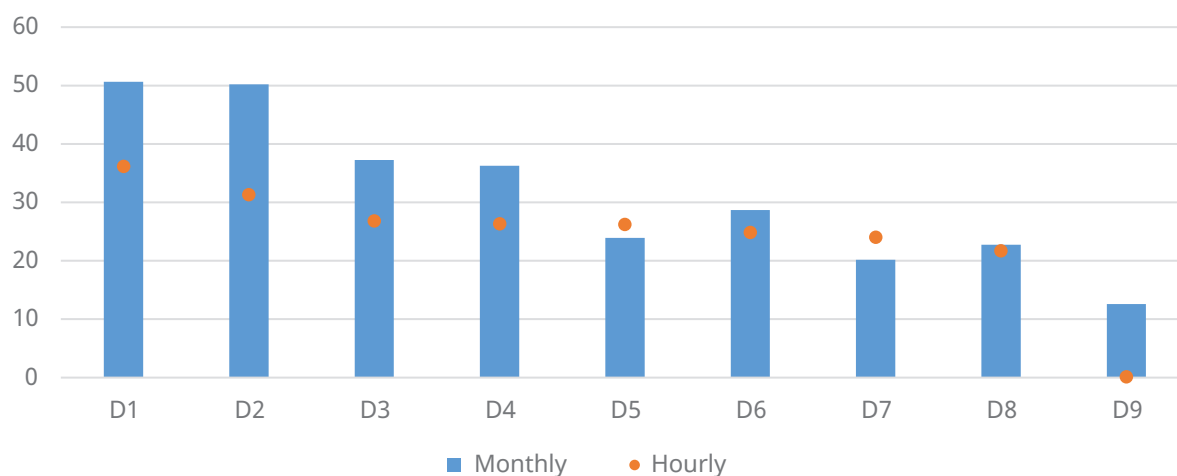
This section also presents the results of the GPG by wage distribution decile. These deciles correspond to the nine values that divide the wage distribution into ten equal parts. This analysis allows a review of how the GPG evolves between low- versus mid- and high-income individuals, which can reveal overlapping sources of inequalities.

The results clearly indicate that the GPG decreases as wages increase (figure 14). That is, the GPG is higher for low-paid individuals than for medium- and high-paid individuals. When measured using monthly wages, the GPG is about 50 per cent at the bottom of the wage distribution (deciles 1 and 2), then declines steadily to about 35 per cent (deciles 3 and 4), 25 per cent (deciles 5 and 6) and 20 per cent (deciles 7 and 8). For individuals at the ninth decile of the wage distribution, the GPG is equal to 12 per cent when measured using monthly wages and 0 per cent when measured using hourly wages.

These patterns need to be interpreted in the light of the pattern that emerges when looking at the share of male and female wage employees by wage distribution quantile (figure A.2), which shows that the share of female wage employees decreases as wages increase. While women are over-represented in jobs at the bottom of the wage distribution (51 per cent of total wage employment in the first percentile of the wage distribution), they are under-represented in jobs at the top of the wage distribution (13 per cent of total wage employment in the 100th percentile).

This suggests that the very few women who manage to obtain high-paid jobs experience a lower GPG, compared to the higher GPG faced by those women who remain in the bottom half of the wage distribution. This is also in line with some of the results presented above, showing that the GPG is lower for individuals with higher educational attainments and in managerial positions. Once again, these patterns are compatible with various explanations, including the differences in the role played by unequal practices in affecting male and female wages along the wage distribution. The following section will dig deeper into these potential mechanisms, with the aim of understanding the drivers of the GPG.

► **Figure 14: Monthly and hourly raw GPG, by wage distribution decile**



The GPG is lower among people with disabilities, as well as in rural areas

Finally, this section presents a review of the GPG by disability status (figure A.3) and urban versus rural area of residence (figure A.4).

Analysing differences in the GPG by disability status is important, because women with disabilities may face a double wage penalty, that is, related to both their sex and their disability status. The evidence confirms that the GPG is also positive among people with disabilities, meaning that women with disabilities earn less than men with disabilities. However, the GPG for this group is lower compared to that of people without disabilities. Specifically, at the mean, the monthly GPG is equal to 26 per cent for people without disabilities and 15.7 per cent for people with disabilities.

The GPG is also slightly lower for individuals living in rural areas than for those living in urban areas. However, this difference is not very large. In particular, the monthly GPG at the mean is 31.9 per cent in urban areas and 27.3 per cent in rural areas. Differences in the GPG between rural and urban areas may reflect, among other things, differences in the distribution of employment across sectors and occupations.

D. What lies behind the GPG?

The discussion now moves to trying to understand the drivers behind the GPG in Bangladesh. This part of the analysis is important from a policy perspective, as policy responses to address the GPG will differ based on the underlying causes behind it. Imagine, for example, a situation in which the GPG is entirely driven by differences in educational attainments between men and women. In this context, policies to reduce the GPG should include, among other things, interventions aimed at increasing educational attainments among women. Alternatively, it is possible that the GPG is entirely explained by the presence of discriminatory practices. In this case, interventions to reduce the GPG should aim to promote compliance with the legislation and tackle discrimination at the workplace.

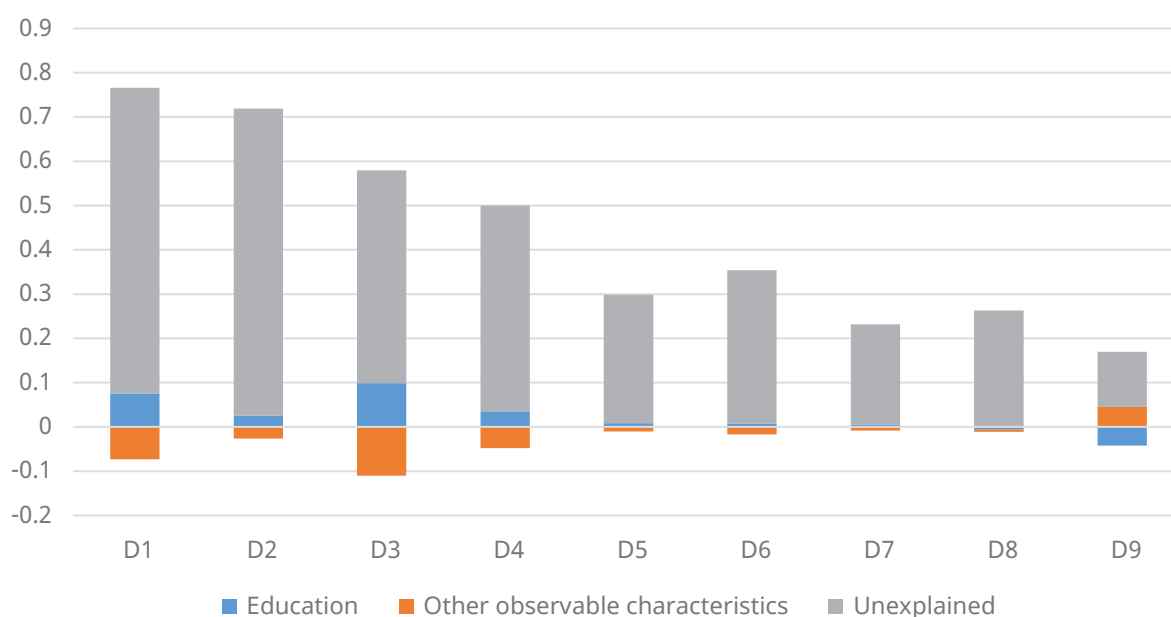
Figure 15 presents the results of a decomposition exercise aimed at understanding the drivers of the GPG. Specifically, for each decile of the wage distribution, it presents a decomposition of the GPG that allows the isolation of the role played by:

- differences in educational attainment (in blue);
- differences in other individual or labour-market characteristics (in orange);²⁷
- the unexplained component of the GPG (in grey), which is the part of the GPG that cannot be explained by either differences in education or differences in other individual and labour-market characteristics. As discussed above, this can be interpreted as the lower bound of the role played by discrimination in explaining the GPG.

Each of these three components can enter the decomposition either positively (that is, it increases the GPG) or negatively (that is, it reduces the GPG).

The results show that at all deciles of the wage distribution, the unexplained component plays the most important role in explaining the GPG. That is, the observed wage differences between men and women in Bangladesh cannot be explained by differences in either educational attainments or other individual and labour-market characteristics. Rather, they are unexplained by these observable factors and most likely related to the presence of discrimination. As a result, the differences in the level of the GPG across deciles of the wage distribution, as shown above, mostly reflect the differences in the role played by this unexplained component. At the bottom of the wage distribution, this unexplained component plays a very large role and this contributes to high values of the GPG. The role of the unexplained component decreases when moving towards the middle and the top of the wage distribution, thus contributing to lower values of the GPG in these deciles, as documented above.

► **Figure 15: Decomposition of monthly raw GPG, by wage distribution decile**



²⁷ The set of other individual level characteristics included in the analysis includes: (a) dummies for the sector of economic activity; (b) dummies for occupation of employment; (c) a dummy for the institutional sector of employment (that is, public, private or not stated); and (d) a linear control for age.

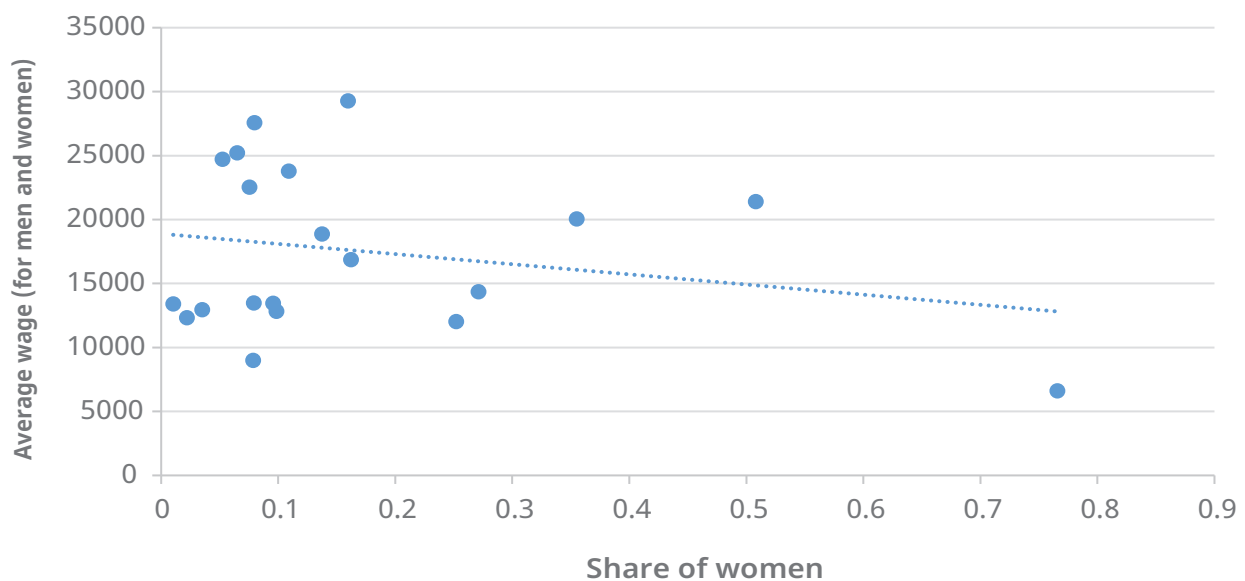
In the rest of this section, the analysis will try to shed light on what lies behind this unexplained component of the GPG. Two main explanations will be provided to interpret the large role played by the unexplained component. First, the sectors that see a relatively strong presence of female wage employees also see lower wages on average (for both men and women). Second, women take care of the vast majority of household care responsibilities, which limits their possibility of participating in the labour market.

Starting with the first explanation, figure 16 presents a scatterplot with the relationship between the share of female wage employees in a given sector (on the x-axis) and the average wage, for both men and women (on the y-axis). The figure shows that the relationship is negative. This provides suggestive evidence of the fact that sectors that employ relatively more women offer lower wages on average. Instead, male-dominated sectors, such as those in which the share of women in wage employment is less than 10 per cent, tend to pay, on average, higher wages.

For example, monthly wages are high in Information and communication (average wage of Tk22,520 in 2023), which is, however, a sector in which only 8 per cent of wage employees are women. Monthly wages are also high in the “Real estate activities” (Tk29,272) and “Public administration and defence” sectors, but in both of those sectors the share of female wage employees is below 10 per cent. On the other hand, the “Activities of households as employers” sector, in which about three of every four employees are women, tends to pay particularly low wages (average monthly wage of Tk6,614). Wages are also relatively low in two gender-balanced sectors: the “Education” sector (in which 35 per cent of wage employees are women and average wages are Tk20,055) and the “Human health and social work activities” sector (in which 51 per cent of wage employees are women and average wages are equal to Tk21,392).

These trends may reflect, among other things, the presence of a penalty against feminized sectors or occupations. Specifically, jobs or tasks that are traditionally performed by women, including those related to care work in education or healthcare, tend to be undervalued in the labour market, as they are often regarded as an extension of responsibilities that women conduct, free of charge, at home.

