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FINAL REVIEW

DRAFT

National Social Security Strategy (NSSS)

of Bangladesh

An independent assessment of progress, results, and lessons in implementing Bangladesh's lifecycle-based social protection reform.

February 2026

Draft Final Report on Final Review of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) and Action Plan Phase II (2021-26)

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Chapter 1: The Context, Objectives and Approach to the Final Review of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS)

1.1 Background

The adoption of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) in 2015 marked a bold and timely shift in Bangladesh's approach to social protection. It built on a long legacy of social safety net interventions that date back to the immediate post-independence period, when programmes were introduced largely on an ad hoc basis to respond to urgent needs arising from natural disasters, seasonal food insecurity, and extreme rural poverty. Over time, these emergency-driven interventions evolved into a wide array of targeted schemes addressing specific risks or population groups. While this expansion reflected the government's responsiveness to emerging challenges, it also resulted in a highly fragmented system, characterised by overlapping mandates, duplicative interventions, and weak coordination across ministries. As a result, public resources were dispersed across numerous small programmes, limiting their ability to generate sustained and scalable impacts.

Structural weaknesses within the pre-NSSS social protection architecture further constrained effectiveness. The absence of complementary support systems meant that programme benefits were often short-lived, leaving beneficiaries exposed to chronic poverty and repeated shocks. This occurred despite Bangladesh's strong socio-economic progress, reflected in rising per capita income, economic transformation, and improved living standards. Evidence consistently showed that a large share of poor and vulnerable households remained excluded from social safety nets, while average transfer sizes were modest and insufficient to meaningfully mitigate vulnerability. Weak targeting mechanisms, discretionary beneficiary selection, leakage, particularly in cash-based programmes, and the lack of a comprehensive database of beneficiaries undermined programme credibility. Monitoring and evaluation practices focused primarily on disbursement levels rather than outcomes or impacts, limiting learning and accountability.

At the same time, international experience demonstrated that as countries develop, social protection systems must evolve beyond residual safety nets toward becoming integral instruments of inclusive and sustainable development. For Bangladesh, on the threshold of LDC graduation and aspiring to upper-middle-income status, incremental adjustments were no longer adequate. A comprehensive reform of the social protection regime was required to address persistent gaps, strengthen resilience, and align the system with long-term national development ambitions. Rapid economic growth created a window of opportunity to design a more coherent, inclusive, and forward-looking framework capable of effectively supporting poor and vulnerable populations.

It was against this backdrop that the NSSS was adopted as a turning point in social protection policy. The strategy reconceptualised social security through a holistic, lifecycle-based lens, moving away from a collection of fragmented interventions toward a coherent system that addresses vulnerabilities at different stages of life. It articulated a vision of consolidating scattered schemes, improving targeting, and strengthening institutional coordination. The reform agenda was structured around two mutually reinforcing pillars. Programmatic reforms aimed to realign benefits with lifecycle risks and rationalise fragmented schemes, while institutional reforms sought to improve governance, enhance inter-ministerial coordination, and leverage digital innovations to increase efficiency and accountability. At its core, the NSSS aspired to establish an inclusive system that prioritises the poorest and most vulnerable, complements broader human development objectives, and supports sustained economic growth.

To operationalise this vision, the NSSS proposed a modern institutional architecture anchored in results-based monitoring and evaluation. Key reform instruments included the introduction of Government-to-Person (G2P) electronic payments to reduce leakage and corruption; the development of a single-registry Management Information System to improve targeting accuracy; the establishment of a Grievance Redress System to strengthen citizen accountability; and the consolidation of small programmes to enhance delivery efficiency. Collectively, these measures were intended to transform Bangladesh's social protection system into one that is streamlined, transparent, and aligned with the country's development transition.

The strategy set out a long-term reform horizon, with an initial ten-year phase (2015–2025) and a roadmap for a subsequent phase beginning in 2026. Implementation was sequenced through two Action Plans, Phase I (2016–2020) and Phase II (2021–2026), which translated strategic objectives into time-bound actions, performance indicators, and clearly assigned responsibilities.

A Midterm Review (MTR) of Phase I, conducted in 2019, provided the first comprehensive assessment of implementation progress, examining 86 programmatic and 50 institutional indicators. The MTR found that progress during Phase I was mixed and frequently fell short of expectations. On the programmatic front, movement toward a lifecycle-based system was partial. While the consolidation of schemes under the Mother and Child Benefit Programme and the gradual expansion of the Old-Age Allowance represented notable achievements, most consolidation targets were not met. Only 30 per cent of programmatic indicators were on track, while 43 per cent were classified as seriously off-track. Urban social protection, identified as a priority reform area, saw negligible progress, and social insurance initiatives remained at an early, underdeveloped stage. The continued prevalence of fragmented, small-scale programmes further diluted efficiency and impact.

Institutional reforms faced comparable constraints. Although the Central Management Committee and its cluster mechanism were established to strengthen cross-ministerial coordination, their effectiveness was limited by high staff turnover, weak accountability, and constrained convening authority. Two-thirds of institutional indicators were assessed as off-track, with many deemed seriously so. Digital G2P payments emerged as a positive innovation, delivering incremental gains

in transparency and efficiency, but these advances were insufficient to overcome deeper governance and capacity challenges. Overall, the MTR underscored a critical lesson: while the reform vision was clear and well-conceived, implementation capacity and institutional follow-through lagged behind ambition.

The adoption of Action Plan Phase II (2021–2026) signalled renewed momentum to address these gaps and accelerate reforms. Several reform initiatives were undertaken during this period. As Bangladesh approaches the end of the NSSS's first strategic horizon, a final evaluation provides a timely opportunity to assess not only what has been achieved, but also how effectively the strategy has positioned the social protection system to meet emerging risks and development challenges in the next phase of the country's transition.

1.2 Objectives of the study

Since the inception of the National Social Security Strategy in 2015, the Government of Bangladesh has developed several complementary policy documents and strategic guidelines to support the effective and timely implementation of the envisaged reforms. The NSSS Gender Policy, approved in 2018, was introduced to ensure that gender considerations are systematically integrated into both programmatic and institutional reforms within the social security system. The Urban Social Protection Strategy and Action Plan (USPSAP), prepared by the Cabinet Division in 2020, provides a clear framework for integrating urban social protection into the national system. In addition, the Guidelines on Adaptive Social Protection in Bangladesh outline a strategic roadmap for strengthening resilience by enhancing coordination, improving system responsiveness, promoting risk-informed decision-making, ensuring sustainable financing, and building capacities at multiple levels. These guidelines also emphasise early risk identification, strengthened administrative preparedness, increased community awareness, and the provision of anticipatory support to vulnerable communities.

Over the decade following the adoption of the NSSS, Bangladesh's socio-economic context has changed markedly. Rapid urbanisation, demographic ageing, tightening fiscal space, rising inequality, and intensifying climate risks have reshaped the vulnerability profile of households. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed structural weaknesses in coverage, shock-responsiveness, and inter-agency coordination, underscoring the need for a comprehensive and adaptive social protection system. Persistent inflation has had far-reaching consequences for livelihoods, particularly among low-income households, eroding real incomes and contributing to a reversal of poverty reduction gains for the first time since independence. At the same time, changes in the political landscape present an opportunity to renew focus on social protection reforms grounded in principles of equity and fairness. In this evolving context, an independent and systematic assessment of NSSS implementation is essential to identify what has worked, what has underperformed, and the underlying reasons for these outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the overarching objective of the final evaluation of the National Social Security Strategy and its Action Plan Phase II (2021–2026) is to support the Government of

Bangladesh in making informed decisions on the ongoing implementation of the NSSS, while generating forward-looking evidence to guide the formulation of the next-generation national social protection strategy beyond 2026. The evaluation is designed to provide a balanced and evidence-based assessment of the extent to which the strategic intent of the NSSS has translated into tangible and sustainable results. More specifically, the evaluation seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- **Assess results and progress:** Examine the extent to which the NSSS and its Action Plan Phase II have delivered on their stated objectives across programme-level reforms, institutional arrangements, and policy outcomes, with particular emphasis on poverty reduction, inclusion, and resilience. This includes assessing progress in implementing gender-related commitments and advancing the integration of persons with disabilities within the social protection system.
- **Identify challenges and opportunities:** Analyse systemic and operational constraints affecting implementation, including issues related to programme design, targeting accuracy, financing adequacy, governance arrangements, and coordination across ministries and agencies. The evaluation will also examine political economy factors that have consistently influenced the pace and direction of reforms under the NSSS, while identifying enabling conditions and opportunities for accelerating progress.
- **Provide actionable recommendations:** Generate evidence-based, practical, and prioritised recommendations to strengthen the efficiency, equity, and impact of social protection, ensuring that proposed reforms are technically sound, institutionally feasible, and politically realistic.
- **Generate lessons for future strategy:** Distil lessons from the implementation experience to inform the design of the national social protection strategy 2026 and beyond. This includes assessing the continued relevance of the NSSS in the current socio-economic and political context, identifying areas for continuation, adaptation, or discontinuation, and ensuring systematic integration of cross-cutting priorities such as gender equality, disability inclusion, and climate resilience.

In fulfilling these objectives, the final evaluation is intended not only to assess past performance but also to serve as a strategic input into reimagining Bangladesh's social protection system for the next decade and beyond. Through rigorous analysis, stakeholder engagement, and policy-relevant recommendations, the evaluation will help position the Government of Bangladesh to design a more coherent, inclusive, accountable, and future-ready social protection framework. The findings will provide a robust evidence base to define strategic priorities, develop fit-for-purpose instruments, and ensure fiscal realism, while aligning future reforms with Bangladesh's development aspirations, its LDC graduation pathway, and its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle.

1.3 Methodological approach

The evaluation is guided by a clearly articulated Theory of Change that explains how NSSS Phase II reforms translate policy inputs, institutional arrangements and budget allocations into intermediate outputs such as programme consolidation, MIS development and improved targeting, and ultimately into outcomes including expanded coverage, reduced poverty, greater equity and enhanced resilience, while explicitly accounting for contextual assumptions like political commitment, coordination and fiscal stability. This is complemented by a Contribution Analysis approach that assesses how observed changes in social protection outcomes can be plausibly linked to specific reforms by triangulating administrative data, stakeholder interviews, field consultations and trend analysis, recognising the incremental and non-linear nature of change in a multi-actor system. A Political Economy Lens is applied throughout to examine how political incentives, institutional dynamics and stakeholder interests enable or constrain reform, particularly in relation to programme consolidation, inter-ministerial coordination, digital innovations and budgetary decisions, ensuring that resulting recommendations are both technically robust and politically feasible in the lead-up to national social protection strategy beyond 2026.

