



The Role of Decent Work in Sustainable and Inclusive Growth

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Since its independence, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in reducing poverty, reducing maternal and child mortality, and making education available to all. The country gained lower-middle-income status in 2015 and qualified as a Least Developed Country (LDC) in March 2018.

Bangladesh is at a pivotal moment on its development pathway, requiring greater focus on key issues to continue its upward trajectory.

LABOUR GOVERNANCE & DECENT WORK

In terms of labour governance and decent work, much has been done, but there are challenges and room for improvements in the legislative framework, labour inspection and OSH.

The context of the Decent Work agenda in Bangladesh will largely be influenced by the current article 26 Complaint concerning Bangladesh on the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No.98).

There is also a need to address the call by their trading partner, the European Union, for the improvement of labour rights and working conditions in Bangladesh.

Since 2013 Bangladesh has gone through massive legal and administrative reforms supported by practical activities to uphold labour rights and workplace safety in Bangladesh. The legal reforms included amendment of Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA), 2006 in 2013 and 2018 (November 2018); adoption of EPZ Labour Act (ELA) in February 2019; formulation of Bangladesh Labour Rules, 2015.



For effective enforcement of the Bangladesh Labour Act, the Directorate of Inspection for Factories and Establishments was upgraded to the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) in January 2014 with 575 inspectors and new field level offices. The Directorate of Labour was also upgraded to the Department of Labour (DoL) with increased manpower from 712 to 921.

Effective institutional mechanisms for supporting the implementation of the new legislative framework will require enhanced collaboration between government authorities and workers and employers to ensure a holistic approach to ensuring improvements in labour governance and decent work.

SKILL & EMPLOYMENT



The Bangladesh labour market is characterised by two million labour market entrants each year. Women labour market participation is low at 36.3%; requiring additional attention to achieve gender parity of labour force participation by 2041 as targeted by Government. In relation to youth employment some 29.8% of youth are neither in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). A majority (10.7 million) are young women.

Specific employment policies and programmes through jobs strategy need to be in place to enhance economic opportunities for women and youth, supporting transition from traditional skills to competency-based TVET delivery and inclusive skills and enterprise training systems. This will allow to address jobs mismatch and skills gaps and build a modern labour force ready for expectation of 4IR.

The concentration of jobs in the informal sector will need to be reversed with greater formalization of the economy, expansion of opportunities for decent work, and greater protection of the informal labour force with more youth, women, persons with disability and people from marginalised communities by promoting robust apprenticeships system in the supply chains of growing labour intensive sectors. Strengthening of skills governance and coordination is needed including capacity enhancement of government authorities in forecasting jobs and skills and provide employment services to the job seekers.

MIGRATION

COVID-19 has impacted the sector and affected migrant workers both in countries of destination and at home. However, overseas employment created 3.5 million jobs against the target of 2 million for the 7th Five Year Plan.

Strengthening social protection, economic reintegration & protection for safe return of migrants; enhancing labour migration regulation for fair and ethical recruitment; and support institutional capacity for developing Welfare Board rules to expand social protection measures are some of the key areas for further attention.

Operationalizing dispute resolution mechanism, developing guidelines, capacity building efforts and monitoring system; and establishing the Migration data system (returnee migrants' registration/identity card, etc.) are currently being developed. For reintegration of the returnee migrants links need to be established to market intelligence system, market driven skills and enterprise development services, skills recognition and employment services (i.e., Skills Passport).



SOCIAL PROTECTION

The principle policy for the implementation of social protection in Bangladesh is National Social Security Strategy (2015) and its accompanying Action Plan (2018). The country's social protection system follows lifecycle approach, with 114 programmes administered by more than 30 ministries/divisions. Twenty major programmes together account for 77.5 per cent of the social protection budget, while the combined share of the smallest 50 is 2 per cent.

Bangladesh needs a holistic social protection institution that systematically ensures the graduation of vulnerable categories of the population from poverty. With the generous stimulus packages announced by GoB, a robust database of current workers is needed, and institutional mechanisms are required to reach these workers employers (factories, enterprises and establishments) to fully access/utilize available financial support.

EC-DEVCO & ILO Partnership responded to the call of Employers and Workers representatives on the establishment of an Unemployment Fund to address impact of COVID19 pandemic with a one-year project on wage subsidy disbursement mechanism. Based on the learnings from this mechanism and a preliminary feasibility assessment of an Unemployment Insurance (UI), the ILO will work in close cooperation with the European Union Delegation and GIZ to provide technical assistance to GoB to establish an Unemployment Insurance Scheme.

The ILO is implementing wage subsidy disbursement for RMG sector project, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), for temporary protection of the workers. This project will pilot the proposed wage subsidy mechanism by providing temporary protection to the workers through wage subsidy to their respective employers. Based on the learning from process, a mechanism will be available for the government to reach to the workers in time of need.

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