► **Figure 16: Relationship between average wage and share of women in wage employment, by sector of economic activity, 2023**



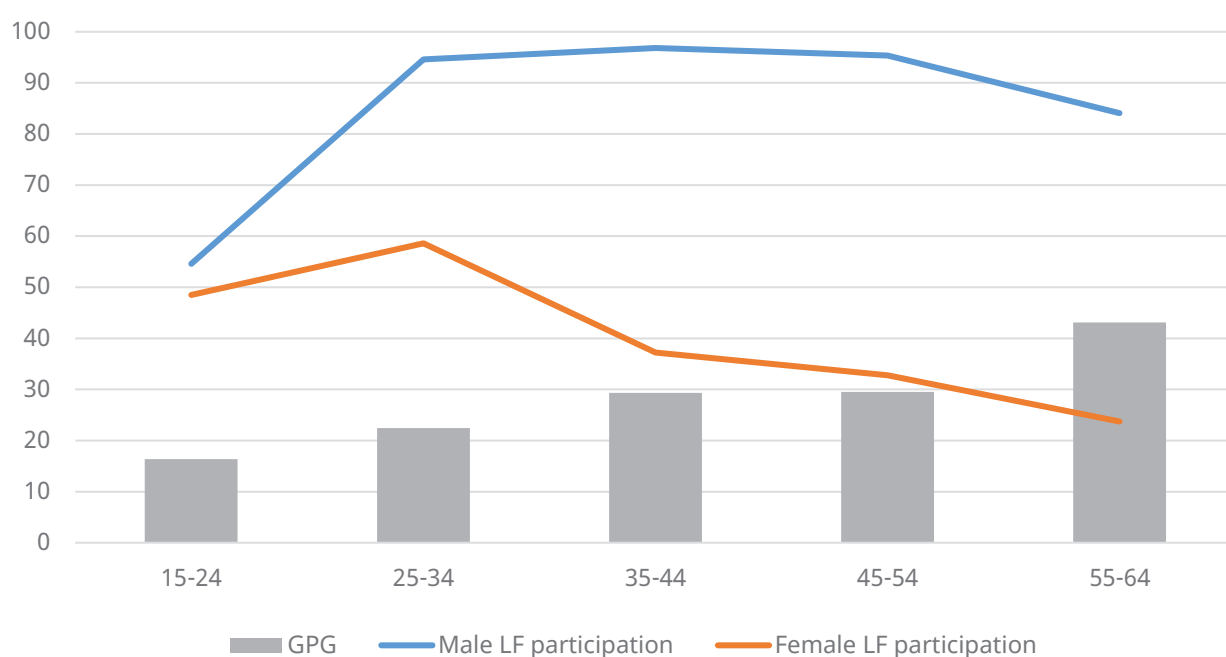
This supports the second explanation mentioned above, notably the role of care responsibilities in limiting career opportunities for women. Different pieces of evidence suggest that this may play an important role in explaining the GPG in Bangladesh.

First of all, figure 17 plots the data on the GPG by age groups (as already shown in figure 9) against the male and female labour force participation rates. As already discussed, the GPG increases significantly with age. At the same time, there are important differences in the evolution of the male and female labour force participation rates. Specifically, for individuals aged 15 to 24, the male and female labour force participation rates are very similar (55 and 48 per cent, respectively), with a gender gap of only 7 percentage points. The male labour force participation rate then increases rapidly to reach 95 per cent for individuals aged 25 to 54

and remains stable at about the same value until the age group 45 to 54. For women, on the other hand, the labour force participation rate increases only slightly for the age group 25 to 34 (to reach 59 per cent) and then decreases sharply to 37 per cent among individuals aged 35 to 44, 33 per cent for those aged 45 to 54 and 24 per cent for those aged 55 to 64. As a result of these diverging trends, the gap between the male and female labour force participation rates increases from 7 percentage points for individuals aged 15 to 54 to 60 percentage points for those aged 55 to 64.

This trend is compatible with the fact that while women and men start their careers with similar labour-market opportunities, the employment trajectories of women and men subsequently diverge, generating the large gender disparities in both wages and employment discussed above. The timing at which this divergence appears is consistent with the presence of a labour market penalty against women due to unpaid care responsibilities that fall predominantly on women, including those related to childcare. However, other explanations are also consistent with the patterns observed in the data. As mentioned above, for younger cohorts, women in wage employment tend to have higher educational attainments than men in wage employment, while the opposite is true for older cohorts. This may indicate that cultural characteristics are different across generations and may lead over time to a reduction in the GPG. This would imply that the GPG will remain low for these younger cohorts even when they enter adulthood.

► **Figure 17: GPG and male and female labour force participation rates, by age group**



While these alternative explanations may very well apply, table 1 presents evidence supporting the interpretation that suggests the important role of household care responsibilities in explaining the GPG in Bangladesh. Specifically, the table presents descriptive statistics on the incidence and amount of household chores performed by male and female wage employees. First of all, the data shows that a high share of both men and women report having done some household chores in the past week (84 per cent of men and 96 per cent of women). However, the amount of time spent on these care responsibilities differs significantly by gender. Specifically, the vast majority of men who report having performed any household chore state that they have spent less than 14 hours on it (this is true for 86 per cent of men reporting any household chore activity in the previous week). On the other hand, only 2 per cent of men performing any household chore report having spent more than 22 hours doing these activities. By contrast, 62 per cent of women reporting any household chore activity state that they have spent at least 22 hours conducting household chores. As a result, the average male employee reports having spent 7.6 hours in the past week doing household chores, while for women the equivalent figure is 27.7 hours.

With this information, it is possible to compute the total number of hours spent on both work and household chore activities. As discussed above, men in wage employment work slightly more hours than women (51.5 and 46.1 hours per week, respectively, in the main job). However, considering also the number of hours spent

conducting chore activities, it emerges that women work many more hours than men (73.7 and 59 hours, respectively). There is also evidence to suggest that the number of hours spent conducting household chores increases with age for women but not for men (figure A.5), in line with the fact that household care responsibilities increase after the birth of a child.

► **Table 1: Household chores, by men and women in wage employment**

	Men		Women	
	mean	sd	mean	sd
Household chores (0/1)	0.84	0.36	0.96	0.19
Hours of chores: Less than 14 (0/1)	0.86	0.35	0.14	0.35
Hours of chores: 15-21 (0/1)	0.11	0.31	0.24	0.43
Hours of chores: 22-27 (0/1)	0.01	0.12	0.11	0.32
Hours of chores: 28-42 (0/1)	0.01	0.11	0.40	0.49
Hours of chores: 43 and above (0/1)	0.00	0.07	0.11	0.31
Weekly hours worked in household chores (0/1)	7.63	6.70	27.74	12.46
Hours worked in main job	51.51	12.72	46.05	14.75
Total hours of work (household chores + main job)	58.97	14.50	73.65	17.47
Observations	64213		13949	

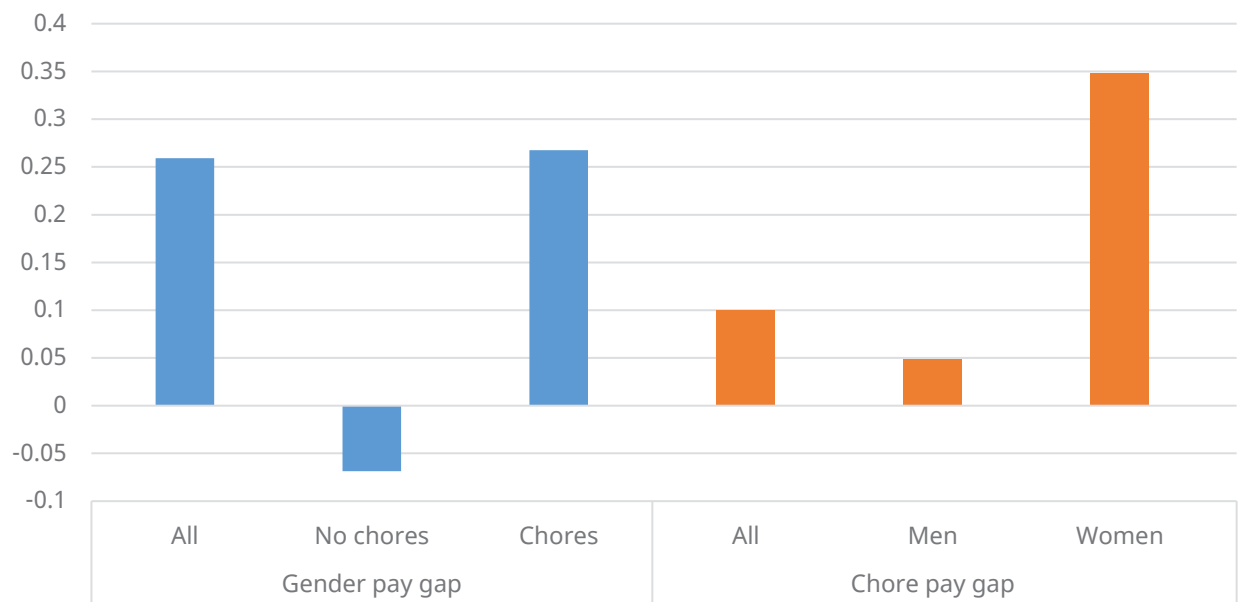
With the available data, it is also possible to directly test the role of household chores in driving the GPG. To illustrate this point, the left panel of figure 18 presents the GPG for the overall population of wage employees (first blue bar from the left). As previously noted above, this is about 26 per cent, when measured using monthly wages at the mean of the distribution. Subsequently, figure 18 presents the GPG computed only on the population of male and female wage employees who report not performing any household chore (second blue bar from the left). For this sample, the GPG is negative, meaning that women who do not perform any household chores are paid on average more than men who do not perform any household chore.²⁸ Instead, the GPG computed among the sample of men and women who report performing some household chores is large and positive, at about 27 per cent (third blue bar from the left).

This supports the hypothesis that household chores negatively impact the wages of both men and women. The fact that women spend more time on these activities may be one of the factors behind the GPG. The right panel of figure 18 provides further evidence to support this hypothesis. There, the different bars do not report any more estimates of the GPG. Rather, they report the wage difference between individuals of any sex who report not performing household chores and individuals who instead report performing some household chore (this may be referred to as the “chore pay gap”). This is first presented for the overall population of both male and female wage employees (first orange bar from the left). It shows that people performing chores earn, on average, lower wages compared to those not performing chores. This is true for both men (second orange bar from the left) and women (third orange bar from the left), but the wage gap associated with performing chores is much higher for women than it is for men. This may be because, as discussed above, while men who perform household chores spend only a little time on these activities, women spend a substantial amount of time on these activities. However, other explanations are also compatible with the trends discussed above and the evidence suggesting a role of household chores in explaining the GPG should be interpreted as only of a suggestive nature.²⁹

²⁸ The analysis here is descriptive in nature and trends should be interpreted with caution. In particular, men and women not performing household chores are not necessarily comparable in terms of their labour-market outcomes (including wages), because they may be different with respect to a number of characteristics. For instance, the few women who do not perform household chores may be relatively advantaged, compared to men (for whom not performing household chores is more standard). There is evidence to support this interpretation, showing for instance that female wage employees who do not perform household chores have higher educational attainments than male wage employees who also do not perform household chores.

²⁹ For instance, an alternative explanation that is consistent with the data is that women who do not perform household chores are systematically different (for example, in terms of educational attainments and other household characteristics) from women who perform household chores – while this difference may be more limited when comparing men not performing household chores with those performing household chores. Under this scenario, the “chore pay gap” outlined above may capture the wage effect of all these differences, in addition to the wage effect of conducting household chores.

► Figure 18: Differences in wages between men and women (left panel) and between individuals performing or not performing household chores (right panel)





4. Review of policies and legislation

THE GPG IN BANGLADESH

► 4. Review of policies and legislation

This chapter reviews the existing policy and legal framework aimed at addressing the GPG, including international commitments, constitutional guarantees, national labour legislations, sectoral policies and enforcement mechanisms. The discussion will cover the state of the legislation and how different policies and institutions are implemented in practice, with a view to identifying the critical gaps that exist in the elimination of the GPG. This is because the analysis above has shown that women are still paid substantially less than men, which calls for additional policy efforts to reduce the GPG.

A. International commitments

Bangladesh's commitment to addressing the GPG is grounded in its ratification of key international conventions and the constitutional principles of equality. Specifically, Bangladesh ratified Convention No. 100 in 1998 and Convention No. 111 in 1972. In addition, Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Bangladesh has also committed to SDG target 8.5, which calls for the achievement of "equal pay for work of equal value" by 2030.

B. Constitutional guarantees

The Constitution of Bangladesh, adopted in 1972, provides broad guarantees regarding gender equality. Article 27 states that all citizens are equal before the law, while Article 28(1) prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. In addition, Article 28(2) affirms that women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and public life. The Constitution also allows for targeted measures to address historical disadvantages. Article 28(4) permits special provisions for women, supporting affirmative action. Several directive principles further support equality in employment. Articles 19(1) and 19(2) require the State to ensure equality of opportunity and to reduce social and economic inequalities. Article 19(3) directs the State to promote equality of opportunity and participation for women in all areas of national life. Although these provisions are not enforceable in court, they delineate clear responsibilities for the State in promoting fair access to work and economic opportunities.

C. National legislation

Equal pay principle. The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 (amended in 2013, 2018 and 2025), is the principal legislative framework governing labour relations in the country. Section 332 prohibits any "indecent or repugnant" behaviour towards female workers. Moreover, section 345 explicitly includes provisions requiring equal wages "for work of equal nature or standard or value".

Despite the presence of these legal guarantees, there are concerns that the equal pay principle, as included in Convention No. 100, is not fully upheld. Specifically, Chapter X (sections 120–137) of the Bangladesh Labour Act, which governs wages, does not mention gender-based pay equality, while the Minimum Wages Board established under Chapter XI lacks the mandate to incorporate gender considerations in wage determination. As a result, despite the presence of the equal pay clause in section 345, the legislation does not tackle the structural factors behind the GPG or provide remedies for wage inequalities.

Wage-setting mechanisms. Chapter XI of the Bangladesh Labour Act establishes a structured Minimum Wages Board system (sections 138–146), which has played a significant role in determining sector-specific minimum wages across the economy. Section 141 outlines the Board's tripartite structure, comprising representatives of the Government, employers and workers, and details its procedural steps for recommending wage rates. However, the law does not include provisions to ensure women's representation within the Board.

The Government may designate any industry for minimum wage determination under section 139, and minimum wages have been established for 47 sectors so far. However, the Board's sector-based mandate leaves several areas of employment with a high incidence of women workers, such as agro-processing industries, handicraft subsectors and small-scale enterprises, outside the current coverage.

In addition, even within covered sectors, the grading system can result in inequality towards women. Specifically, the Minimum Wages Board employs a grading system classifying workers by occupation and skill level. This, in theory, should avoid any form of discrimination between men and women performing the same type of job or work of equal value. However, this often undervalues the occupations predominantly performed by women. For instance, in the ready-made garment industries, cutting operators (primarily men) are placed in higher grades with monthly wages of Tk12,000 to Tk15,000, while sewing operators (primarily women) are classified in lower grades earning Tk8,000 to Tk10,000 — a 20 to 30 per cent differential despite comparable skill requirements.

These structural barriers are compounded by procedural delays. Although section 139(6) requires five-year wage reviews (amended into three-year reviews in November 2025), revisions are often delayed and do not always account for inflation.

Maternity and paternity leave. Maternity protection is a crucial aspect for promoting gender equality in the labour market. Section 46 of the Bangladesh Labour Act, as amended in 2025, provides women with 120 days of maternity leave — 60 days before and 60 days after childbirth — while ensuring full wage payment and protection from dismissal during this period. This represents an extension from the previous 16-week entitlement and exceeds the minimum standard of 14 weeks set by Convention No. 183.