The evaluation adopts a mixed-methods, participatory and evidence-based approach to assess progress, challenges and opportunities within Bangladesh's social protection system, recognising that data gaps, methodological constraints and the need to capture diverse stakeholder perspectives. While selected objectives under the NSSS Action Plan Phase II are assessed quantitatively, many critical dimensions, including targeting effectiveness, institutional coordination and political drivers of reform, require qualitative analysis. Quantitative findings are therefore systematically complemented by focus group discussions, key informant interviews and stakeholder consultations, with triangulation across methods enhancing validity, deepening interpretation and generating a more nuanced understanding of results.

A comprehensive review of relevant documents and complementary studies is undertaken to inform the evaluation, encompassing key policy, planning and analytical sources related to Bangladesh's social protection system. These include the National Social Security Strategy and its Action Plan, the Gender Policy, the mid-term implementation review of the NSSS, the Seventh and Eighth Five-Year Plans, the White Paper on the State of the Bangladesh Economy, the Task Force Report on re-strategising the economy and resource mobilisation, budget speeches, Medium Term Budget Framework, meeting minutes of the Advisory/Cabinet Committee on Social Protection Programmes, CMC, and NSSS focal points, progress and implementation reports from Phase II, monitoring and evaluation reports, studies and concept papers on contributory mechanisms for the working-age population, relevant statutory and regulatory texts, and wider macroeconomic and transition documents that define the policy and fiscal context. Peer-reviewed and grey literature, together with insights from numerous other studies and reports, are also drawn upon to build the assessment

One of the core methodological approaches used in this study was the systematic mapping of programme strategies and reform directions articulated in the NSSS Action Plan, followed by an

assessment of actual implementation progress against these commitments. Through this process, 150 concrete programmatic indicators and 100 institutional reform indicators were identified, each supported by clearly defined outcome measures that allowed their current status to be tracked. The Action Plan's specified timelines further enabled a structured assessment of progress.

Qualitative evidence was gathered primarily through key informant interviews (KIIs) with more than 30 government officials, senior decision makers, operational leads and subject specialists across oversight bodies, implementing ministries, social partners and knowledge actors. Ministry- and department-specific semi-structured questionnaires were developed to capture progress against relevant performance indicators and to document reform processes in practice. In addition, several ministries/departments provided written progress updates on their respective action plans. The KIIs provided insight into how coordination mechanisms functioned, how mandates and escalation pathways were experienced, and which incentives and constraints shaped progress on programme consolidation, MIS operations, payment timeliness and grievance redress. They also examined how inclusion commitments, particularly in relation to gender, children and persons with disabilities, were translated from policy into everyday implementation.

To complement the KIIs, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals directly affected by the NSSS and its Action Plan Phase II. FGDs generated qualitative evidence on how social protection measures functioned in practice, including access, adequacy, accountability and perceived relevance. A total of ten FGDs were held, each comprising 8-10 participants, with groups formed through local administration and civil society networks to reflect diverse delivery contexts. Attention was given to balanced representation by sex and age, inclusion of persons with disabilities and caregivers, urban and rural settings, including remote and disaster-prone areas, and workers in informal employment, with particular emphasis placed on amplifying the voices of women, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups to identify inequities.

As part of the review exercise, regular meetings and discussions were held with the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) programme to facilitate ongoing engagement and exchange of information. In addition, three day-long workshops were organised with the SSPS programme team to gain deeper insights into programme design and to build familiarity with the data systems and analytical work maintained across different aspects of social security implementation. These interactions provided important contextual understanding and helped strengthen the overall evidence base for the review.

Given the longstanding engagement of development partners in social security and social protection programmes, efforts were made to systematically capture their perspectives on the terms of reference and analytical focus of the study. A combination of in-person and virtual meetings was held with several development partners to gather their views, feedback and suggestions. Their comments and observations provided valuable insights and contributed to strengthening and enriching the analysis presented in this report.

Finally, an inception workshop was organised at the Cabinet Division, bringing together Coordination and Reform Secretaries, other Cabinet Division officials and NSSS focal points. The workshop served to validate the evaluation framework, confirm the Key Evaluation Questions, and align the work plan, methods and preliminary findings of the NSSS final evaluation. Key insights and feedback emerging from the discussions were subsequently incorporated into this report.

Particular attention was given to the NSSS Gender Policy, both in undertaking a focused review and in assessing the extent to which gender-related commitments had been implemented. This was achieved through a review of relevant literature and the NSSS Action Plan, complemented by information gathered through key informant interviews with ministries and departments responsible for gender-specific programmes. These inputs were instrumental in identifying implementation gaps and informing potential directions for strengthening gender responsiveness within the social protection system.

Throughout the evaluation, quantitative data analysis serves as a critical foundation for contextualising findings, validating qualitative insights and benchmarking progress against established indicators. This report draws on the updated SSPS database on programme participation, coverage and budgetary allocations, complemented by data from a range of secondary sources. These include datasets produced by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), notably the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS), as well as social protection budget reports from the Finance Division. Particular emphasis is placed on in-depth analysis of HIES 2022, which provides the most recent nationally representative evidence on household income, expenditure and welfare. This enables the evaluation to examine participation patterns, identify inclusion and exclusion errors, and assess the distributional impacts of key programmes. Integration of these quantitative findings with qualitative evidence from interviews, FGDs and stakeholder consultations generates a comprehensive and triangulated evidence base.

In addition to the qualitative and quantitative methods outlined above, the evaluation employs the Bangladesh Social Protection System Assessment using the Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI) to systematically assess system performance and identify evidence-based reform options. Developed under the Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessments (ISPA) framework, CODI combines quantitative indicators with qualitative insights derived from secondary and primary data, including government-led technical workshops. While it does not capture all scheme-level inefficiencies or overlaps, CODI provides a system-wide diagnostic tool that tracks progress and challenges over time across key dimensions such as coverage, adequacy, equity and responsiveness. For this evaluation, CODI findings from multiple years are analysed to identify trends, highlight systemic gaps and inform targeted policy responses.

To support a comprehensive assessment of NSSS and Action Plan Phase II, the evaluation adopts the SMART-Weighted Rubric Framework (SWRF) to assess progress across indicators and activities. Building on lessons from the Mid-Term Review of NSSS Phase I and II, the SWRF combines evidence-based scoring with qualitative judgement, enhanced through weighted matrices and

rubric-based interpretation. This allows relative importance, institutional complexity and contextual factors to be reflected in the assessment, while enabling consistent aggregation and comparison across pillars. Having traced the current state of implementation, the review undertook an SWRF-based scoring exercise for each indicator to summarise progress along a spectrum including severely-off track, moderately off-track, moderately on-track, on-track and completed.

1.4 Structure of the report

This report is organised into eight chapters. Following Chapter 1, which sets out the background, context and objectives of the study and outlines the overall methodological approach, Chapter 2 draws on multiple rounds of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) to present a snapshot of poverty, inequality and multidimensional deprivation in Bangladesh. The chapter re-emphasises the relevance and necessity of a comprehensive and robust social protection system by examining trends in poverty and vulnerability, patterns of social protection coverage, and budgetary allocations across major social security programmes. It also estimates coverage gaps, targeting errors and the impacts of social protection interventions on poverty reduction and vulnerability.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed assessment of progress on programmatic reforms under the NSSS. It examines each reform area set out in the Strategy and analyses the extent to which intended targets and activities under the Action Plan Phase II (2021–2026) have been achieved. Key NSSS programmatic reform objectives, such as a stronger lifecycle approach and programme consolidation, are reviewed alongside reforms related to food transfer consolidation, resilience to covariate shocks, and social protection provisions for the urban poor and socially excluded groups. The chapter concludes with a structured scoring exercise that tracks progress against activities and performance indicators within the timelines specified in the Action Plan.

Chapter 4 focuses on the development of a comprehensive social protection system for persons with disabilities. It assesses how NSSS reforms have addressed existing social security provisions for this group and examines whether key barriers to access have been adequately identified and addressed. The chapter highlights persistent challenges in expanding coverage and ensuring effective inclusion of persons with disabilities within the broader social protection framework.

Chapter 5 analyses gender mainstreaming in social protection, using the NSSS Gender Policy and Action Plan as benchmarks for assessing gender balance and responsiveness within social security programmes. After situating the discussion within the broader context of women’s empowerment, the chapter reviews key features of the NSSS Gender Policy and assesses progress in implementing gender-focused reforms.

Chapter 6 reviews progress on institutional reforms as stipulated in the NSSS and Action Plan Phase II (2021–2026). It examines each reform area against intended targets, covering critical issues such as CMC-led cluster coordination, development of the Single Registry MIS, rollout of Government-to-Person (G2P) payments, strengthening beneficiary selection procedures, implementation of grievance redress mechanisms, and adoption of results-based monitoring and

evaluation systems. As with programmatic reforms, the chapter includes a scoring exercise to assess progress against agreed timelines.

Chapter 7 analyses the political economy constraints that continue to inhibit effective social protection reform in Bangladesh. It explores why, despite the adoption of a progressive framework such as the NSSS, persistent challenges in design, targeting, financing and implementation remain. By examining underlying interests, incentives and power dynamics, the chapter provides a realistic assessment of the reform environment for advancing social protection reform.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, presents evidence-based and feasible policy recommendations to further strengthen and modernise Bangladesh's social protection system in line with citizens' evolving needs. These recommendations are grounded in the analyses across preceding chapters and informed by consultations with experts, key stakeholders, development partners, and relevant line ministries and departments. Together, they are intended to guide the development of the next phase of Bangladesh's national social protection strategy beyond 2026.

Chapter 2: Socio-Economic Context and the State of Social Protection in Bangladesh

2.1 Introduction

After decades of sustained progress across key socio-economic indicators—including economic growth, poverty reduction, educational attainment, life expectancy at birth, gender parity in health and education, and sharply declining maternal and infant mortality—Bangladesh now finds itself at a critical development juncture. The economy expanded at an average rate of 4.7 percent in the 1990s, 5.6 percent in the 2000s, and 6.6 percent in the 2010s, consistently outperforming many of its regional peers. This prolonged growth trajectory lifted millions out of poverty and delivered remarkable gains in social and human development, with Bangladesh recording one of the fastest improvements in the Human Development Index (HDI) globally. Rising per capita income led to the country’s reclassification as a lower-middle-income economy in 2015 under the World Bank’s income classification, and Bangladesh is now poised to graduate from the United Nations’ Least Developed Country (LDC) category—another milestone reflecting its long-term development achievements.

These gains, however, have come under increasing strain in recent years. Initial shocks from the Covid-19 pandemic were subsequently compounded by widening macroeconomic imbalances, marked by persistent inflationary pressures, declining foreign exchange reserves, and balance-of-payments stress, alongside heightened political uncertainty and disruptions surrounding the regime change in August 2024. Since the onset of the pandemic, average economic growth has moderated to 5.24 percent, with GDP growth slowing to 4.5 percent in FY24 and further to 3.97 percent in FY25. At the same time, stubbornly high inflation—averaging close to 10 percent during 2023–25—has eroded real incomes, placing renewed pressure on household welfare and threatening to reverse some of the hard-won gains in poverty reduction and human development.

The interim government recognises the depth and urgency of these challenges and has committed to restoring macroeconomic stability, safeguarding social and human development outcomes, and laying the foundations for a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable growth trajectory through prudent macroeconomic management, institutional reforms, and strengthened social protection. Aspirational political parties have likewise articulated their commitment to improving the social wellbeing of low-income and vulnerable populations, including through proposals for innovative social protection interventions aimed at cushioning households against economic shocks and preserving development gains.

Social protection assumes a central role in safeguarding development gains and supporting a more inclusive recovery. Social protection interventions are designed to help individuals and households cope with shocks and crises while building resilience among poor and vulnerable groups and enabling them to invest in human capital—particularly the health and education of their children—to improve future living standards. An effective social security system contributes to sustainable and inclusive growth by supporting aggregate demand, improving labour market participation, and fostering asset accumulation. When well designed and

properly implemented, social protection schemes can contribute reducing poverty and inequality, strengthening resilience to unforeseen shocks, and breaking intergenerational poverty traps. In Bangladesh, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) adopted in 2015 and subsequent targeted reforms have played critical role in advancing these objectives, supporting economic development while addressing the needs of poor, vulnerable, and marginalised population groups.

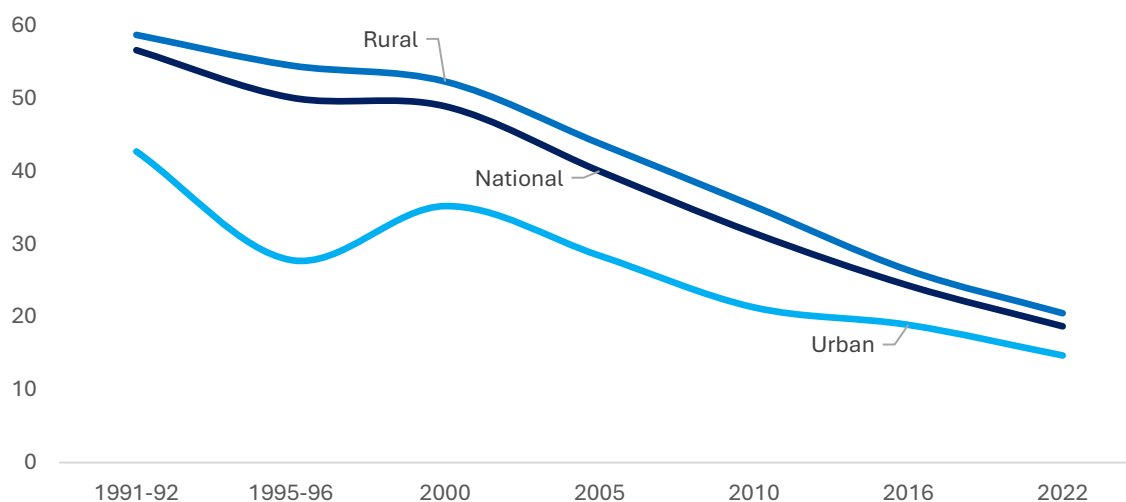
This chapter aims to provide an updated assessment of poverty, vulnerability, and inequality in Bangladesh, while examining the key features and effectiveness of the social security system and the impact of social protection transfers on poverty outcomes. Using data from the 2022 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) and complementary sources, the chapter first analyses recent trends in poverty, vulnerability, and inequality, highlighting regional disparities that can be compared with the current structure of social protection programmes. It then reviews the salient features of the social protection system, including programme coverage, benefit adequacy, and budget allocation across lifecycle, drawing on both administrative and survey data, and identifies key limitations and structural weaknesses. The chapter further assesses system inefficiencies by estimating targeting errors in social protection programmes and examining the extent to which inclusion and exclusion errors reduce the poverty-reduction impact of public spending. It also presents findings from microsimulation exercises to quantify the poverty-reduction effects of existing transfers and to estimate the potential gains that could be achieved by improving targeting accuracy.

2.2 Poverty and vulnerability

With sustained economic growth over the past decades, Bangladesh experienced a significant decline in poverty incidence, although the pace of reduction has slowed in recent years. The headcount poverty, defined as the proportion of the households living below the upper poverty line incomes, dropped from 56.6 per cent in 1991-92 to 18.7 per cent in 2022 – a reduction of 37.9 percentage points.. Extreme poverty, defined as the proportion of the households living below the lower poverty line incomes, has also recorded a sharp drop from 41.1 to just 5.6 per cent during the same time – recording a 35.5 percentage points reduction. This overall progress is evident in both rural and urban settings, although the pace and scale of reduction have varied significantly across regions. Although poverty has declined in both rural and urban areas over recent decades, urban poverty reduction has been slower compared to that in rural areas. The disparities in poverty reduction between urban and rural areas were more pronounced from 2010 to 2022.

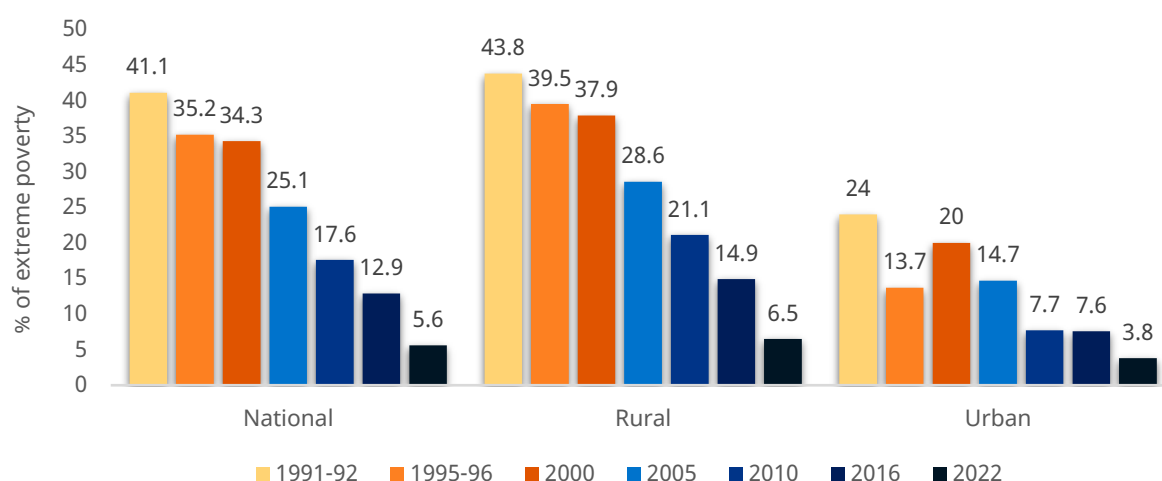
- Rural moderate poverty fell from 35.1 to 20.5 per cent between 2010 and 2022, marking an average annual decline of about 1.2 percentage points, while urban moderate poverty dropped from 21.3 to 14.7 per cent over the same period, equivalent to only 0.55 percentage points per year.
- Rural extreme poverty declined from 21.1 per cent in 2010 to 6.5 per cent in 2022, i.e., a reduction of 14.6 percentage points, making an annual average decline of 1.2 percentage points. During the same time, urban extreme poverty reduced from 7.7 per cent to 3.8 per cent, with an annual reduction of 0.33 percentage points.

Figure 2.1: Trends in poverty (moderate) incidence in Bangladesh, 1992-2022 (%)



Source: Author's presentation using HIES various rounds, BBS.

Figure 2.2: Extreme poverty in Bangladesh, 1992-2022 (%)



Source: Author's presentation using Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) various rounds, BBS.

Spatial variations in poverty reduction are evident across divisions. Between 2010 and 2022, urban moderate poverty decreased substantially in Khulna (by 25.9 percentage points) and in Barishal and Rajshahi, while progress in Dhaka, Chattogram, and Sylhet was relatively limited, and Rangpur experienced an increase. Rural poverty declined in every division, with the steepest drops in Rangpur, Dhaka, and Khulna. Extreme poverty declined most dramatically in rural Dhaka, falling from 23.5 to 1.9 per cent, followed by large reductions in Sylhet and Rangpur, although Rangpur still had the highest rural extreme poverty rate in 2022. Urban extreme poverty remained very low in most divisions by 2022, except in Rangpur and Mymensingh. District-level maps for 2022 illustrate that moderate poverty is concentrated in northern and western districts, while extreme poverty remains relatively high in several northern and southwestern areas.

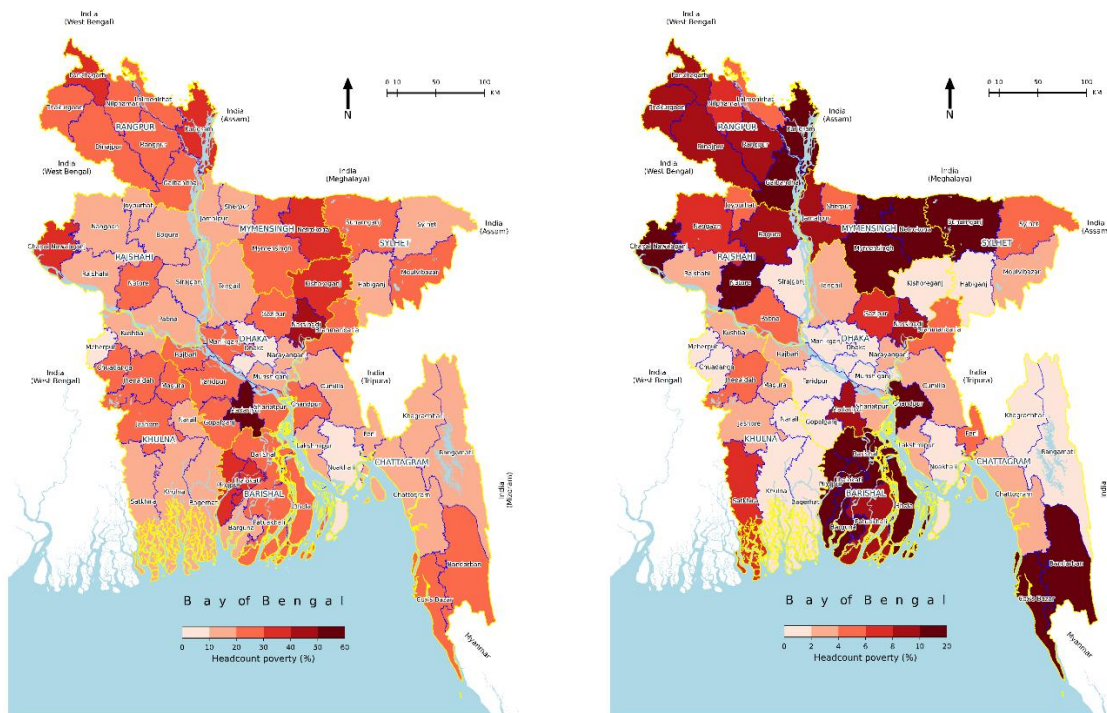
Table 2.1: Urban and Rural Poverty Trends at the National and Divisional Levels, 2010–2022