However, the financing arrangement diverges from the approach advocated by international labour standards. Specifically, under section 47, employers are responsible for the full cost of maternity benefits. In contrast, Article 6(8) of Convention No. 183 recommends that maternity benefits be funded through compulsory social insurance or public funds to prevent imposing direct financial liability on individual employers. International experience indicates that when maternity benefits are solely employer-funded, it may foster statistical discrimination in recruitment and promotion.

In addition to maternity leave, other provisions included in the Bangladesh Labour Act aim to protect women around the time of childbirth. Specifically, the Bangladesh Labour Act has provisions allowing women two daily nursing breaks for up to 36 months, facilitating continued workforce participation during early motherhood. This entitlement exceeds the minimum standard set by Convention No. 183.

Restrictions on women's employment. The Bangladesh Labour Act includes several protective provisions designed to safeguard women workers. However, some applications may unintentionally limit their access to better-paid or higher-responsibility roles.

Specifically, section 109 prohibits the employment of women between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. While this provision aims to reduce risks related to security and harassment, it also restricts women's eligibility for night-shift work, which often offers higher wage rates than daytime shifts. Section 45 further addresses pregnant women, restricting their assignment to work that involves heavy lifting, prolonged standing or tasks deemed harmful during pregnancy. While the protective intent of this restriction is clear, its interpretation has sometimes been extended beyond pregnant workers. Employers may avoid assigning women — regardless of their pregnancy status — to roles that are perceived as physically demanding or technically complex.

Childcare services. Section 94 of the Bangladesh Labour Act, as amended in 2025, requires workplaces employing 40 or more women (reduced from the previous threshold of 50) to establish childcare facilities for children under six years of age, either onsite or in a nearby location. However, compliance remains limited. One study³⁰ found that while many factories reported having daycare facilities, only a small proportion of workers could access functional services.

Public childcare provision also remains limited. Specifically, the implementation of the Child Daycare Centre Act 2021 is at an early stage. Limited childcare availability restricts mothers' ability to remain in or return to paid employment, reducing lifetime earnings and contributing to gender pay differentials.

Social protection. The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), adopted in 2015, outlines a vision for a comprehensive and inclusive social protection system. While the NSSS does not distinguish between men and women in designing key provisions, the 2019 Gender Diagnostics revealed that differences in labour-market participation, earnings, and employment status between men and women create significant gaps in access to benefits (Bangladesh, Planning Commission 2019, 78–82). These disparities are particularly evident in contributory schemes, as women have a much lower likelihood than men to be in wage employment. Because

³⁰ Fair Labor Association, "Maternity Rights and Childcare in Bangladesh: A Study of Workers in the Ready-Made Garment Sector", 2019.

old-age pensions are tied to lifetime earnings, women's lower wages and more frequent career interruptions diminish their entitlements. The gender assessment highlighted that these structural exclusions could reinforce economic vulnerabilities.

To address these gaps, the NSSS Gender Policy proposed several reforms, including the introduction of non-contributory maternity benefits for informal-sector workers, the inclusion of care credits in pension formulas and the integration of gender-responsive design across labour-market programmes. However, as of 2024, implementation remains limited.

Skills development. The National Skills Development Policy was introduced to enhance workforce productivity and align training with labour-market demands (Bangladesh, Ministry of Education 2011). However, its implementation has reproduced existing gender hierarchies in employment. Evidence shows that skills training programmes remain heavily gender-segregated: women are systematically directed toward traditional, low-paid trades, such as sewing, beauty care and food processing, while men dominate training in higher-paying technical trades, including electrical work, plumbing, machine operation and construction. This gendered structuring of training risks reinforcing occupational segregation by confining women to sectors with limited earning potential.

Enforcement. The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments is the principal authority responsible for enforcing the Bangladesh Labour Act. The system operates through routine, complaint-based and follow-up inspections conducted by a central office and field-level inspectorates across districts. The 2025 amendment to the Bangladesh Labour Act also expands inspectors' authority to conduct unannounced inspections, access all wage registers and employment contracts, and interview workers privately without employer presence.

Section 307 of the Bangladesh Labour Act outlines penalties for contraventions of provisions, including those related to wages. The 2025 amendment ordinance significantly strengthens this provision. Under the amended section 307, violators face imprisonment for up to six months (doubled from three months), a fine ranging from a minimum of Tk25,000 to a maximum of Tk50,000 (previously up to Tk25,000 with no minimum) or both. The introduction of a mandatory minimum fine of Tk25,000 ensures that even first-time offenders cannot escape with nominal penalties. In addition, the 2025 amendment introduces penalties for workplace discrimination, violence and harassment. These penalties are included under the new section 307A, with fines ranging from Tk20,000 to Tk50,000.

These provisions could potentially strengthen the detection of short-payment, non-payment and delayed payment of wages, including wage discrimination, particularly in cases in which women workers fear retaliation for reporting pay disparities. However, a series of limitations has constrained the effectiveness of the system of labour inspection in addressing gender-based wage discrimination.

The first challenge refers to the fact that the system of labour inspection primarily focuses on formal establishments, resulting in limited coverage of the informal sector. This poses a challenge, as a significant portion of workers — especially women — are engaged in informal employment. The ILO's 2021 assessment noted that "the current inspection system is inadequate to ensure compliance with labour laws, particularly in the informal sector where most women work" (ILO 2021).

Another challenge refers to the personnel shortage. Specifically, Bangladesh employs only about 400³¹ labour inspectors to monitor more than 300,000 registered establishments, resulting in an inspector-to-worker ratio of approximately 1:150,000 (ILO 2019), which is far below the level registered in several Asian countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam (Bernhardt et al., 2016).

In addition to quantitative shortages, the system faces challenges related to gender imbalance and limited specialization. Currently, only about 5 per cent of inspectors are women, which may hinder the ability of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments to effectively address complaints related to gender-based discrimination, harassment or wage inequality.

However, the 2025 amendment introduced a significant reform by mandating the implementation of legal provisions related to the conditions of employment and protection of workers (section 318A). This addresses a long-standing gap. Previously, inspectors received minimal guidance on identifying gender-based wage

³¹ As of 2024, the number of labour inspectors was 432.

discrimination or assessing compliance with women-specific provisions. The amendment also requires the development of standard operating procedures, including checklists for gender-specific compliance issues such as equal pay, maternity benefits and childcare facilities.

Labour courts and other complaint mechanisms. The Bangladesh Labour Act establishes labour courts as the primary mechanism for adjudicating employment disputes (sections 214–234). Although these courts play an important role in resolving conflicts, access remains limited for many workers. Proceedings are often lengthy and the associated legal costs and procedural requirements can discourage low-wage earners, particularly women, from pursuing claims (Hasle 2003). Concerns about retaliation further reduce workers' willingness to engage with the system (Amnesty International 2024).

The scope for addressing wage discrimination is also constrained. In the absence of clearly defined guidelines on the operationalization of the equal pay clause, labour courts have limited grounds to adjudicate cases involving gender-based wage disparities, while the lack of statutory guidance on “work of equal value” restricts consistent interpretation and remedy (ILO 2022). In addition, the process for obtaining the payment of wage arrears can be cumbersome, as labour inspectors cannot directly order the payment of wage arrears in case they identify wage-related violations.

Section 124A of the Bangladesh Labour Act provides for wage-dispute resolution through conciliation as an alternative to formal litigation. However, stakeholders reported that women workers rarely use this channel due to fear of retaliation, lack of awareness and the absence of enforceable standards on equal pay. Consequently, conciliation remains an underutilized mechanism.

D. Trade unions and collective bargaining

Chapter XIII of the Bangladesh Labour Act governs trade unions, formally recognizing workers' right to association and collective bargaining. Under section 179 of the Bangladesh Labour Act, as amended in 2025, a trade union no longer requires support from 30 per cent of the workforce. Instead, a fixed minimum number of workers can apply for registration based on the size of the establishment: 20 workers for establishments with 20 to 300 workers; 40 workers for those with 301 to 500 workers; 100 workers for those with 501 to 1,500 workers; 300 workers for those with 1,501 to 3,000 workers; and 400 workers for those with more than 3,000 workers. The legal and institutional framework does not specifically address women's representation within workers' organizations.

In addition, the scope and effectiveness of collective bargaining remain narrow, when it comes to issues related to gender discrimination. Specifically, section 211 of the Bangladesh Labour Act grants employers broad discretion in wage-setting and restricts issues that can be brought to collective negotiation. In practice, this limits unions' ability to negotiate on structural issues, such as pay equity, grading systems or recruitment policies contributing to the GPG.

In addition to these legislative considerations, other obstacles to the effective use of collective bargaining to promote gender equality relate to the presence of gender constraints (Nawaz and Haque 2020). Specifically, gender equality in trade unions is constrained by time poverty resulting from disproportionate domestic and care responsibilities, the absence of childcare facilities at union meetings and male-dominated union leadership that tends to deprioritize women's concerns, such as harassment, maternity protection or wage inequalities. Even where women are union members, their voices remain peripheral in decision-making. As a result, evidence from the ready-made garment sector underscores these gaps: only 8 per cent of union leaders are women; fewer than 5 per cent of collective bargaining agreements have had women in lead negotiating roles; and women hold just 1 per cent of factory leadership roles and just 9 per cent of managerial positions between 2010 and 2018.³² These patterns suggest that collective bargaining structures do not yet fully capture the perspectives or priorities of women workers.

Table 2 summarizes the discussion presented in this section, detailing, for the main policy areas of interest, (a) the current status of the legislation; (b) the critical gaps that emerge; and (c) the implications of these gaps in terms of the efforts to reduce the GPG.

³² Md Mahfuz Ul Bashar. 2025. “Advancing Women’s Leadership in Bangladesh’s RMG Sector towards Inclusive Industrial Relations”.

► Table 2: Key policy domains to address the GPG: Current status, critical gaps and impact on GPG

Policy domain	Current status	Critical gaps	Impact on GPG
Equal pay legislation	Principle included in the legislation, although the application remains limited.	Provisions do not tackle cases of structural gender inequalities in the labour market.	No legal justification against structural forms of gender-based wage inequalities.
Minimum wage coverage	47 sectors covered by the Minimum Wage Board.	Large segments of the workforce (for example, agro-processing, handicrafts, small enterprises), remain outside Minimum Wage Board coverage.	The vast majority of women workers have no minimum wage protection.
Maternity benefits	120 days paid leave (employer-funded).	No state cost-sharing; creates hiring disincentive for women.	Depresses women's employment and wages.
Childcare availability	As per the Bangladesh Labour Act, establishments with 40 or more female workers must provide and maintain daycare facilities for workers' children under the age of 6. Very low compliance in workplaces; limited public childcare provision.	Lack of quality and accessible childcare; facilities in factories are often non-functional; informal workers are largely excluded.	Constrains women's labour force participation; pushes women into informal/low-paid work.
Working time regulations	Night work prohibition for women.	Limits access to overtime and premium pay.	Reduces women's earning potential.
Collective bargaining	Numerical thresholds for forming trade unions, gender-related constraints to women's participation in trade unions.	Women are under-represented in trade unions; limited bargaining on gender-related considerations.	Collective bargaining is not fully exploited as an instrument to reduce the GPG.
Skills training	Different distribution of men and women across training courses.	Women channelled into low-wage occupations.	Reproduces occupational segregation and wage gaps.
Enforcement	Limited capacities of labour inspection; overburdened courts.	Inspector-to-worker ratio is 1:150,000.	Laws not enforced; violations go unpunished.



5. Views of stakeholders

THE GPG IN BANGLADESH

► 5. Views of stakeholders

This section documents the perspectives of national stakeholders regarding the underlying causes of the GPG in Bangladesh and their suggestions for addressing them. The analysis draws on insights from four stakeholder groups: government representatives and policymakers; employers' organizations; trade unions; and labour-focused development experts.³³ By integrating these diverse perspectives, the analysis captures both policy intentions and ground-level realities. Understanding stakeholder perspectives is essential to bridge the gap between policy intentions and real word outcomes. It helps uncover social, cultural and institutional barriers that shape gender wage inequality, identify gaps in implementation and ensure that future policy recommendations are grounded in lived experiences.

A. Methodology

Four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with distinct stakeholder groups to capture diverse perspectives on the GPG in Bangladesh. Each FGD was structured around open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth responses on three broad themes: (a) perceived drivers of the GPG across sectors; (b) sectoral and institutional barriers to wage equality; and (c) stakeholder-specific policy recommendations. The complete FGD guidelines, including detailed questions, are provided in Appendix B.³⁴

The qualitative data obtained from FGD transcriptions were analysed using the framework analysis approach (Ritchie and Spencer 1994; Gale et al. 2013), which is particularly suited for policy-oriented research. Framework analysis is a systematic and transparent method that allows researchers to explore predetermined themes while remaining open to emergent insights. It involves five stages: (a) familiarization with data; (b) developing a thematic framework; (c) indexing (coding); (d) charting (organizing coded data into matrices); and (e) mapping and interpretation.

The analysis was complemented by elements of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), which focuses on identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data, and directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005), which uses existing theory or prior research to guide initial coding. The combination of these approaches enabled both deductive coding (based on established GPG frameworks) and inductive coding (allowing new themes to emerge from the data).

The analysis was supported by NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software that facilitates systematic text-processing, coding and retrieval. NVivo was used to organize transcripts, apply codes to text segments and generate thematic matrices. However, all coding decisions and interpretations were made through manual review to ensure contextual accuracy and capture nuances that automated processes might miss.

Following the text-processing step, the FGD transcriptions were divided into segments — coherent units of meaning that typically correspond to a speaker's complete response or a paragraph that expresses a single idea. A total of 176 segments were identified across all four FGDs. Each segment was systematically reviewed and coded according to a thematic framework consisting of four categories: (a) structural and institutional factors; (b) occupational segregation; (c) social and cultural norms; and (d) labour-market dynamics. Segments could be assigned to multiple themes when they addressed intersecting issues. Thematic matrices were then used to identify cross-cutting issues, sectoral variations and shared or divergent stakeholder perspectives, leading to policy-relevant interpretations.