Divisions	Urban				Rural				Total			
	2010	2016	2022	% reduction 2010-2022	2010	2016	2022	% reduction 2010-2022	2010	2016	2022	% reduction 2010-2022
Moderate poverty												
Barishal	39.9	30.4	21.3	-18.6	39.2	25.7	28.4	-10.8	39.4	26.5	26.9	-12.5
Chattogram	11.8	15.9	11.3	-0.5	31	19.4	17.9	-13.1	26.2	18.4	15.8	-10.4
Dhaka	18	12.5	14.3	-3.7	38.8	19.2	21.7	-17.1	30.5	16.0	17.9	-12.6
Khulna	35.8	28.3	9.9	-25.9	31	27.3	16.2	-14.8	32.1	27.5	14.8	-17.3
Mymensingh		32	16			32.9	26.2			32.8	24.2	
Rajshahi	29	22.5	14.9	-14.1	30	30.6	17.2	-12.8	29.8	28.9	16.7	-13.1
Rangpur	27.9	41.5	29.9	2	44.5	48.2	23.6	-20.9	42.3	47.2	24.8	-17.5
Sylhet	15	19.5	14.4	-0.6	30.5	15.6	18.1	-12.4	28.1	16.2	17.4	-10.7
Extreme poverty												
Barishal	24.2	12.2	6.7	-17.5	27.3	14.9	13.1	-14.2	26.7	11.8	11.8	-14.9
Chattogram	4	6.5	2.3	-1.7	16.2	9.6	6.3	-9.9	13.1	8.7	5.1	-8.0
Dhaka	3.8	3.3	3.7	-0.1	23.5	10.7	1.9	-21.6	15.6	6.5	2.8	-12.8
Khulna	16.4	10	3.1	-13.3	15.2	13.1	2.8	-12.4	15.4	12.4	2.9	-12.5
Mymensingh		13.8	8.5			18.3	10.3			17.6	10.0	
Rajshahi	13.2	10.7	2.5	-10.7	17.7	15.2	8	-9.7	16.0	14.2	6.7	-9.3
Rangpur	17.2	26.3	8.7	-8.5	29.4	31.3	10.3	-19.1	27.7	30.5	10.0	-17.7
Sylhet	5.5	9.5	1.3	-4.2	23.5	11.8	5.2	-18.3	20.7	11.5	4.6	-16.1

Bangladesh’s poverty profile has also experienced a notable spatial shift over the past decade, with the burden of poverty shifting from the northern regions toward the central, eastern, and southern parts of the country (Razzaque et al, 2026). During 2010–2016, poverty increased in Rangpur and remained largely unchanged in Rajshahi, while other regions recorded stronger progress. The eastern, southern, and central regions performed relatively better, with moderate poverty reductions in Chittagong and Khulna and more pronounced declines in Barisal, Dhaka, and Sylhet. This pattern reversed between 2016 and 2022, as poverty became increasingly concentrated in the central, eastern, and southern regions. Several upazilas in the Barisal, Dhaka, and Sylhet divisions experienced rising poverty rates (Figures 2.5,2.6), underscoring that recent economic growth has not been uniformly inclusive across regions. These spatial disparities are further exacerbated by migration patterns that remain heavily skewed toward Dhaka, constraining the role of migration in equalising economic opportunities nationwide and reinforcing regional imbalances.

Figure 2.3: District-level national poverty map (moderate poverty), 2022

Figure 2.4: District-level national poverty map (extreme poverty), 2022



Source: Authors’ estimation and illustration using HIES 2022.

Figure 2.5: Changes in moderate poverty between 2010 and 2016 (percentage points)

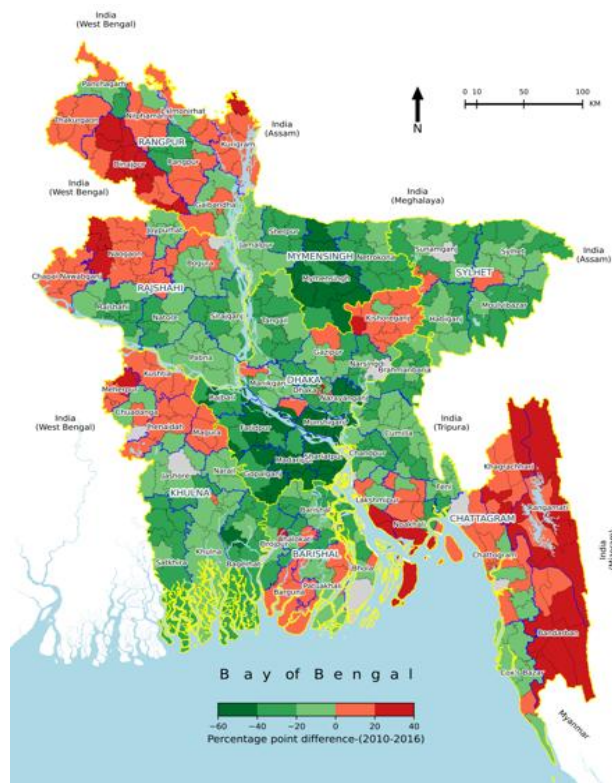
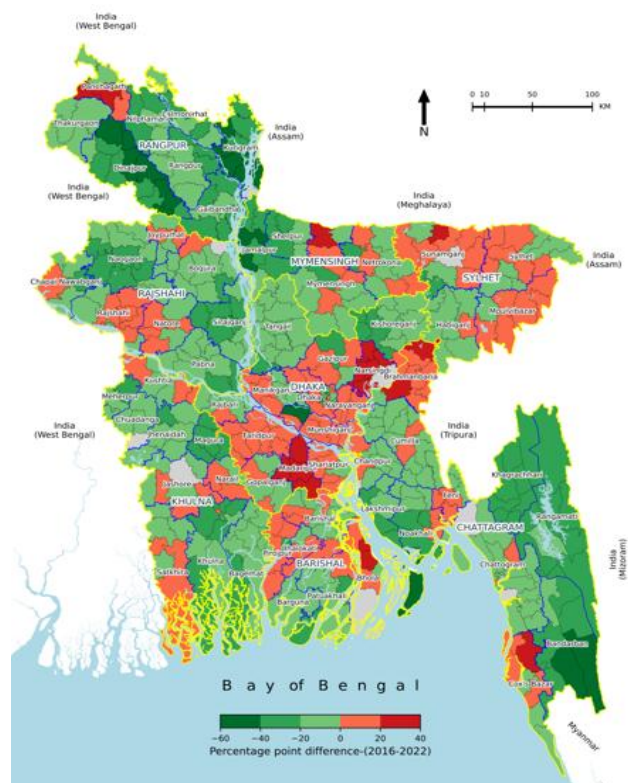


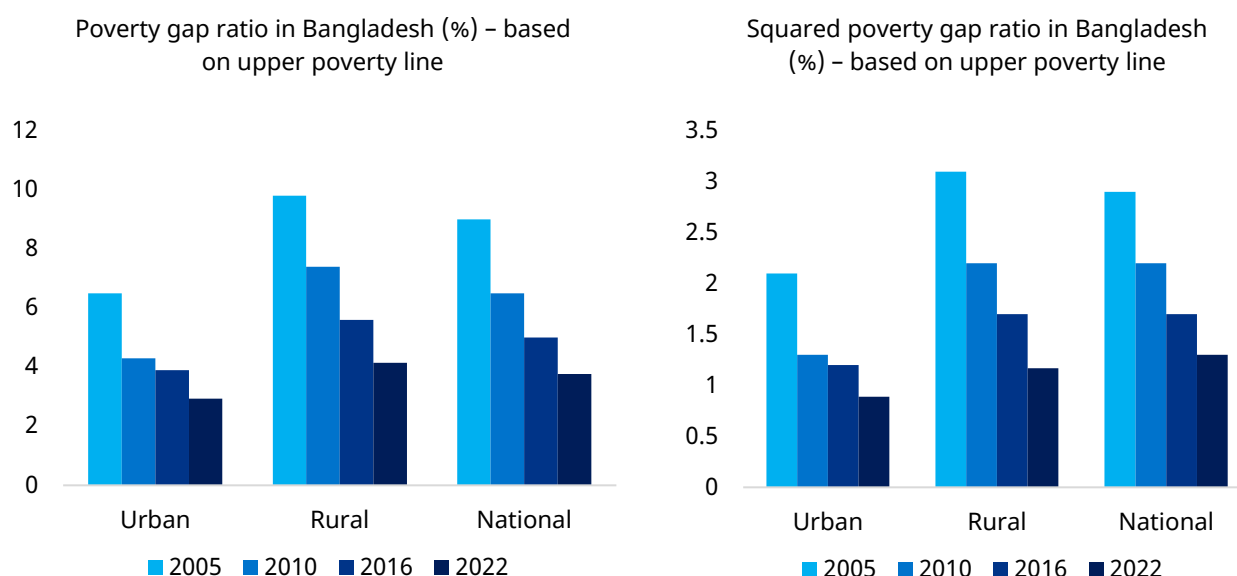
Figure 2.6: Changes in moderate poverty between 2016 and 2022 (percentage points)



Source: Razaque et al (2026) based on Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (2010, 2016 and 2022), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). Note: Areas shaded in green indicates that the poverty rate has declined (an improvement), while red indicates that it has increased (a worsening of poverty).

The headcount ratio does not account for the depth and severity of poverty, but the poverty gap ratio and squared poverty gap ratio can do so. The poverty gap ratio, which measures the depth of poverty by quantifying how far are the poor as a proportion of the poverty line income, fell from 6.5 per cent in 2010 to 3.8 percent in 2010. It dropped from 4.3 percent to 2.9 per cent in urban areas between 2010 and 2022. In comparison, it declined from 9.8 to 4.2 per cent in rural areas during the same time. The squared poverty gap, which captures severity of poverty among the poor, reduced from 2.2 per cent in 2010 to 1.3 per cent in 2022. A similar uneven reduction in the squared poverty gap (SPG) ratio has been observed in both urban and rural areas. These findings suggest that while poverty has reduced everywhere, improvements have been significant in rural areas where the poorest have moved closer to the poverty threshold.

Figure 2.7: Poverty gap and squared poverty gap trends by area, 2010–2022



Source: Author’s presentation using Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) various years, BBS.

Beyond those officially classified as poor, a large share of Bangladesh’s population remains economically vulnerable, households whose incomes exceed the national upper poverty line but remain within 25 per cent of it, as defined under the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS). This group faces a high risk of falling back into poverty in the presence of even modest economic shocks. Nationally, nearly one-third of the total population in 2022 falls within either poverty or vulnerability. The combined incidence of poverty and vulnerability is lower in urban than in rural areas. In 2022, 28.5 per cent of urban residents, more than one in four, were either poor or vulnerable, down from 38.1 per cent in 2010. Rural areas recorded a sharper improvement, with the combined rate falling by 18.6 percentage points over the same period, from 55.0 per cent to 36.4 per cent. Figure 2.10 presents a more granular, district-level picture of poverty and vulnerability in 2022, revealing significant spatial variation across the country.

While poverty and vulnerability incidences have declined in both rural and urban areas over the past decade (Figure 2.8), trends in absolute numbers point to a growing urban challenge. The number of poor people living in urban areas increased from 7.4 million in 2010 to 7.9 million in 2022, an addition of around half a million people (Figure 2.9). The urban vulnerable population expanded even more sharply, rising from 13.3 million to 15.3 million over the same period. By contrast, rural areas experienced a substantial reduction in poverty, with the number of rural poor falling from 34.2 million to 23.7 million—an overall decline of 10.5 million people. The rural poor and vulnerable population dropped significantly from 53.4 million in 2010 to 42 million in 2022. Nationally, 57.6 million individuals were classified as either poor or vulnerable in 2022.

The increase in urban poverty and vulnerability, despite the overall decline in national poverty rates, points to structural challenges in urban areas. Rapid rural-to-urban migration continues to reshape the poverty profile, as large numbers of people move to cities in search of better

livelihoods.¹ However, urban job creation has not kept pace with this influx, and rising living costs—particularly for housing and basic services—have constrained income gains for many households. These dynamics highlight the urgency of a more targeted urban poverty agenda, centred on employment generation, affordable housing, and expanded, well-targeted social protection to prevent poverty reduction gains from being eroded.

Figure 2.8: Poverty and vulnerability in Bangladesh (% of total population)

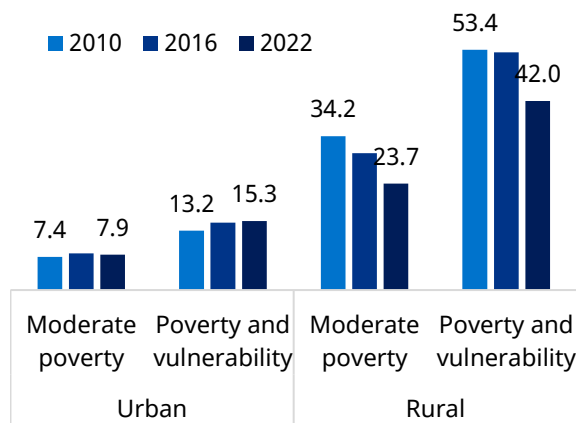
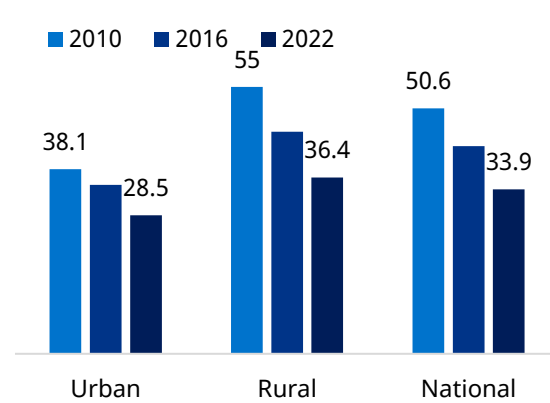
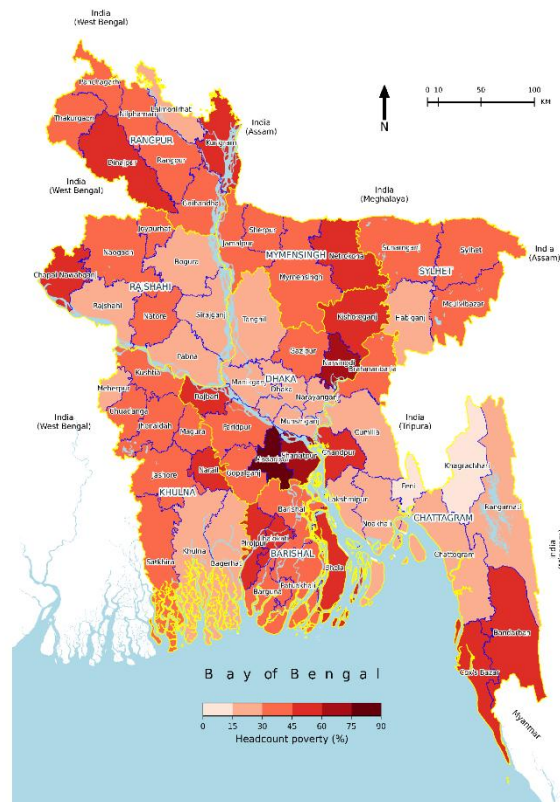


Figure 2.9: Number of poor and vulnerable in urban and rural areas (million)



Source: Authors' presentation using HIES various rounds, BBS.

Figure 2.10: District-level poverty and vulnerability map, 2022



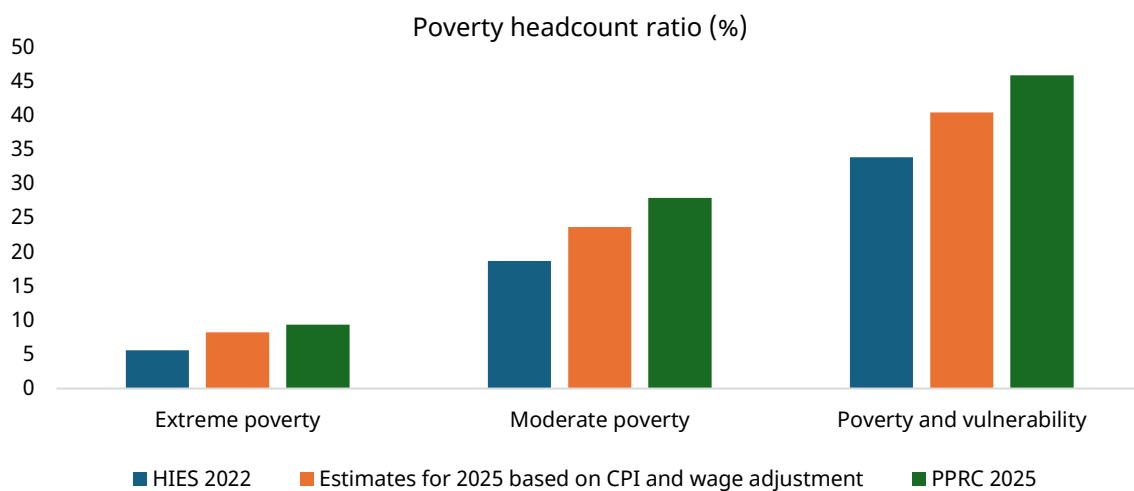
Source: Authors' estimation and illustration using HIES 2022, BBS.

¹ In Dhaka, for example, around 80 per cent of household heads were not born in the city; nearly half migrated within the past decade, and almost one-quarter arrived in the five years preceding the 2016 survey (Rahman, 2016).

Recent macroeconomic developments have raised serious concerns about a reversal of hard-won poverty reduction gains. Prolonged and elevated inflation has significantly eroded real incomes, intensifying economic stress and widening socio-economic vulnerabilities. Between January 2023 and October 2025, point-to-point monthly inflation remained persistently above 8 per cent, with most months registering price increases in the range of 9–10 per cent, well above the historical average of 5–6 per cent. These sustained price pressures have placed acute strain on household budgets, particularly as the cost of food and other essential goods has risen faster than wages.

Prices of essentials have risen faster than wages, pushing millions into poverty. Between September 2022 and August 2025, the consumer price index increased by around 40 percentage points, while the wage index rose by only 25 points, underscoring a growing gap between income growth and the cost of living. When poverty estimates are adjusted to account for inflation and wage dynamics, analysis based on HIES 2022 suggests a marked deterioration in poverty outcomes. Extreme poverty is estimated to have increased from 5.6 per cent in 2022 to around 8.3 per cent in 2025, making an additional 4.3 million people falling into extreme poverty (Razzaque et al., 2024). Moderate poverty rose from 18.2 per cent to 23.7 per cent, pushing nearly 9 million more individuals below the poverty line. As a result, the combined share of poor and vulnerable populations expanded sharply, from 33.9 per cent to 40.6 per cent, placing an estimated 11 million people in increasingly precarious conditions. These trends are consistent with findings from other sources. A recent survey by a private-sector think tank estimates that moderate poverty incidence reached 27.9 per cent in 2025, compared with the officially reported 18.7 per cent in 2022. The World Bank projects that the combined effects of high inflation and subdued investment could replicate the sluggish economic conditions observed during the COVID-19 shock. Under this scenario, extreme poverty is expected to rise to 9.3 per cent, adding a further 3 million people to poverty (World Bank, 2025). These trends highlight the critical role of strengthening social protection for poor and vulnerable households in Bangladesh.

Figure 2.11: Rising poverty and vulnerability resulted by prolonged inflation



Source: HIES 2022, Power and Participatory Research Centre (PPRC) 2025, and Razzaque et al. (2024).

2.3 Multidimensional poverty

Conventional poverty measures based on headcount ratios focus primarily on household income or consumption and therefore overlook deprivations in other critical dimensions of well-being, including health, education, and living standards. Multidimensional poverty measures address this limitation by capturing a broader set of deprivations faced by households.² In Bangladesh, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is typically derived from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), with the most recent round conducted in 2019. As a result, updated MPI estimates based on more recent data are not currently available. To address this gap, an indicative MPI has been constructed using data from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES).³

Estimates based on HIES data indicate that 23.3 per cent of the population—approximately 41 million people—were multidimensionally poor in 2022, meaning that they were deprived in at least one-third of the weighted indicators. Between 2010 and 2022, multidimensional poverty declined markedly in both urban and rural areas, though the pace of reduction differed substantially. In urban areas, the multidimensional headcount rate fell from 30.8 per cent to 14.9 per cent, a decline of 15.9 percentage points. Rural areas experienced a sharper reduction, with poverty falling from 59.0 per cent to 28.3 per cent—an improvement of 30.7 percentage points. Over this period, nearly 25 million rural residents were lifted out of multidimensional poverty, compared with about 3 million in urban areas, underscoring the faster pace of multidimensional poverty reduction in rural Bangladesh.