B. Drivers of the GPG according to stakeholders

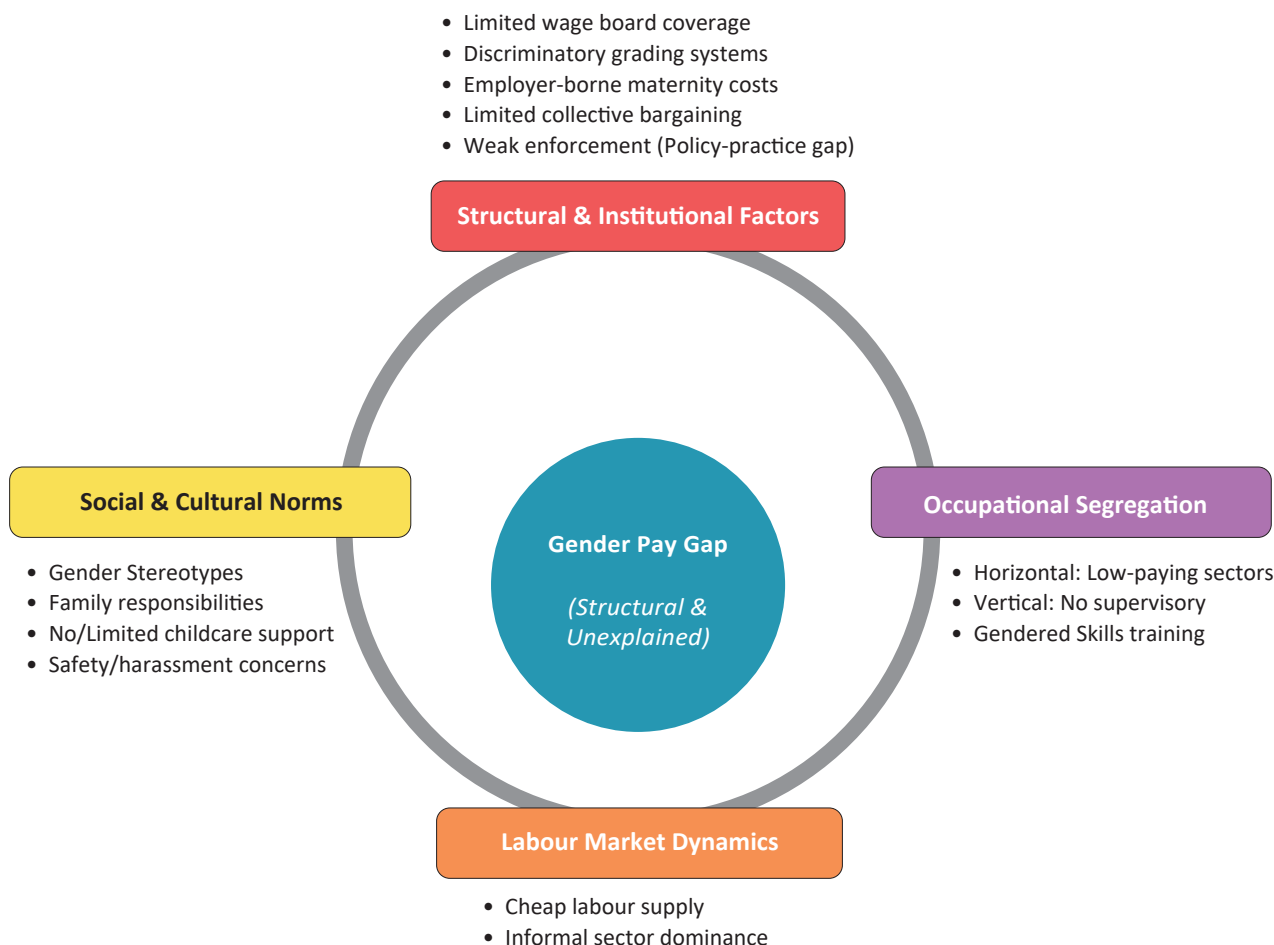
Thematic analysis of the FGD transcripts revealed a complex and interconnected set of drivers contributing to the GPG in Bangladesh. The framework in figure 19 illustrates these interrelationships by grouping the identified drivers into four broad thematic domains: (a) structural and institutional factors (for example, limited coverage of minimum wage boards, discriminatory grading systems); (b) occupational segregation

³³ Experts who are leading/implementing different projects on skills training, care work, employment injury schemes and related programmes.

³⁴ Each FGD lasted approximately 90 to 120 minutes and was conducted in Bengali, with simultaneous note-taking and audio recording. Transcriptions were prepared in English for analysis. The open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions and recommendations without being constrained by predetermined response categories.

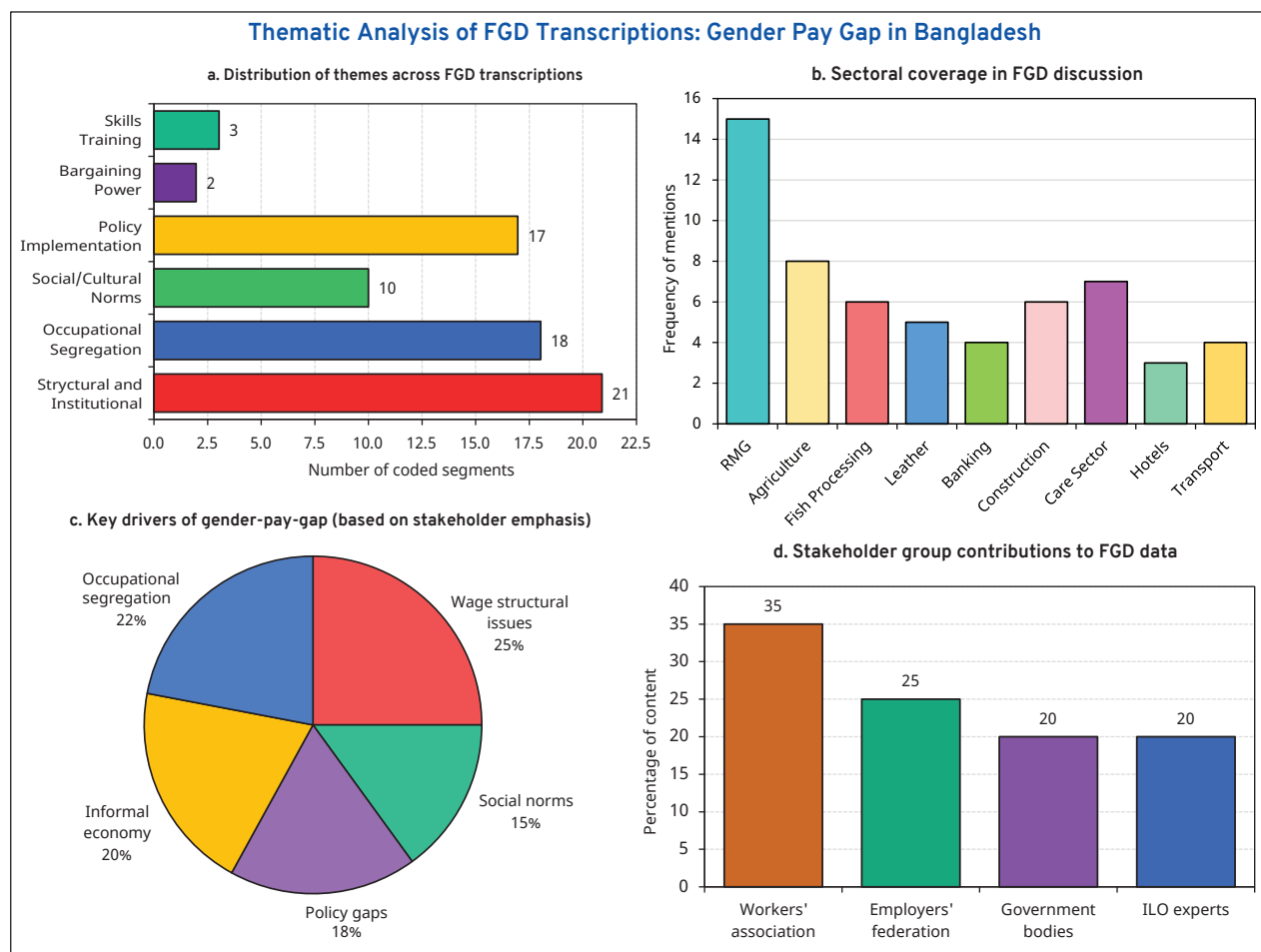
(that is, both horizontal segregation resulting in women's being employed in sectors and occupations that pay lower wages on average, and vertical segregation preventing women from obtaining access to high-skilled and managerial positions); (c) social and cultural norms (for example, gender stereotypes and household care responsibilities); and (d) labour-market dynamics (for example, oversupply of labour resulting in low wages).

► Figure 19: Framework of GPG drivers in the Bangladesh labour market



To complement this conceptual framework, figure 20 summarizes the results of the thematic coding process applied to all FGD transcripts. The charts illustrate the distribution and frequency of coded segments, the sectors represented in the discussions and the contributions of various stakeholder groups. This quantitative mapping reveals that structural and institutional issues were the most frequently addressed topics (21 coded segments), followed by issues related to occupational segregation (18 segments) and policy implementation gaps (17 segments). This pattern indicates a shared perception among participants that the GPG is systemic and deeply rooted in governance processes. Sector-wise, the ready-made garments industry dominated the discussions, followed by agriculture, fish processing and the care sector.

► Figure 20: Thematic analysis of FGD transcriptions



While all stakeholders acknowledged the presence of gender wage disparities in Bangladesh, the views on the drivers behind the GPG varied, as outlined below.

- Workers viewed the GPG as a result of structural injustice and institutional neglect, stemming from their exclusion from wage-setting, inspection and collective bargaining. They emphasized their experience of vulnerability and a lack of accessible mechanisms for redress.
- Employers recognized disparities but attributed them to individual factors, such as skills and family responsibilities, rather than discriminatory practices. By defining inequality as stemming from personal circumstances, employers focused away from organizational control, suggesting that wage gaps arise from broader social norms rather than from workplace bias.
- Government representatives positioned themselves between these two viewpoints. They acknowledged gaps in policy enforcement and labour inspection, but described these as procedural and capacity-related issues, rather than manifestations of structural inequality. In their view, improving institutional coordination and strengthening administrative mechanisms were the main pathways to narrowing the wage gap.
- Labour experts argued that the GPG is embedded in the gendered configuration of the labour market — from vocational training and skills acquisition to promotion pathways and leadership representation.

Similarly, the discussions pointed to the fact that, while some of the drivers of the GPG are common across the country, some other factors are different across sectors, as outlined below.

- In the manufacturing sector, particularly in the ready-made garment sector, minimum wage compliance is higher, especially in first-tier factories. However, subcontracted and lower-tier factories show weaker compliance, leaving women more vulnerable to wage exploitation. Even within the formal sector, occupational roles are often gendered, leading to imbalances in pay and advancement opportunities.

- In the agriculture and fish processing sectors, challenges are more pronounced. Women in day labour or processing roles often earn less than men for comparable work. In fish processing, women, who make up most of the workforce, receive very low daily wages, typically from Tk80 to Tk100, indicating minimal regulation. The agriculture sector faces similar issues, with informal and largely unregulated wage-setting.
- Geographic disparities exist in care work: urban areas such as Dhaka offer higher wages, while rural workers earn significantly less for similar tasks. These patterns highlight the ongoing wage disadvantage for women and the effects of location- and sector-specific conditions.
- In the finance and banking and hospitality sectors, women are well represented in entry-level positions but significantly underrepresented in officer-level and managerial roles, despite having qualifications that meet or exceed job requirements. This limitation in career progression impacts earning potential, contributing to persistent wage disparities.
- In the leather and construction sectors, employment is highly informal, inspection mechanisms are weak or non-existent and women are largely absent from skilled technical roles, exposing them to lower wages and unsafe working conditions.
- The transport sector also shows the intersection of informality and low female participation, with few women employed and virtually no protective regulations in place.

Table 3 summarizes the key sector-specific patterns highlighted by stakeholders.

► Table 3: Sector-specific patterns of gender inequalities distinct challenges

Sector	Key findings
Manufacturing	Skill-based segregation persists and minimum wage determination lacks the mandate to incorporate gender considerations.
Agriculture	Clear and direct GPG. No effective wage regulation or enforcement.
Construction	A wage board exists, but recruitment is entirely informal through contractors. No inspection mechanism to verify compliance.
Leather	Perception of high GPG. Severe health and safety hazards. Minimal legal protections.
Finance and banking	Women are concentrated in front-line service or customer care roles despite having higher educational qualifications than required.
Hotels and restaurants	Inadequate wage policies and high vulnerability to exploitation.
Care sector	Severe geographic wage disparities.
Transport	Very low female participation. Sector is entirely informal or semi-formal, with no legal protections.

The rest of this section reviews in more detail the four key drivers contributing to the GPG in Bangladesh, as mentioned above. While the discussion will focus on the key trends that apply to the overall labour market and the points that were shared by all the groups of stakeholders interviewed, differences across sectors as well as differences in opinions across stakeholders will be mentioned, when relevant.

Structural and institutional factors. Among the four cross-cutting themes identified through the thematic analysis, structural and institutional factors — in particular, wage structure issues and policy implementation gaps — emerged as the most dominant concern voiced across all stakeholder groups.

These structural factors, in turn, relate to different topics.

First of all, participants consistently underscored that the current wage-setting mechanisms in Bangladesh struggle to ensure fair and equitable compensation, particularly for women. Workers' associations further emphasized that Bangladesh's minimum wage remains the lowest in Asia, falling well below what is necessary to support the basic needs of an average household.

Even within sectors formally regulated by the Minimum Wage Board, stakeholders noted that the grading process has become a key channel through which gender disparities are reproduced. While section 345 of the Bangladesh Labour Act requires equal wages for men and women for work of equal nature or standard or value, stakeholders noted that women are frequently placed in lower grades, despite performing tasks that require comparable skills and responsibilities. This practice perpetuates wage differentials within skill-based grading structures, even where the legal principle of equal wages for similar work formally exists.

As one workers' association representative explained:

"According to sections 138–146 of our Labour Law and under rules 127–132, a wage board has been constituted, which determines wages for a total of 47 sectors ... Nowhere does it state that wages can differ based on authority or power [meaning hierarchical position or job rank]. Therefore, in the sectors where the wage board sets wages, there is very limited scope — formally or legally — to declare a gender pay gap. The real issue arises in the grading process, which creates disparities between men and women performing the same work based on skill." (Workers' association representative)

Another structural factor associated with the GPG relates to the presence of limited enforcement and inspection. Stakeholders across all groups highlighted a persistent and troubling gap between policy intent and actual practice. This gap reflects widespread frustration with weak enforcement mechanisms, limited worker participation in policymaking and unintended policy consequences that continue to disadvantage women.