At the national level, the intensity of poverty—capturing the average proportion of deprivations faced by each multidimensionally poor individual—remained elevated at 49.4 per cent. This indicates that poor individuals were deprived, on average, in nearly half of the weighted indicators. Urban areas recorded a moderate improvement, with poverty intensity declining from 53.2 per cent in 2010 to 47.5 per cent in 2022, a reduction of 5.7 percentage points. Rural areas experienced a larger decline, from 59.2 per cent to 49.9 per cent over the same period, reflecting a faster easing of average deprivation among rural poor households.

The National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which integrates both the incidence of poverty and its intensity, is estimated at 0.119. This implies that multidimensionally poor people in Bangladesh account for 11.9 per cent of the total deprivations that would exist if the entire population were deprived across all indicators. The MPI remains substantially lower in urban areas (0.07) than in rural areas (0.14), highlighting persistent spatial disparities in multidimensional poverty.

² The Multidimensional Poverty (MP) index is constructed using 10 indicators across three dimensions: education (school attendance, years of schooling), health (nutrition, child mortality), and living standards (electricity, sanitation, drinking water, housing, cooking fuel, and asset ownership).

³ Given that the HIES does not include the health-related indicators required under the standard MPI framework, the estimation is necessarily based on nine indicators rather than the full set of 10 indicators.

Figure 2.12: Multidimensional headcount poverty rate (%), 2010-2022

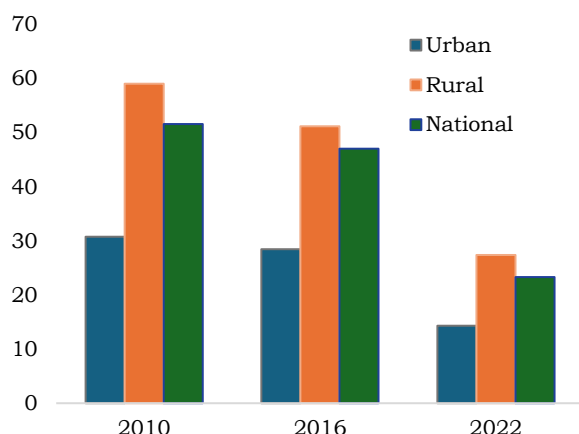
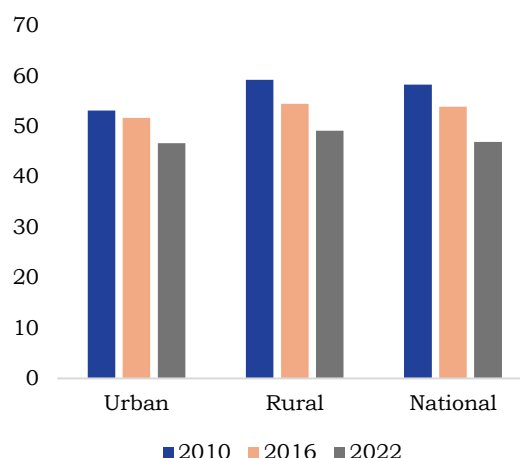


Figure 2.13: Intensity of multidimensional poverty (%)



Source: Razzaque et al. (2025), based on HIES data (various years).

Similar findings are reported by the General Economics Division of Bangladesh, with technical assistance from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), based on MPI estimates using MICS 2019 data (GED, 2025). The study estimates that multidimensional headcount poverty in Bangladesh was 24.1 per cent in 2019, implying that nearly one-quarter of the population was multidimensionally poor. The incidence was substantially lower in urban areas (13.6 per cent) than in rural areas (27.0 per cent). Between 2012–13 and 2019, multidimensional headcount poverty in both urban and rural areas declined by almost half. However, reductions in the intensity of poverty were more limited in urban areas, falling from 44.9 per cent to 41.2 per cent, compared with a larger decline in rural areas, from 46.5 per cent to 41.9 per cent. Overall, the national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was estimated at 0.168, with urban and rural MPI values of 0.106 and 0.185, respectively.

2.4 Inequality

The pattern of income distribution in Bangladesh reveals that inequality has deepened over the past two decades, with the most pronounced changes observed in urban areas. Data from successive rounds of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) indicate a growing concentration of income among the richest households, while the share of income held by the poorest segments has declined. Over the past thirty years, income inequality has steadily increased, with the bottom 40 per cent of the population experiencing a dramatic drop in their share of total income, from 29.2 per cent in 1991–92 to just 12.4 per cent in 2022 (Razzaque et al, 2026). The middle 50 per cent has also seen a moderate decline, falling from 53.4 per cent to 47.4 per cent during the same period. In contrast, the top 10% has more than doubled its income share, rising sharply from 17.4 per cent to 40.2 per cent.

The income share held by the top 5 per cent of the population increased from roughly 17 per cent in the 1990s to 30 per cent in 2022. In contrast, the poorest 5 per cent saw their already limited share shrink from 1.03 per cent in the 1990s to just 0.23 per cent in 2016, with only a slight recovery to 0.37 per cent by 2022. Between 2005 and 2022, the income share of the richest

5 per cent of urban households surged from 22.8 per cent to 33.4 per cent, an increase of 10.6 percentage points. By contrast, the poorest 5 per cent of urban households saw their share decline by more than half, from 1 per cent to 0.48 per cent. In rural areas, the top 5 per cent experienced a rise in their income share from 20.4 per cent to 24.2 per cent, while the bottom 5 per cent saw their share fall from 1.2 per cent to 0.37 per cent.

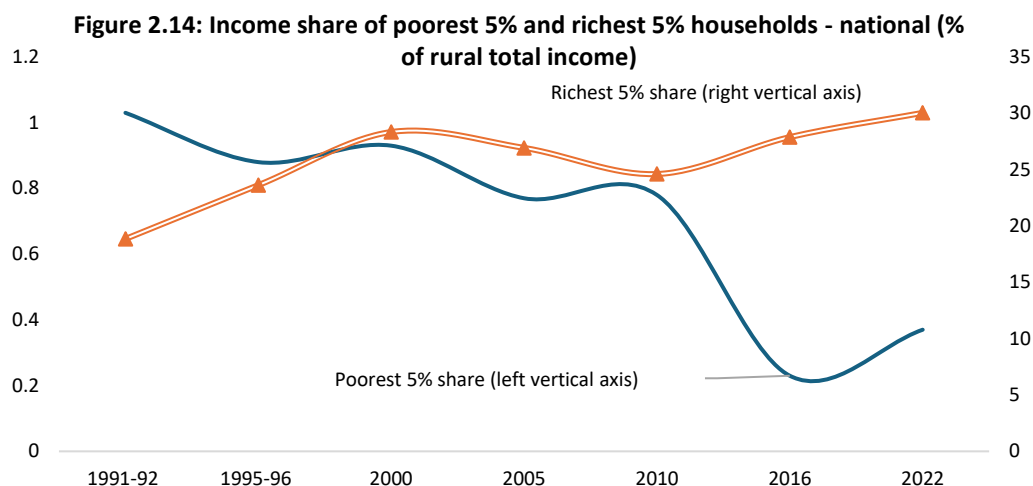


Figure 2.15: Share of richest and poorest 5% of households in urban areas (% of urban total income)

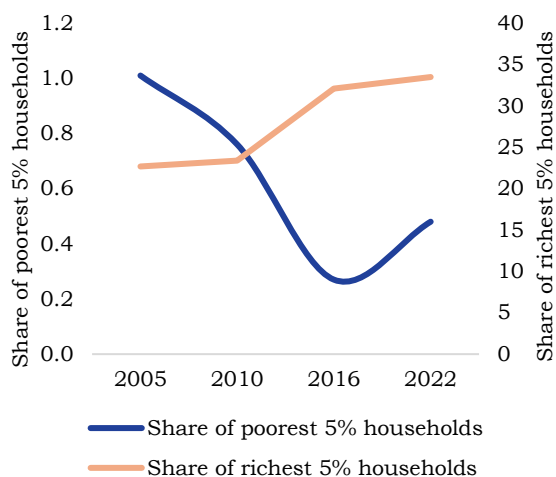
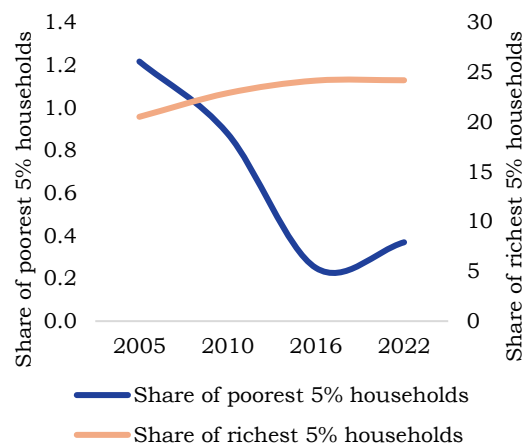


Figure 2.16: Share of richest and poorest 5% of households in rural areas (% of rural total income)



Source: Authors' estimation based on HIES data (various years).

The Gini coefficient⁴ for income, the most widely accepted measure of income inequality, shows a steady upward movement across survey rounds. The national income Gini increased from 0.458 in 2010 to 0.499 in 2022, with the steepest rise in urban areas, where it reached 0.54 in

⁴ Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or, in some cases, consumption expenditure) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Lorenz curve plots the cumulative percentages of total income received against the cumulative number of recipients, starting with the poorest individual or household. The Gini index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and a hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. Thus, a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 1 implies perfect inequality.

2022, up from 0.46 in 2010. In rural areas, it increased modestly from 0.43 to 0.45 during the same period. Consumption inequality has followed a similar though less sharp trajectory, with the national consumption Gini remaining lower than the income Gini, reflecting that consumption is more evenly distributed than income. Nonetheless, the widening gap between urban and rural areas highlights the faster pace of income growth among better-off urban households.

To complement the Gini measure, the Theil Index and the Palma Ratio provide additional insights into inequality dynamics. The Theil Index captures disparities across the entire distribution, while the Palma Ratio compares the income share of the richest 10 per cent of households to that of the poorest 40 per cent, providing a clear indication of concentration at the extremes. Both measures point to a steady widening of inequality over the past decade and a half. The Theil Index, after declining between 2005 and 2010, has remained broadly stable since 2016, indicating that while inequality has stopped accelerating, it remains elevated. The Palma Ratio, however, shows a more consistent increase, rising from 2.62 in 2005 to 3.23 in 2022, which implies that the top decile of households now earns more than three times the combined income of the bottom 40 per cent. The rising inequality, especially among urban households, underscores the need for targeted measures to address inequality and ensure more equitable income distribution, such as expanding social protection interventions.

Figure 2.17: Income Gini in Bangladesh

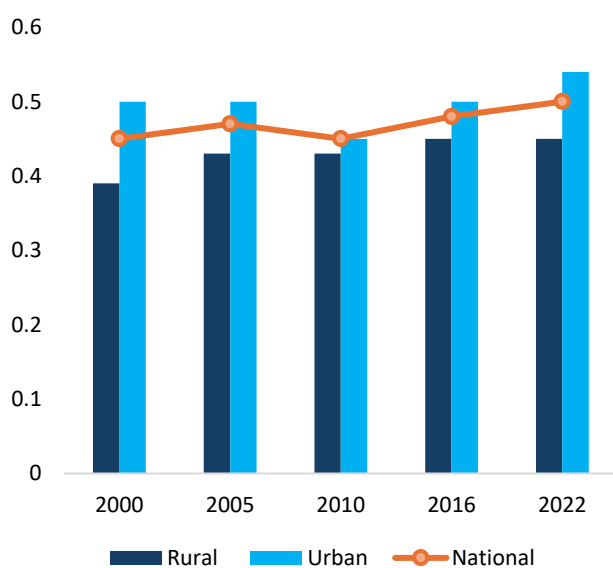
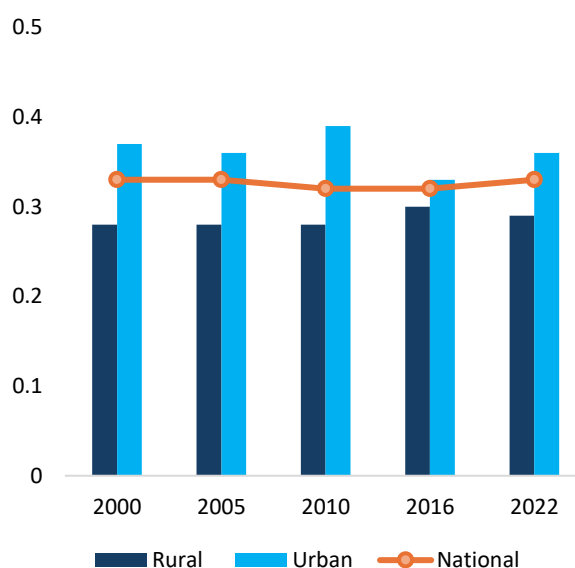
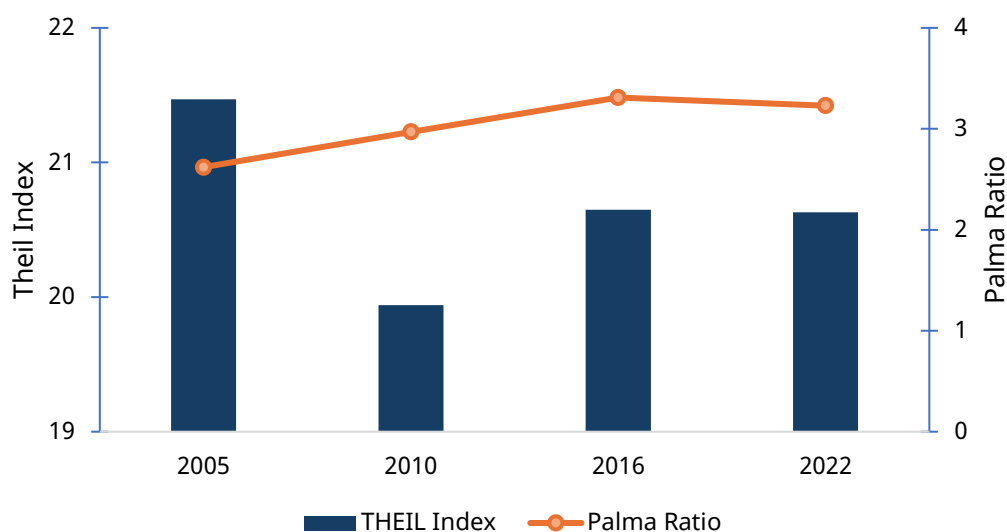


Figure 2.18: Consumption Gini in Bangladesh



Source: Authors' analysis based on HIES (various years), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS)

Figure 2.19: Theil Index and Palma Ratio in Bangladesh 2005-2022



Source: Authors' presentation based on HIES (various years), BBS.

2.5 State of social protection in Bangladesh

Tackling poverty and vulnerability, while ensuring social resilience for all through a strengthened social protection system, has remained one of Bangladesh's key priorities over the past decades. Social protection support in the country is provided to shield households/individuals from poverty, income shocks, and lifecycle-specific risks, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, informal workers, and marginalized communities. Beyond alleviating immediate deprivation, the system aims to promote human capital development, foster productive inclusion, and reduce structural inequalities, thereby contributing to more equitable and sustainable economic growth. Strengthening social protection also supports broader policy goals, including resilience to climate-related and economic shocks, enhancing labour market outcomes, and enabling households to invest in health, and education.

Social protection spending in Bangladesh

While Bangladesh has made significant strides in expanding its social protection programs over recent decades, the budgetary allocation remains disproportionately low relative to the national economy. The social protection allocation in absolute terms, increased from less than TK 150 billion in 2008-09 to reach at TK 1,360.3 billion in 2024-25, then declining to TK 1,167.3 billion in 2025-26, owing to limited fiscal space (Figure 2.20). Social protection allocation in 2025-26 accounts for 14.8 per cent of the national budget and 1.9 per cent of GDP (Figure 2.21), dropping from earlier figures of 16-17 per cent of total government expenditure or roughly around 2-3 per cent of GDP.

The current level of spending as per cent of GDP falls significantly short of international standards. The World Social Protection Report 2024-26, published by the ILO, shows that the South Asian countries spends on average 3.8 per cent of their GDP on social protection; it is 4.2

per cent in lower-middle-income and 8.5 per cent in upper-middle-income countries.⁵ Inadequate funding for social protection in Bangladesh stems from the government's limited fiscal space, as reflected in a low revenue-to-GDP ratio, just around 7 per cent, among the lowest in the world, with almost the entire social protection budget being tax-funded in the absence of any significant contributory schemes.

Figure 2.20: Spending on social security (crore Tk.)

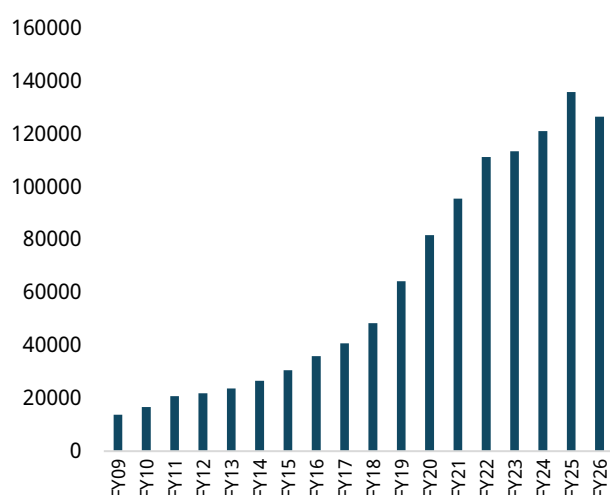
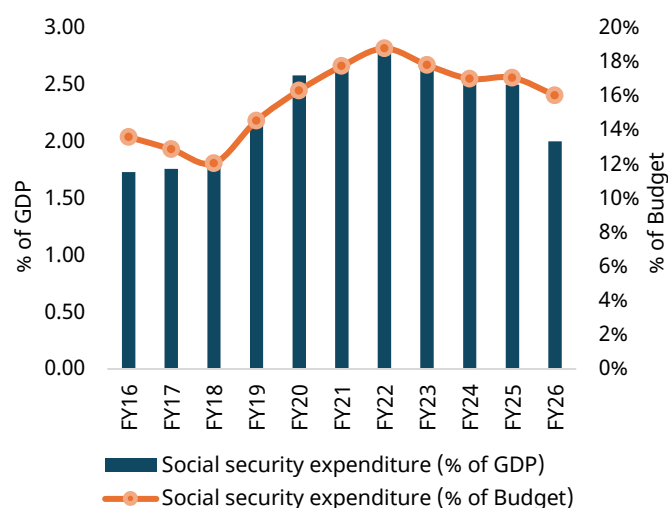


Figure 2.21: Social security expenditure (% of GDP and budget)



Source: Based on data from the Ministry of Finance and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

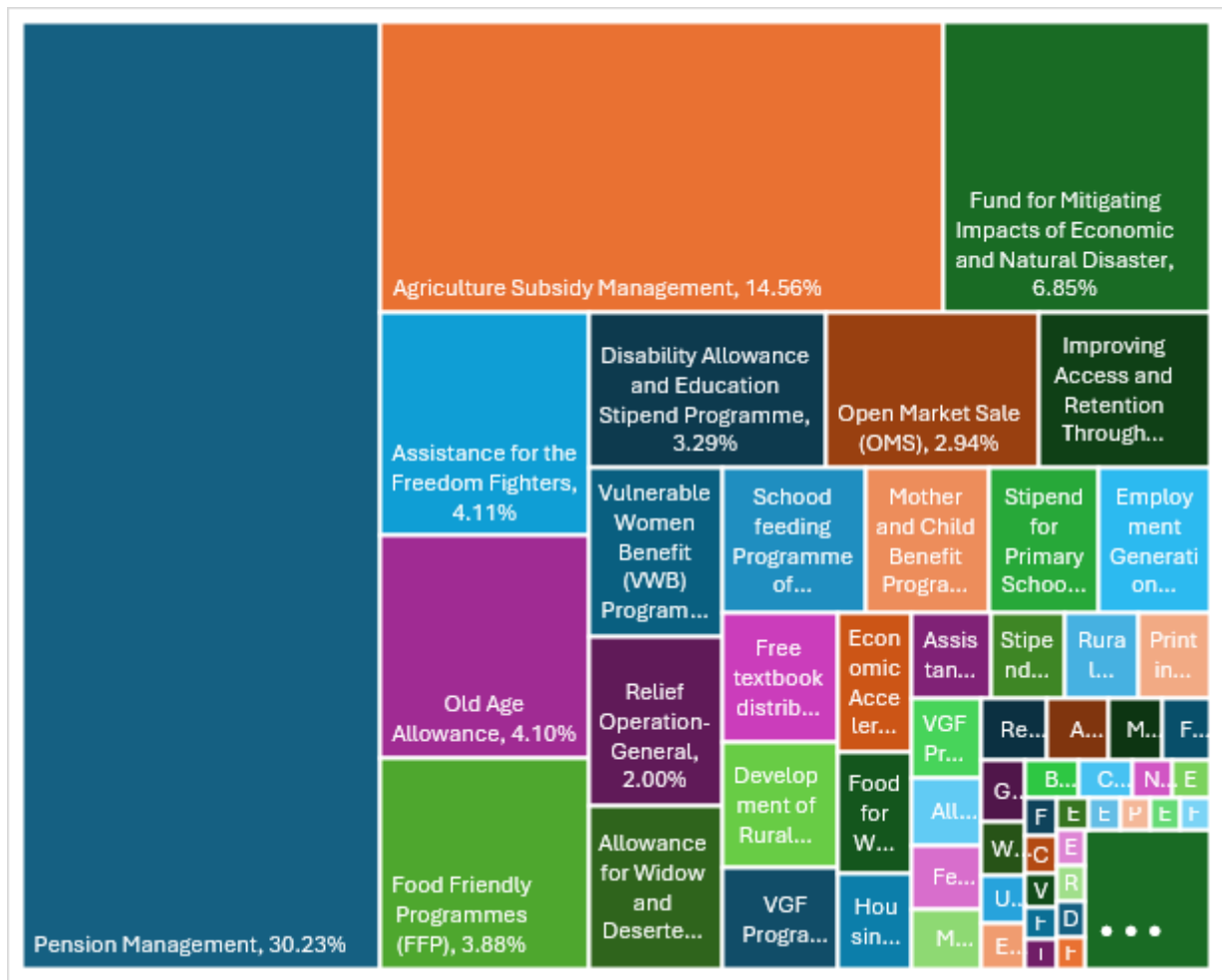
Note: Data are based on the revised budget. Proposed budget data are used for FY26. Revised GDP estimates for the base year FY16 are used to calculate the share of SSPs in GDP.