Participants consistently described the labour inspection system as severely under-resourced and ineffective. Workers' associations reported that inspectors rarely interact with individual workers and that most complaints never reach formal channels due to the absence of accessible reporting mechanisms. Even when violations are identified, enforcement remains weak, with few or no penalties imposed on non-compliant employers. Government representatives acknowledged these systemic shortcomings, noting efforts to increase the number of female labour inspectors. However, they also admitted that many of these newly appointed women are excluded from critical opportunities on the grounds of being "too new" or "inexperienced," reflecting both institutional inertia and gender bias within enforcement agencies themselves.

Another institutional factor that was mentioned as driving the GPG refers to limited collective bargaining and social dialogue. Specifically, the analysis showed that women's weak bargaining power in the labour market is both a cause and a consequence of the GPG. This two-way relationship helps explain why low pay for women tends to persist over time. Stakeholders noted that trade unions and federations are weak or inaccessible for many workers, while women's participation in these organizations is particularly low. Without collective voice or negotiated agreements, women have virtually no leverage to contest low pay, unsafe conditions or discriminatory practices. The lack of bargaining power also reduces the likelihood that workplace grievances will be addressed or that informal-sector employers will adopt fairer pay practices.

A recurring concern, especially among workers' associations, was their exclusion from the formulation of labour and wage policies. Representatives expressed strong dissatisfaction at being included only at the monitoring stage rather than during policy design. This exclusion not only limits the effectiveness of labour policies but also undermines their legitimacy and the sense of ownership among the very groups they are intended to protect.

As one participant remarked:

"When the government formulates policies, no federation representatives are included in the policymaking team; they are only part of the monitoring team. But if there is no role in policy formulation, what is the purpose of monitoring?"

The last institutional factor that was mentioned as driving the GPG was the legislation on maternity leave. Stakeholders identified an unintended outcome of existing maternity protection policies. Since employers, rather than the State, bear the full financial cost of maternity leave, many employers perceive hiring women of childbearing age as an economic burden. This structural design effectively penalizes women in recruitment and promotion decisions, despite the policy's original intent to safeguard their rights. Several participants advocated for the introduction of a cost-sharing mechanism, either through public funds or social insurance, to reduce the financial disincentive for employers and promote fairer labour-market participation for women.

As one employer's representative remarked:

"To be honest, the full cost falls on employers, and for many small and medium-sized companies, it becomes difficult. If the government or some kind of shared fund could support part of the maternity payment, then it would be easier for them to hire women without worrying about the financial pressure."

Occupational segregation. Occupational segregation emerged as another pervasive and deeply entrenched driver of the GPG in Bangladesh. Stakeholders across groups highlighted how gendered patterns of employment placement systematically confine women to lower-paid roles and hinder their upward mobility in almost every sector of the economy.

The occupational segregation was observed in the concentration of women in low-wage, labour-intensive and repetitive roles. In the ready-made garment sector, for instance, women overwhelmingly occupy sewing operator positions, the lowest-paid roles in the production chain. Employers acknowledged that hiring decisions in these positions are often shaped by gendered assumptions about women's patience, diligence and suitability for repetitive manual tasks, revealing how gender stereotypes are used to rationalize occupational inequalities. In contrast, higher-paid and more technically skilled positions, such as knitting machine operators, dyeing technicians and Jacquard machine operation, are predominantly held by men. This gendered division of labour is not confined to ready-made garment manufacturing. In the private banking sector, women are largely positioned in front-line service roles such as cashiers or customer service representatives, while men dominate managerial and officer-level positions. The same trend extends to the agriculture, construction and transport sectors, in which women are rarely found in skilled or technical work.

Moreover, stakeholders consistently observed the near absence of women in supervisory and managerial roles. This disproportionate representation is perpetuated by a combination of structural and cultural barriers. Employers often assume that women lack the authority or confidence to manage teams effectively. The expectation that supervisors must work longer hours also discourages women, who continue to bear the major share of household and caregiving duties. Moreover, concerns about workplace safety and harassment further reduce women's willingness to take on leadership positions. The lack of structured mentorship and career development programmes compounds these barriers, leaving women with limited pathways towards promotion or professional growth.

A critical insight gleaned from the discussions was the role of the skills training system in reinforcing occupational segregation. In most technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutes, female trainees are systematically encouraged to enrol in courses that are traditionally associated with women's work — such as sewing, baking or beauty services. These trades are often oversaturated and offer limited income opportunities. In contrast, male students are guided toward technical fields — such as mechanics, electrical work or information and communication technology, which are more skill-intensive and better paid. This gendered division in skills development not only restricts women's access to higher-paying occupations but also reproduces the structural inequalities that sustain the GPG.

Social and cultural norms. Social and cultural norms remain powerful forces that determine women's labour-market outcomes in Bangladesh. These norms influence how work is divided, how women's roles are perceived and how their opportunities for advancement unfold across sectors. Stakeholders widely agreed that gender inequality in employment and wages cannot be separated from these underlying cultural expectations.

First of all, stakeholders across all groups observed that persistent gender stereotypes continue to shape hiring decisions, job assignments and promotion opportunities. A prevailing belief remains that women are less suited for technical, physically demanding or leadership roles, especially in manufacturing and agro-based industries. Such biases are not confined to workplaces; they are reinforced by social attitudes among male colleagues and even within families, which often discourage women from aspiring to higher-level or non-traditional occupations. These stereotypes, in turn, justify women's under-representation in better-paid and decision-making positions, sustaining a self-perpetuating cycle of inequality.

In addition, women's disproportionate share of unpaid household and caregiving responsibilities was identified as a major constraint on their employment choice and career progression. Women often shoulder the primary responsibility for childcare and household duties, leaving little room for full-time or shift-based employment. Many women cannot accept positions that involve travel, night shifts or relocation — factors

closely tied to promotions and higher earnings. The absence of affordable childcare further limits their participation. Employers noted that while women make up a large share of lower-level workers in sectors such as agri-food, which includes agriculture, fisheries, food processing and retail, they are rarely found in senior roles. Married women, in particular, face difficulties balancing work and family expectations and often need to withdraw from formal employment or accept less-demanding roles.

Safety concerns and harassment also deter women from certain jobs or shifts. Many women fear harassment while commuting or working in male-dominated settings, particularly during night shifts. Although protective measures — such as restrictions on night work — aim to ensure safety, they often have the unintended effect of reducing women's earning opportunities and advancement prospects. This highlights the need to balance protection with equal access to work opportunities.

Labour market dynamics. Some of the stakeholders repeatedly pointed to the abundant supply of cheap labour as a factor that drives down wages.

As one representative from workers' association put it:

"In Bangladesh, since the supply of labour is always high, cheap labour is easily available. The younger the worker, the lower the wage. Similarly, women are paid lower wages. Employers always seek workers who will work for the least pay."

In such a market, employers face little incentive to raise wages or improve conditions, because replacements are readily available at lower cost. Young workers and women, who are often perceived as more willing or obliged to accept lower pay, therefore become the default pool for low-paid roles.

The situation is even more precarious in the informal sector, which employs the majority of women. Here, the non-applicability of legal frameworks, including with respect to wages, allows wide gender-based disparities to persist unchecked. Stakeholders cited examples from sectors such as the fish processing sector, in which women — who constitute a large portion of the workforce — earn only Tk80 to Tk100 per day, as well as from the leather production, domestic work and agriculture sectors, in which similar inequities prevail.

The interaction between labour supply and weak bargaining produces a reinforcing cycle. Low wages and precarious employment discourage investment in training and career progression, while limited skill development and short job tenure make it harder for workers to demand higher pay, which keeps the pool of low-cost labour large and attractive to employers. Women, who are disproportionately represented in informal, insecure and low-paid jobs, therefore find themselves trapped in a system in which both market conditions and institutional weakness sustain the GPG.

C. Policy solutions proposed by stakeholders

This section ends by summarizing the possible policy solutions proposed by stakeholders to address the GPG. This section synthesizes the key policy recommendations proposed by each stakeholder group, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence.

Wage-setting and minimum standards. Concerns regarding wage structure were central to the recommendations of all groups, though each approached the issue from a different perspective. Workers' organizations identified the lack of a universal wage floor as the root cause of exploitation, calling for the establishment of a national minimum wage applicable to all wage employees, irrespective of industry, category or nature of employment, along with an expansion of wage board coverage beyond the current 47 sectors. They argued that without a common benchmark, women — particularly those in informal or subcontracted work — remain invisible to policy protections. Government officials acknowledged this challenge but emphasized the need for gradual expansion and administrative feasibility, noting that enforcing such standards across the country's diverse and informal labour markets would require improved inspection capacity. Employers expressed concerns about affordability and sectoral sustainability, emphasizing that wage adjustments should align with productivity and economic conditions, rather than be imposed as blanket mandates. Labour experts provided a balancing perspective, advocating for evidence-based wage-setting through research cells within wage boards to ensure adequate and balanced wage levels that will ensure workers protection without compromising competitiveness.

Skills development and occupational mobility. A second area of convergence was the recognition that women's limited upward mobility and concentration in low-wage roles stems from gendered skill formation. Workers called for accessible and gender-inclusive training programmes that would enable women to advance beyond repetitive, low-skill positions and qualify for higher-paying technical or supervisory roles. Employers largely agreed on the importance of skills development but framed the issue as a supply-side constraint, citing the limited availability of qualified women in technical trades. The Government pointed to ongoing efforts to reform the TVET system. However, stakeholders noted that gender stereotypes remain deeply embedded in curricula and institutional practices. Labour experts pushed this discussion further, recommending systemic reform of training curricula to eliminate gender bias, the establishment of women-focused training institutions in non-traditional trades, and the scaling up of programmes such as Gender Equality and Returns (GEAR),³⁵ which have demonstrated the transformative potential of targeted capacity-building for women.

Labour rights, representation and enforcement. The most contentious area of policy discussion concerns labour rights and enforcement mechanisms. Workers' associations highlighted the lack of effective complaint channels, limited access to justice and their exclusion from policy formulation processes as critical governance failures. They argued that meaningful representation in decision-making is essential for ensuring accountability and trust. In contrast, employers preferred incentive-based compliance over punitive enforcement, asserting that the focus should be on partnership rather than regulation. Government representatives acknowledged the resource and capacity limitations within the inspection system and emphasized ongoing efforts to increase the number of female inspectors and improve training access. Labour experts underscored that without robust inspection, monitoring and grievance mechanisms, policies would not be applied. Their emphasis on building institutional accountability reflects a broader understanding of the GPG as a governance issue rather than just a labour-market outcome.

Work-family balance and gender-responsive infrastructure. Stakeholders also made recommendations to address the intersection of paid work and unpaid care responsibilities. Workers viewed existing maternity leave provisions as both necessary and punitive: while essential for women's well-being, the employer-funded structure discourages the hiring of women of childbearing age. Employers echoed this concern from a financial perspective, advocating for cost-sharing mechanisms between employers and the State. The Government appeared receptive to this idea, viewing it as a pragmatic step towards encouraging fairer hiring practices. In addition to maternity protection, both employers and workers emphasized the need for childcare facilities, safe transportation, and improved housing and schooling in industrial areas — measures that would directly enhance women's ability to work longer and advance in their careers. Labour experts framed these interventions within a broader agenda of gender-responsive labour policy, stressing that the right to work cannot be separated from the conditions that enable women to work safely.

Table 4 summarizes the key policy recommendations of each stakeholder group, highlighting how their priorities align with their roles and perspectives. It provides a concise synthesis of the policy directions discussed, illustrating the complementarities and tensions in Bangladesh's agenda for gender pay equity.

³⁵ Gender Equality and Returns (GEAR) is a special initiative of Better Work Bangladesh, jointly implemented by the ILO and the International Finance Corporation. Piloted in 2016, the initiative has made significant strides in advancing women's economic potential and improving access to better jobs and opportunities for women. See Better Work, "Bangladesh: Gender Equality and Returns-GEAR".

► Table 4: Stakeholder-specific policy recommendations and underlying rationales

Stakeholder group	Key policy recommendations	Underlying rationale/perspective
<i>Workers' organizations</i>	• Establish a national minimum wage applicable to all wage employees, irrespective of sector, industry and nature of work. • Create accessible complaint and grievance mechanisms. • Include worker representatives in the initial stage of policy formulation. • Set up research cells within wage boards for evidence-based wage-setting.	Wage inequality is viewed as a structural injustice that is rooted in exclusion from wage-setting and enforcement processes. Demand is expressed for stronger legal protections, worker participation and institutional accountability to address systemic neglect.
<i>Employers' organizations</i>	• Improve infrastructure in industrial zones (housing, childcare, transport). • Provide workplace childcare facilities and ensure safe environments. • Strengthen anti-harassment and safety mechanisms. • Support targeted upskilling programmes aligned with labour-market demand.	Gender disparities are acknowledged but attributed to social constraints and limited female labour supply. Emphasis is placed on pragmatic interventions that improve retention and productivity rather than on regulatory mandates.
<i>Government bodies</i>	• Enhance labour inspection capacity and allocate greater resources. • Ensure equal training opportunities for female inspectors. • Introduce cost-sharing mechanisms for maternity benefits. • Gradually expand minimum wage coverage to informal sectors. • Introduce explicit equal pay and equal value provisions in the Bangladesh Labour Act and align wage-setting processes with these principles.	Policy gaps are recognized but framed as administrative rather than structural challenges. Priority is given to institutional strengthening and gradual reform within existing policy frameworks.
<i>Labour experts</i>	• Scale up GEAR-like capacity-building initiatives for women. • Reform skills curricula to eliminate gender stereotypes. • Establish women-focused training centres in non-traditional trades. • Launch awareness campaigns to challenge gender norms. • Promote evidence-based wage and policy decisions.	The GPG is viewed as a systemic outcome of gendered labour-market structures and institutional bias. Long-term reforms are advocated to integrate policy, training and social norms into a cohesive gender equality framework.



6. Conclusions and policy options

THE GPG IN BANGLADESH

► 6. Conclusions and policy options

This report has shown that women in Bangladesh still face several obstacles to full and equal participation in the labour market. Specifically, the female employment rate is still about 40 percentage points lower than the male employment rate (40.2 and 77.9 per cent, respectively, in 2023). In addition, women in employment are less likely to be in wage employment and more likely to work as own-account workers, which is generally associated with less income and employment security. As a result, women constitute only 17 per cent of wage employees in the country. Women in wage employment are concentrated in the “Manufacturing” sector (which accounts for 41 per cent of total female wage employment), while other important sectors of economic activity for female wage employees are “Activities of households as employers” (19 per cent of total female wage employment) and “Education” (12 per cent). Women in wage employment tend to be over-represented in low-skilled occupations and only 6.2 per cent of managerial positions are filled up by women. At the same time, women in wage employment have a slightly higher likelihood to be in formal employment compared to men in wage employment and the number of hours worked by men and women is quite similar.

The report proceeded to look at the wage difference between men and women, also known as the gender pay gap or GPG. The results show that when this is estimated using monthly wages, women earn from 22 to 25 per cent less than men. This estimate decreases, although not substantially, when computing the GPG using hourly wages. At this level, the GPG in Bangladesh is slightly lower than the values registered in other countries in the region, including Pakistan and Sri Lanka, while it is higher than the average value observed around the world. The results also show that within each age group the GPG increases with age, while within each level of educational attainments the GPG decreases with education. The GPG is also higher for individuals in informal employment than for those in formal employment, consistent with the fact that compliance with the labour legislation reduces the GPG. The GPG is also positive in virtually all sectors of economic activity, including those that present a relatively high share of female employment (for example, the “Manufacturing of wearing apparel” sector). The results also show that the GPG is higher among low-skilled occupations and for individuals at the bottom of the wage distribution.

The report’s empirical analysis then investigated the drivers behind the GPG in the country. First of all, the results of a decomposition exercise show that the vast majority of the GPG cannot be explained by differences between men and women in terms of educational attainments or other labour-market characteristics (for example, sector or occupation of employment). Rather, at all deciles of the wage distribution, the vast majority of the GPG remains unexplained by these observable factors and is likely driven by inequalities of opportunities and conditions. Two possible explanations are put forward to interpret the large role of the unexplained component of the GPG. First, the sectors of economic activity that employ a relatively higher proportion of women are associated with lower wages on average for both men and women. Internationally, this has been interpreted as a penalty against jobs that are traditionally regarded as jobs for women. Second, women in wage employment spend substantially more time than men in wage employment conducting household chores. This reduces their capacity to fully participate in the labour market, contributing also to lower wages.

The report then reviewed the existing policies and institutions that are in place in Bangladesh to promote gender equality in the labour market. The country’s commitment to reduce the GPG is evident from its ratification of numerous international conventions on the topic, including Conventions Nos 100 and 111, ratified, respectively, in 1998 and 1972. Bangladesh also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1984. The 1972 Constitution guarantees equal rights between men and women “in all spheres of the State and of public life” (Art. 28). However, a number of legislative gaps remain. In particular, the Labour Act includes a reference to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, but this provision has been narrowly interpreted. The Minimum Wages Board is the main wage-setting mechanism in the country, responsible for determining the minimum wages for different sectors. However, the Minimum Wages Board shows a limited sectoral coverage and the wage-setting scheme does not explicitly ensure that the remuneration rates are fixed free from gender bias. Other legislative aspects that are potentially limitative include the legislation on maternity leave, which establishes that employers need to bear its full costs, as well as the presence of restrictions against women working overtime or in certain occupations.

Finally, the report presented the results of interviews and consultations conducted with representatives of the Government, employers’ organizations and trade unions, as well as labour experts. These were used to obtain the views of stakeholders on the main factors explaining the GPG in Bangladesh. Several factors were mentioned.

First, structural and institutional factors, including the limited coverage of the minimum wage, contribute to the persistence of gender wage inequalities. Second, horizontal and vertical segregation push women to work in lower-paid sectors and occupations. Third, the uneven distribution of household care responsibilities between men and women, as well as safety and harassment concerns, discourages women from taking up highly paid jobs. Fourth, the weak state of the labour market provides limited incentives to raise wages, resulting in particularly low wages for vulnerable groups of workers, including female wage employees.

Based on the empirical evidence summarized above, the review of the legislation and policies in place, as well as the opinions expressed by stakeholders, the report concludes by putting forward a number of possible policy recommendations or options. **These are informed by the available evidence from around the world on “what works” to reduce the GPG and should inform national debate among stakeholders in the country taking into consideration the national context and realities.**

- **Clarifying the application of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.** As mentioned above, the Bangladesh Labour Act includes the principle of equal pay for “work of equal nature or standard or value”. However, it is not clear how this principle has been implemented and there are concerns that it is generally interpreted in a narrow sense (that is, to compare individuals conducting the same job but not individuals performing different jobs that are, however, of equal value). Specifically, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), in its Direct Request adopted in 2022 concerning the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), asks the Government to provide information on “how the terms ‘work of equal nature or standard or value’ have been applied or interpreted in practice, including information on any cases of pay inequality dealt with by the labour inspectors, the courts or any other competent authority, the sanctions imposed and remedies granted”.³⁶ It is important to clarify the application of the principle included in the Bangladesh Labour Act, ensuring that this is in line with the provisions of Convention No. 100.
- **Broadening the definition of remuneration.** Implementing the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, as stated in Convention No. 100, also requires adopting a definition of remuneration that is as broad as possible, in particular including all wage components (that is, both basic wages and non-regular wage components). This is to account for the fact that gender wage differentials may also refer to the non-regular component of wages (for example, bonuses, overtime premiums). In the Observations adopted in 2022, the CEACR “notes with concern” that the Government “considers that the definition of ‘wages’ included in section 2(45) of the Labour Act to be in line with the Convention”; instead, the CEACR “recalls that this definition excludes particular aspects of remuneration such as ‘the value of any house accommodation, light, water’ or ‘any travelling allowance’”.³⁷ This is in contrast with the provisions of Convention No. 100, which call for considering “any additional emoluments whatsoever” (Art. 1(a)), thus including travel allowances and accommodation. It is thus suggested to consider reviewing the definition of remuneration, ensuring that this is in line with the broad definition included in the Convention.

Box 1: The principle of equal pay for work of equal value in Indonesia and Pakistan

In Indonesia, the regulation on wages (section 11) establishes that every worker is entitled to equal wage for work of equal value, in line with the provisions of Convention No. 100. The definition of remuneration includes any amount that is “paid according to a [formal and written] work agreement (*perjanjian kerja*), a deal (*kesepakatan*), or laws and regulations”, thereby extending the application of the provisions also to informal workers who do not have a formal and written contract.

The labour legislation in the Pakistani province of Balochistan recently introduced the right to equal remuneration for the “same work or work of a similar nature or work of equal value” (Balochistan Payment of Wages Act of 2021). The same legislation defines work of equal value. In addition, the legislation includes the definition of job appraisals as “objective appraisal for determination of wage differentials without regard to sex, to ensure the enforcement of the principle of equal remuneration for male and female workers for work of equal value” (ILO 2025a).

Source: EPIC, “Equal Pay Legal Database: Country Information – Indonesia”.

³⁶ See ILO, [Direct Request \(CEACR\) - adopted 2022, published 111st ILC session \(2023\)](#)
[Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 \(No. 100\) - Bangladesh \(Ratification: 1998\)](#), Arts 1 and 2.

³⁷ See ILO, [Observation \(CEACR\) - adopted 2022, published 111st ILC session \(2023\)](#)
[Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 \(No. 100\) - Bangladesh \(Ratification: 1998\)](#), Art. 1(a).

- **Objective job evaluations.** The promotion of the equal pay principle also requires the use of objective job evaluations. The importance of job evaluations was also recently reaffirmed for Bangladesh by the CEACR in its 2022 Direct Request to the Government. Specifically, the CEACR noted that “no information was provided in the Government’s report regarding approaches and methods for objective job evaluation” and asked the Government to provide information on “any measures taken to promote, develop and implement practical approaches and methods for objective job evaluation, both in the public and private sectors, based on criteria that are free from gender bias, such as qualifications and skills, effort, responsibilities and conditions of work”.³⁸

The most common method of performing a job evaluation is to identify, for each job, its different factors and attribute points to each of these factors. The identification of these factors is crucial in determining the success of the job evaluation; in particular, it is important that these factors do not discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against jobs performed by women. Factors that can be included in job evaluations are (a) skills and qualifications needed to perform the job, as acquired either through formal or informal education, training or experience; (b) responsibilities that are part of the job, which might include both the management of people and resources; (c) the efforts needed to conduct the job, which could be both physical and intellectual; and (d) the working conditions, including a consideration of both the physical and psychological elements that might be detrimental to the worker. In addition to introducing job evaluations into legislation, it is also important to provide incentives to ensure that both public and private enterprises use these tools. These could include financial incentives (for example, social security discounts for firms using job evaluations and reporting the absence of gender pay discrimination) as well as preferential access to public procurement (for example, assigning extra points in public bids to firms that can provide proof of the absence of gender wage discrimination).

Box 2: Job evaluations in Switzerland and Spain

Switzerland is one of the first countries that introduced job evaluations with the aim of reducing gender wage inequalities. Specifically, the software Logib, prepared by the Federal Office for Gender Equality, allows employers to identify each person in the company, enter individual level information (age, sex and education levels and so on) as well as the specific function of that person within the company and his or her wage (including both the basic wage and other wage components). Separately, the employer needs to establish, for each function, the intensity of certain requirements and responsibilities (that is, using a scale such as “very low”, “rather low”, “medium” or “very high”). Each function then receives a score based on these factors and the value of a job is estimated. This value is compared to the remuneration received by the individual in that function and discrimination is detected if, for instance, a worker receives a lower wage compared to another one whose job is estimated to be of lower value.

In Spain, Royal Decree 902/2020 introduced guidelines for conducting job evaluations to measure the value of work. Based on these criteria, the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy and the Ministry of Equality have developed a tool to conduct job evaluations, in coordination with the most representative trade unions and employers’ organizations. Specifically, the tool identifies factors and subfactors associated with a job. For each of them, the evaluation must select the level most appropriate to the job, indicating the frequency with which the specific factor or subfactor is present in a particular job – from 0 (not applicable to the job) to 5 (very high level of effort). Once the evaluation is completed, the tool computes the overall value of a job, using predetermined weights for each factor. The tool then produces a list of all jobs with their associated value.

Sources: Switzerland, “[Equal pay analysis with Logib](#)”.

Spain, [Real Decreto 902/2020, de 13 de octubre, de igualdad retributiva entre mujeres y hombres](#). - Boletín Oficial del Estado de 14-10-2020.

³⁸ See ILO, Direct Request (CEACR) - adopted 2022, Art. 3.

- **Gender-sensitive wage-setting mechanisms.** In addition, the benefits of reducing the GPG could be realized by designing a gender-sensitive wage-setting mechanism. As reviewed above, the current wage-setting framework in Bangladesh does not explicitly aim to address gender wage differences. This concern was also recently expressed by the CEACR in its 2022 Direct Request to the Government, which included the request to provide any information on “the method and criteria used, when determining minimum wages in accordance with section 345 of the Labour Act, to ensure that the remuneration rates are fixed free from gender bias, and in particular that the work in sectors with a high proportion of women is not being undervalued”.³⁹

It is important to note that the minimum wage, if properly established and implemented, can contribute to reducing different types of wage inequalities, including gender wage inequalities. This is because women are more likely to be represented at the bottom of the wage distribution and therefore they will derive a relatively greater benefit from the establishment or update of a minimum wage. However, this requires avoiding gaps in coverage, both across and within sectors, that are caused either by legislation or practice (for example, if the minimum wage is only infrequently updated). This means that legislation on the minimum wage should cover all workers, including agricultural workers. In addition, when determining the minimum wage, it should be ensured that the methods used do not discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against occupations in which women tend to be over-represented. Job evaluations could be used to this purpose. It is also important to guarantee that the minimum wages are regularly updated and that their coverage extends also to sectors that currently fall outside of the scope of minimum wages boards. Finally, compliance with the minimum wage provisions should also be guaranteed. This can be done by launching information and awareness-raising campaigns to ensure that workers are well informed about the minimum wage; promoting the involvement of and capacity-building among employers’ and workers’ representatives; and reinforcing the system of labour inspections.

Box 3: Minimum wages to reduce gender wage inequalities

South Africa established the minimum wage for domestic workers in 2002 (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, and Sectoral Determination 7 for the Domestic Worker Sector). The Act established that minimum wages for domestic workers could depend only on two parameters: (a) the number of hours worked for a single employer (that is, establishing higher hourly rates for workers employed for fewer hours); and (b) the region of employment. This ensured that the minimum wage legislation is clear and easily understandable, thereby increasing the probability of effective implementation. The legislation also established that deductions can be made to the worker’s wage if accommodation is provided by the employer, but these cannot exceed 10 per cent.

Namibia initially had a minimum wage only in selected industries, but in 2024 the Government introduced a nationwide minimum wage (at 18 dollars (N\$) per hour), after extensive consultations with the social partners. The introduction of a national minimum wage also implied that the previous sector-level minimum wages had to be adjusted if they were providing wage levels that were lower than the new minimum wage. This was the case for the minimum wage for domestic workers, which was about half of the new minimum wage. In order to avoid potential disruption in the sector, the legislation established that the minimum wage for domestic workers had to be increased gradually by about N\$3 per year until it reached the new nationwide minimum wage level.

Sources: South Africa, [Basic Conditions of Employment Act: Sectoral determination 7: Domestic worker sector: Wages and conditions of employment: Amendment](#).

Namibia, [Government Gazette No. 8409, 7 August 2024](#).

³⁹ See ILO, Direct Request (CEACR) - adopted 2022, Art. 2(2)(b).

- **Maternity and paternity leave.** The legislation on maternity leave in Bangladesh grants women 120 days of maternity leave but assigns full financial responsibility to employers – while the State does not pay any financial contribution. This could have possible negative implications in terms of women’s employment, as employers may perceive that hiring a woman of childbearing age could come with higher costs and may therefore prefer hiring men with comparable skills and qualifications (ILO 2019). Consideration may therefore be given to sharing the financial responsibility, whereby the State would bear at least part of the costs of maternity leave, or to introducing compulsory and fully paid paternity leave, also financed by the State. This would further reduce the perceived cost differential of hiring women and men and would also contribute to involving fathers in household care responsibilities.

Box 4: Maternity benefits in Namibia

In Namibia, all women who work for an employer and receive a basic wage are entitled to receive maternity leave. Maternity benefits are financed by a mandatory contribution equal to 1.8 per cent of the wage (up to a ceiling). This contribution is shared equally between the employer and the worker and must be paid for both male and female workers. Self-employed individuals can also voluntarily decide to contribute to the scheme, in which case they need to pay the entire 1.8 per cent contribution. In order to receive maternity benefits, a woman must have made at least six months of contributions before the birth of the child. The benefit replaces 100 per cent of her wage, up to a ceiling.

Source: ILO Global Care Policy Portal, “[Namibia – 2025](#)”.

- **Restrictions on women’s employment.** Certain restrictions on women’s employment are still in place in Bangladesh. These include, in particular, the prohibition of night work for women, as well as the prohibition of conducting certain jobs that require intense physical activity and might cause miscarriage. While intended to protect women, these measures could have the unintended effect of limiting employment and earning opportunities for women, including non-pregnant women. This is also because these restrictions could reinforce cultural norms, according to which certain jobs are not fit for women. It is thus important to review all the existing restrictions that are in place with a view to eliminating those that are not strictly necessary. Importantly, this assessment should be made with the involvement of the social partners, also ensuring that female representatives are involved. This would also allow the Government to respond to the Observation adopted by the CEACR in 2022, most notably with respect to provide information on “the steps taken to address occupational segregation, including by promoting women’s access to the labour market and to jobs with career prospects and higher pay, and their results”.⁴⁰

Box 5: Reviewing restrictions on women’s employment: The experience of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan

In Azerbaijan, legislation until recently prohibited women from working in 674 occupations across sectors such as agriculture, construction, transport, energy and manufacturing. These restrictions included diverse occupations. Amendments to the legislation introduced in 2022 eliminated all 674 job restrictions for non-pregnant and non-nursing women. As a result, women have recently started being employed in occupations that were previously banned to them (Kurshitashvili et al. 2024). The list of banned occupations was replaced with a list of 204 roles and 78 harmful production factors that are restricted for pregnant women and mothers of infants under one year.

Similarly, in Uzbekistan, changes to the legislation introduced in 2019 eliminated the prohibition to employ women in 44 occupations with adverse working conditions. This prohibition was replaced with a recommended list of sector/occupations likely to affect women’s health. This led to an increase in women’s employment in sectors that were traditionally male dominated (ILO 2025b). Moreover, the law introduced a prohibition for employers to terminate employment contracts with women of pensionable age (55 years). This has improved women’s employment, since employers would often dismiss women on the grounds of their pensionable age. Accordingly, the share of women aged 55 years and above in employment increased from 2.8 per cent before the reform to 3.9 in 2022 (ILO 2025b).

Namibia, [Government Gazette No. 8409, 7 August 2024](#).

⁴⁰ See ILO, Observation (CEACR) - adopted 2022, Arts 1-4.

- **Collective bargaining to reduce gender inequalities.** Collective bargaining can also play an important role in promoting women's employment and reducing the GPG. This is because it can promote the adoption of clear and transparent policies on pay, promotion and job classification, ensuring that all workers are treated equally. In addition, collective bargaining can also help identify innovative solutions that support gender equality, including the implementation of caregiving support or the adoption of flexible work arrangements. However, in Bangladesh, the scope of collective bargaining to reduce gender inequalities seems to be limited. This is partially due to the fact that collective agreements tend to be narrow in scope. This latter issue was also mentioned by the CEACR in its 2022 Direct Request, which it asked the Government "to provide information on any measures to promote the principle of equal remuneration between men and women for work of equal value through collective agreements, and to provide examples of any clauses of collective agreements reflecting the principle of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value".⁴¹ In this context, it is important to promote more extensive collective bargaining and to mainstream gender issues across all areas of negotiations. When it comes to collective bargaining over wages, this requires not only checking that men and women are paid equally when performing the same job but also that job classifications are not gender-biased, thereby ensuring that pay and promotion decisions are taken following an objective and transparent process.

Box 6: Collective bargaining to reduce the GPG in the public sector

In Chile, an agreement was reached in 2022 between the Government, the Central Organization of Chilean Workers and 16 trade unions from the public sector to introduce initiatives to reduce the GPG. As a result, a bipartite committee with government and trade union representatives was tasked with the goal of reviewing data on the GPG in the public sector and to run pilot projects in three public institutions, using the ILO's methodology to conduct job evaluations. These efforts followed a first set of initiatives, in particular the fact that in 2017, a pilot project was launched to conduct evaluations after an agreement between the Government and the National Association of Public Employees (ITUC 2023).

- **Flexible work arrangements.** The empirical results have shown that one of the main drivers behind the GPG in Bangladesh concerns the unequal distribution of household care responsibilities. In particular, a large share of women in wage employment spend a substantial amount of time conducting household chores. This limits their possibility to participate fully in the labour market, with negative consequences for their wages. It is thus important to promote the use of flexible work arrangements that allow women to better balance their professional and family responsibilities. Importantly, this requires ensuring that these more flexible work arrangements do not translate into lower wages (at least in terms of hourly wages) and do not preclude possibilities of career advancement. This requires strong cooperation with the private sector, as a change in human resources policies will be required. In particular, it is important to ensure that part-time or flexible work is not associated with wage penalties and is granted equal access to performance bonuses, allowances, training and promotion opportunities. The possibility to work remotely or in hybrid formats should also be expanded to all those sectors and occupations in which this is feasible, as remote work can promote better work-life balance. Making sure that working hours and work schedules are predictable (for example, fixed and predictable shifts in sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare and hospitality) would also substantially benefit female workers.
- **Workplace safety and harassment.** The focus group discussions with stakeholders also highlighted that concerns over workplace safety and the risk of harassment are preventing many women from fully participating in the world of work, potentially contributing to lower employment and wages for women. It is thus important to introduce measures to increase workplace safety and to reduce harassment both at the workplace and while commuting. The recent ratification by Bangladesh of the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), as well as Convention No. 190, mark a significant step in

⁴¹ See ILO, Direct Request (CEACR) - adopted 2022, Arts 2(2)(c).

promoting safer workplaces. The measures to implement these Conventions could include extending legal coverage of the labour legislation to all workers, including workers in agriculture, to ensure that they have access to labour rights and can report complaints. Incentives could also be introduced for firms to adopt safer working environments (for example, lighting, safe toilet facilities, cameras in high-risk areas). It is also important to ensure that women can access safely reporting and complaint mechanisms, that the privacy of the complainant is guaranteed and that adequate anti-retaliation guarantees are present for both the complainant and potential witnesses. In addition, capacity-building could be strengthened, ensuring that workers and managers receive training on what constitutes acceptable behaviour and what to do if episodes of violence and harassment occur. Finally, interventions could also be directed towards improving safety of workers while commuting, by either reinforcing the system of public transport or introducing incentives for firms that are willing to set up safe transportation arrangements for their workers.

Box 7: Private sector engagement to promote safety

In Bangladesh, many women working in garment factories finish late and must travel long distances to return home, often facing harassment during their commute and feeling unsafe. To address these risks, European garment and outdoor brands collaborating through the Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) have begun to coordinate more systematically with factories, local organizations and public authorities to address the widespread problem of violence against women in garment supply chains. Since 2012, the FWF has implemented its violence and harassment prevention programme in production hubs in India (Tirupur and Bangalore) and Bangladesh (Dhaka), focusing on the underlying factors that heighten the risk of gender-based violence in the workplace. The initiative operates simultaneously at different levels of the supply chain. At the factory level, the FWF supports training for managers, supervisors and workers to establish and operate anti-harassment committees, in line with legal requirements in India and the directives of the High Court in Bangladesh. At the community level, the programme connects workers to helplines and local support services run by unions and NGOs. At the international level, the FWF works with member brands to strengthen their influence with supplier factories and encourage more robust prevention measures. Evaluations of the programme show that addressing sexual harassment has helped open channels for social dialogue, even in workplaces with limited experience of worker-management negotiation. As noted by one committee representative in India, the intervention contributed to a marked change in women's working conditions, helping both workers and employers to better recognize and challenge different forms of harassment. She emphasized that preventing sexual harassment should be a shared priority across the industry to create a safer working environment and encourage greater participation of women in the workforce (ILO and UN-Women 2019).

- **Enforcement of the legislation.** Although all the recommendations set out above are intended to strengthen the policy and legislative framework to reduce the GPG, progress will not be achieved unless the provisions contained in legislation are actually implemented. This is an important element, especially in a country in which the vast majority of employment is informal and therefore labour law compliance is generally low. At present, the labour inspectorate is seriously understaffed and only 5 per cent of labour inspectors are women. The possibilities of reverting to labour courts for dispute resolution or, alternatively, to seek a conciliation with the employer are available, but their accessibility to some categories of workers – mainly women – remain challenging and require further simplification and strengthening. It is thus important to reinforce the system of labour law enforcement by increasing the number of labour inspectors; ensuring the adequate representation of women in labour inspection; training labour inspectors on issues related to gender inequalities; and ensuring that labour inspectors follow a gender-sensitive approach in their operations. This may require detecting practices that, while being formally the same for men and women, end up penalizing women (for example, excessive reliance on overtime work within a company). It is also important to streamline the procedures for dispute resolution by reducing their costs and the time required and ensuring the protection and privacy of individuals who file complaints.

Box 8: Gender mainstreaming in labour inspection

In the Republic of Moldova, thanks to the support of the ILO–Sida global partnership and the European Union-funded EU4Gender Equality: Reform Helpdesk, 58 labour inspectors were trained in 2022 on gender mainstreaming. The training focused on ensuring decent working conditions, safe working environments, non-discrimination and equal opportunities for men and women nationwide. In Indonesia, the ILO, in partnership with Better Work, provided training in 2023 to 20 labour inspectors on the prevention of discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment, with a focus on labour-intensive sectors such as palm oil and fish processing. The training, which covered notions such as gender bias, harassment and different types of discrimination, was also helpful for inspectors to be able to learn how to enforce legislation on violence and harassment (Ministerial Decree No. 88/2023).

Sources: EU Neighbours East, “[EU-Funded Training for Moldovan Authorities Advances Gender-Responsive Governance](#)”, press release, 20 June 2025.

ILO, “[Gender-Sensitive Labour Inspectors Promote a Workplace Free from Violence and Harassment](#)”, press release, 4 January 2024.

- **Data and evidence.** Finally, it is also important to promote the production of data and research that can inform a debate on the GPG. This is also in line with the Observation adopted in 2022 by the CEACR, which asked the Government to provide information on “the earnings of men and women, disaggregated by economic activity and occupation, in both the public and private sectors, as well as in the informal economy”.⁴² Specifically, the present report has been prepared using data from the Bangladesh labour force survey. Although this represents an important source of information, it does not allow all the questions that are relevant for policymaking to be fully answered. This would require having access to additional sources of data and producing knowledge and evidence on the GPG. For instance, matched employer-employee data could be used to understand the extent to which the GPG arises across or within firms. Answering this question would allow policy initiatives to be more precisely targeted. In addition, while the labour force survey already gathers some information on household care responsibilities, ad hoc modules could be added on gender perceptions and cultural norms. While these modules might be expensive and time-consuming, they could be run at specified intervals of time (for example, every five years) rather than annually. Increasing data availability could be accompanied with the creation of a network of researchers, from both academia and other research and policy institutions, that would be tasked with the objective of studying the main drivers behind the GPG and possible policy options to promote women’s employment. Researchers could also be directed to assessing the impact of some of the proposed policy changes discussed in this report with a view to promoting evidence-based policymaking. As a matter of example, the expansion of the coverage of the minimum wage regulations to new sectors could be studied, trying to understand its effects on employment and earnings as well as the GPG.

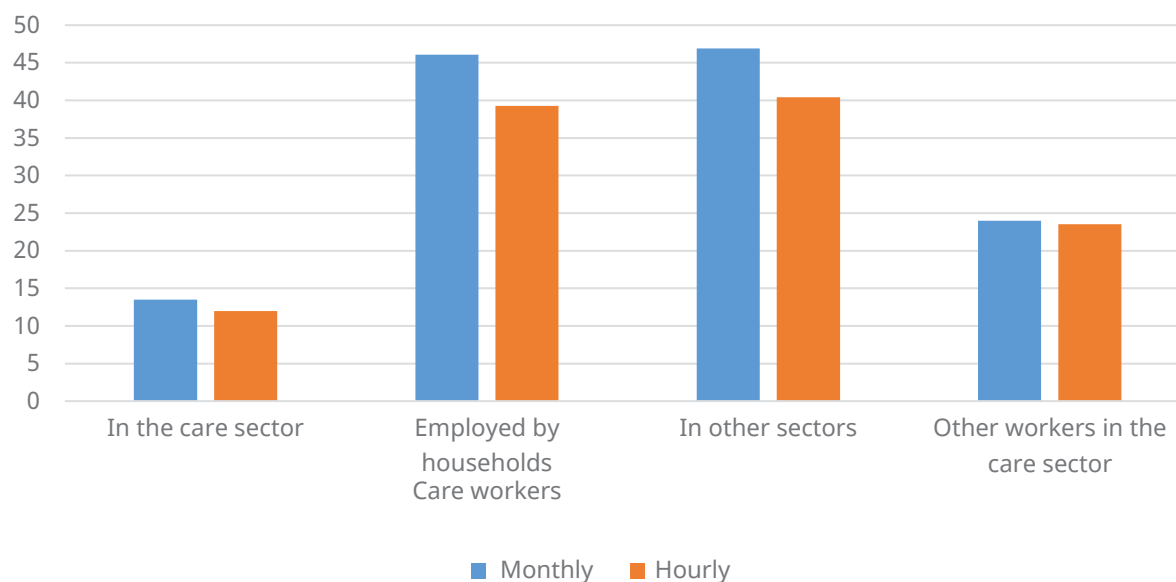
⁴² See ILO, Observation (CEACR) - adopted 2022, Arts 1–4.

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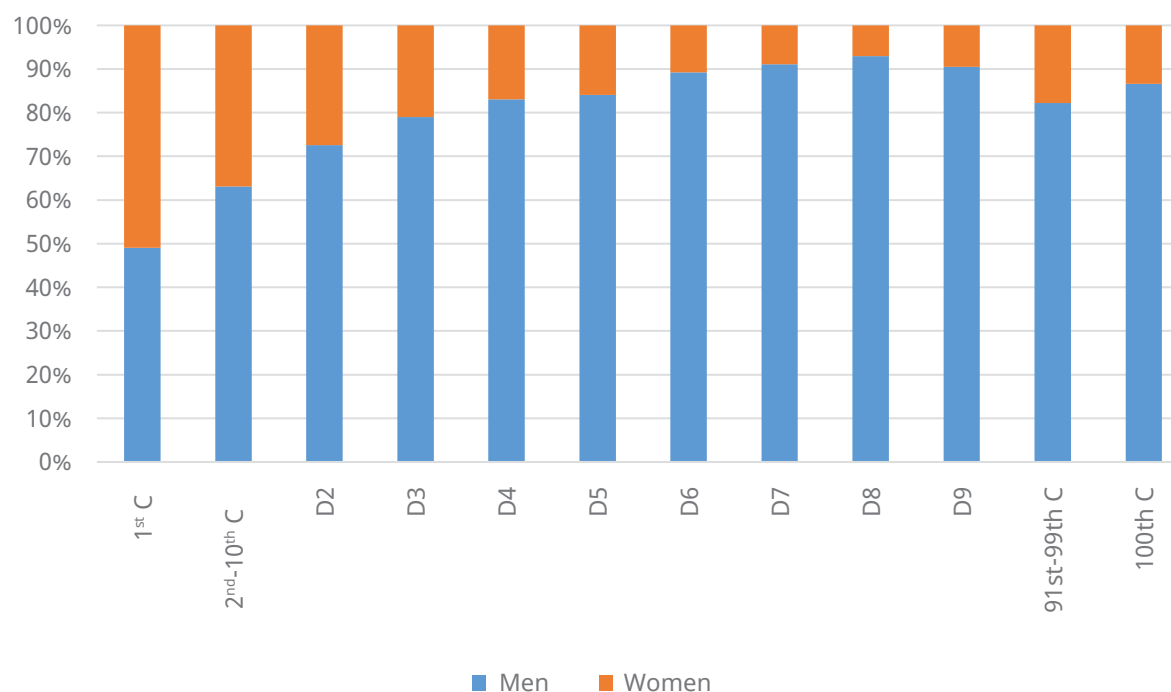
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► Appendix A: Additional figures

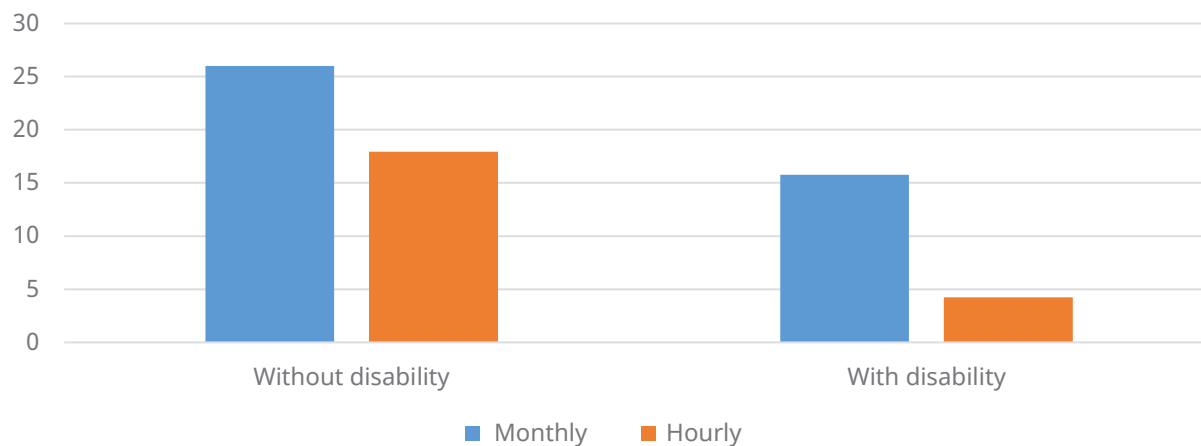
► Figure A.1: GPG at the mean, care workers (in different sectors) and other workers in the care sector



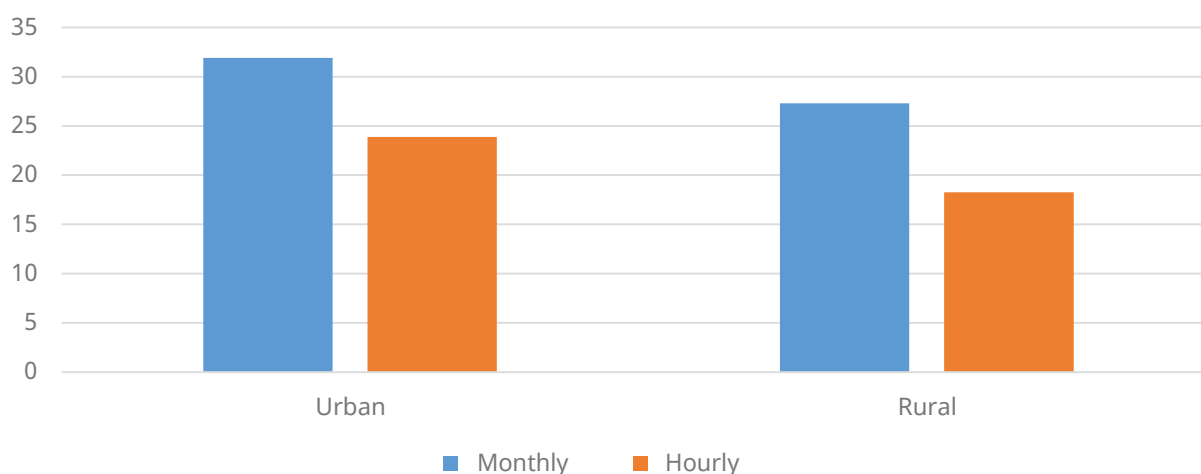
► Figure A.2: Share of male and female wage employees, by wage distribution quantile



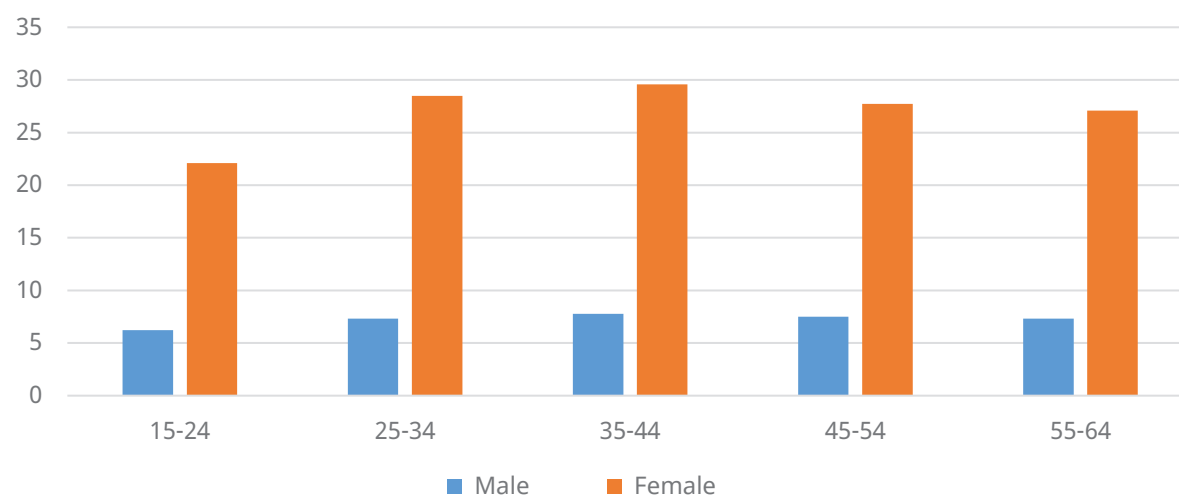
► Figure A.3: Raw GPG at the mean, by disability status



► Figure A.4: Raw GPG at the mean, urban and rural areas



► Figure A.5: Number of weekly hours spent in household chores, by sex and age group



► Appendix B: Methodology for focus group discussions with stakeholders

Discussion guide:

**These questions will serve as a guide, but will not be strictly adhered to.

Introduction

- Introduction to the team and thanking the participant for attending
- Explanation of the purpose of this discussion and the context of the research
- Brief on confidentiality and ethicality of discussion, and that all questions are voluntary
- General questions
- Please give us a brief introduction to yourself in your professional capacity.

BANGLADESH EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION (BEF)

[The Bangladesh Employers' Federation represents the interests of employers and business organizations. Engaging in a focus group discussion with this organization will shed light on employer perspectives and practices, as well as potential barriers or incentives for addressing the gender wage gap within the private sector.]

- What is your perception of the gender wage gap in Bangladesh?
- [If you think it exists], What is your understanding of the causes and contributory factors to the gender wage gap? What role do factors such as education, experience, job roles and industry play in determining wages?
- In Bangladesh's current labour environment, what are the current workplace policies and practices related to compensation, promotions and benefits?
- Are there any existing specific measures taken by employers to promote gender equality and ensure equitable pay?
- As an employer, to what extent do you think gender bias and discrimination prevail in the workplace? (If yes) What are the existing efforts to address and eliminate such biases and discrimination?
- Is gender-disaggregated data on wages collected within organizations in Bangladesh? If not, why?
- What are the main challenges and barriers faced by employers in addressing the gender wage gap?
- Are there any specific industry-related challenges?
- How can employers be supported/incentivized to proactively take measures to reduce the gender wage gap?
- Could you share any best practices or success stories from companies that have effectively tackled the gender wage gap? What were the outcomes achieved?
- What do you think is the role of the Bangladesh Employers' Federation in promoting gender equality and addressing the wage gap?
- What do you think policymakers, employers and other stakeholders can do to tackle this issue effectively?

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

[Government representatives of different ministries, especially the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Minimum Wage Board, hold significant influence over labour policies and regulations. It is expected that the focus group discussions with government representatives will provide insights into the Government's perspective on the gender wage gap, existing initiatives, challenges and potential policy measures to address this issue.]

- Do you think there is a gender wage in the country? If so:
- Have there been any recent changes or trends?
- Is it particularly more prevalent in some sectors than others?
- What factors do you (and the Ministry) think contributes this gender wage gap in Bangladesh? (for example, occupational segregation, education, work experience, discrimination and so on)
- What is your view on if and how societal and cultural norms influence wage disparities between men and women?
- What are the current initiatives and policies implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Minimum Wage Board that seek to address the gender wage gap?
- In your view, have these initiatives/policies been successful/effective? And by what metric is this effectiveness gauged?
- What have been some challenges to implementation for the aforementioned initiatives/policies?
- In addition to direct policies/initiatives, how do you see the role of general workplace practices/standards/policies influencing gender gaps in wages?
- What are the measures taken by the Ministry to promote gender equality in the workplace?
- Does the Ministry have any future plans and strategies to further reduce the gender wage gap?
- What do you think policymakers, employers and other stakeholders can do to tackle this issue effectively?

WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS

[Workers' organizations, including trade unions and labour rights groups, represent the voice of the workforce. Their perspectives are vital to understanding the real-world implications of the gender wage gap, including the nature of workplace discrimination, gaps in enforcement and workers' expectations from employers and the State.]

- Do you believe there is a gender wage gap in Bangladesh?
- If yes, in which sectors or job types is it most prevalent?
- Have you observed any changes in the gap over recent years?
- From the workers' perspective, what are the main reasons for the gender wage gap?
- How do issues like job roles, working hours, contract types and overtime affect men and women differently?
- Do women face barriers to promotion or access to better-paying roles?
- How do education, skill levels or prior work experience factor into wage differences between men and women?
- What kind of wage-setting practices do you see in your sector?
- Are wages transparently discussed or negotiated?
- Are there disparities in starting pay for men and women in the same roles?
- Do female workers feel safe and empowered to raise concerns about unequal pay or workplace discrimination?
- If not, what are the barriers?
- What kind of workplace policies or practices have you observed related to gender equality in wages, promotions and benefits?
- Are there any positive examples or cases where employers made deliberate efforts to ensure equity?
- What challenges do women face in joining or participating actively in trade unions or workers' organizations?
- Are you aware of any companies, factories or sectors that have taken effective measures to reduce the gender wage gap?
- What were the outcomes and lessons learned?
- What kind of support do workers need from the Government and employers to ensure fair and equal pay?
- Are there gaps in enforcement or inspection systems?
- What is your role as a workers' organization in advocating for gender wage equity?
- What actions have you taken or plan to take?
- What policy changes or enforcement mechanisms do you think are necessary to close the gender wage gap in Bangladesh?

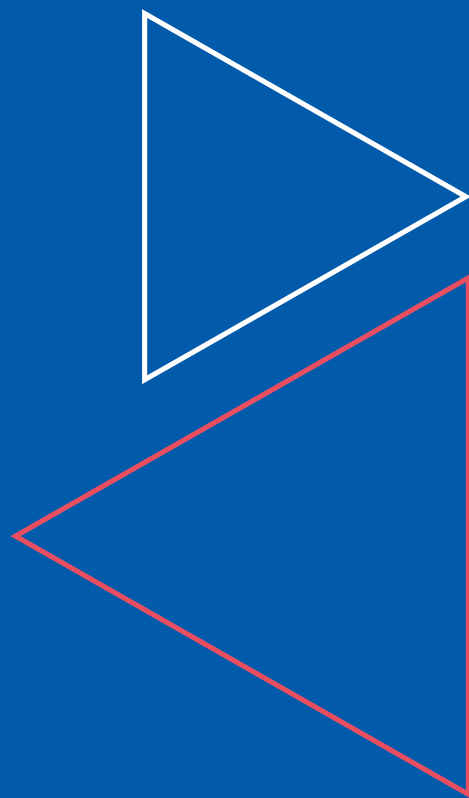
LABOUR EXPERTS

[Engaging with representatives from labour experts from development partners will provide a broader perspective on the gender wage gap from a non-governmental standpoint. This interview will explore the roles, contributions and recommendations of these stakeholders in addressing wage disparities, promoting gender equality and supporting policy interventions.]

- Do you think there is a gender wage in the country? If so:
- Have there been any recent changes or trends?
- Is it particularly more prevalent in some sectors than others?
- What is your organization's role and involvement in addressing wage disparities and promoting gender equality?
- Any specific campaigns or initiatives?
- What factors do you think contributes this gender wage gap in Bangladesh? (for example, occupational segregation, education, work experience, discrimination and so on)
- What is your view on if and how societal and cultural norms influence wage disparities between men and women?
- What is your experience collaborating with the Government and employers to advocate for policy interventions and gender equality measures?
- Have you experienced any challenges, and what strategies have been used to overcome them?
- Do you have any grass-roots-level initiatives aimed at empowering women in the labour market and supporting income equality? Discuss their success and challenges encountered.
- Are you involved in any advocacy and awareness-raising efforts regarding the gender wage gap and gender-based discrimination? What are the methods used?
- How do you seek to address the intersectionality of the gender wage gap, particularly regarding women from marginalized groups (for example, rural women, women with disabilities and so on).
- What do you think policymakers, employers and other stakeholders can do to tackle this issue effectively?



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