A relatively small budget for social security is obviously one major problem, which manifests in allocations being too thinly spread over too many programs. In FY26, the social security system of Bangladesh comprises 95 programmes, administered by more than 30 ministries/divisions/departments, declining from 140 schemes in the previous year. The recent decline is a result of programme consolidation/harmonization as recommended by the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), discontinuation of some schemes, and dropping of several programmes which are not directly related to social protection. However, there are still a large number of small programmes in operation.

Pension management for government employees and their families is the largest social protection programme, taking up 30 per cent of total social protection spending. The top five programmes together account for 60 per cent of total allocation, while the top ten absorb almost three-quarters (75%). The top twenty schemes combined make up nearly 89 per cent of the entire social protection budget. At the other end of the distribution, the smallest fifty programmes together receive only about 2 per cent of the allocation. This high level of concentration means that resources are tied up in a handful of schemes, leaving a large number of other programmes with very limited space, which in practice reduces their capacity to expand coverage or improve benefit levels across the wider social protection system.

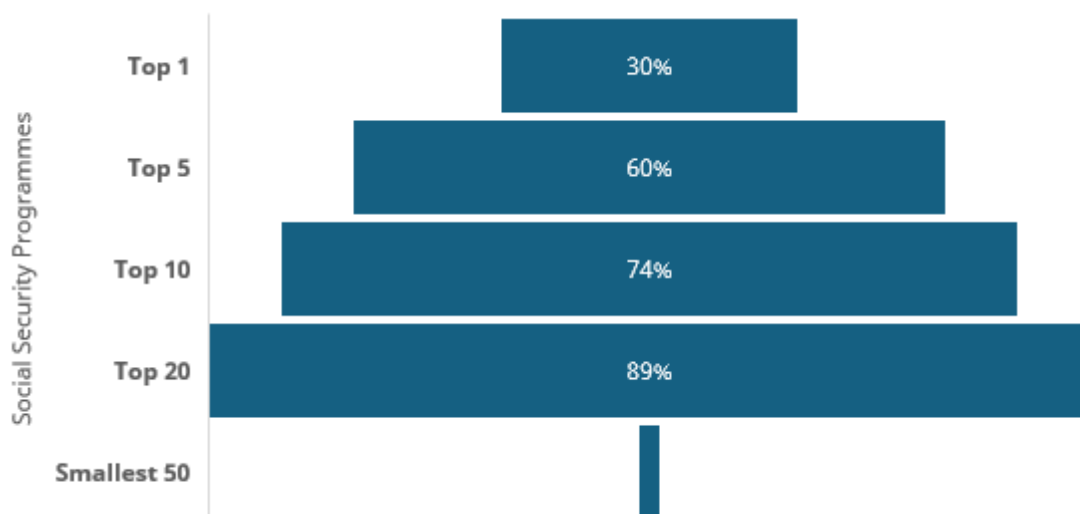
⁵ According to the same report, Bangladesh's social protection spending was just 0.9 per cent of GDP.

Figure 2.22: Distribution of SP programs by size (in % of total SP budget)



Source: Based on data from the Finance Division of the Ministry of Finance.

Figure 2.23: Budget share of social protection programmes (in % of total social protection budget)



Source: Authors' presentation using the data from Social Security Budget Report 2025-26, FD, MoF.

The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2015 marked a significant shift in Bangladesh’s social protection system by replacing largely ad hoc interventions with a lifecycle-based approach. Viewed through this lens, social security budget allocations are heavily concentrated on addressing covariate risks, which account for 42.7 per cent of total spending. These programmes are designed to mitigate households’ vulnerability to shocks, support persons with disabilities, and respond to environmental and climate-related risks. Programmes targeting older persons constitute nearly 40 per cent of total social protection expenditure, reflecting the wide coverage of old-age allowances and pension schemes. In contrast, interventions for school-aged children and working-age individuals together account for about 15.6 per cent of total spending, primarily aimed at supporting education continuity and income generation. Pregnancy and early childhood programmes receive the smallest share, accounting for just over 2 per cent of total social protection expenditure, highlighting a relative underinvestment in early-life interventions.

Table 2.2: Lifecycle-based allocation of social security budget, 2025-26

Lifecycle stages	No. of programme	Budget (billion TK)	% of total social protection allocation
Pregnancy and early childhood	4	24.7	2.1%
School-aged children	9	97.9	8.4%
Working age	23	84.0	7.2%
Elderly	7	461.7	39.6%
Covariate shocks	52	1160.6	42.7%
Total	95	1167.3	100.0%

Source: Based on the data from the Finance Division of the Ministry of Finance.

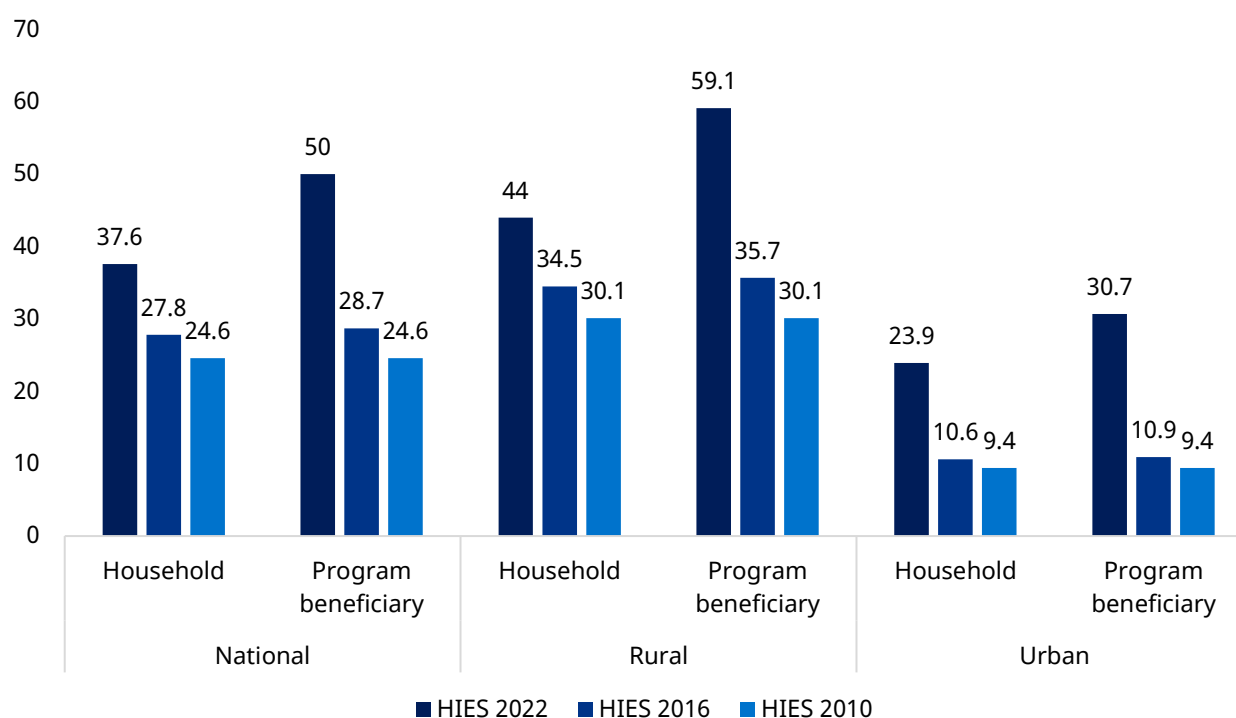
Coverage of social protection

Information on the total number of unique beneficiaries of social protection programmes is difficult to derive directly from the social security budget, as beneficiary counts are reported using different metrics across programmes—such as person-months, unique individuals, or other measures. Nonetheless, data from the Finance Division indicate that 39.1 million unique beneficiaries were covered under 24 cash-based social protection programmes. Among these, the primary school stipend programme has the largest coverage, reaching approximately 11.6 million beneficiaries, followed by the harmonised stipend programme for secondary and higher secondary education (6.9 million), the old-age allowance (6.1 million), disability allowance and disability stipend programmes combined (3.5 million), the widow allowance (2.9 million), and stipends for technical and madrasa education (2.1 million). Beyond cash-based interventions, several non-cash social protection programmes also reach a large number of beneficiaries. Vulnerable Group Feeding covers about 17.6 million individuals, while Open Market Sales and the Food Friendly Programme reach approximately 12.2 million and 5.3 million beneficiaries, respectively.

The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) provides detailed information on household and beneficiary coverage under social protection programmes in Bangladesh.⁶ According to HIES 2022, more than 37 per cent of households benefit from at least one social protection programme, marking a substantial increase from 27.8 per cent in 2016 (Figure 2.24). These beneficiary households account for around half of the country's total population. Coverage is notably higher in rural areas, where 44 per cent of households, representing nearly 60 per cent of the rural population, receive support from at least one social protection programme. In contrast, urban coverage remains disproportionately low, with only 24 per cent of urban households benefiting from such programmes.

Stipend programmes account for the largest share of beneficiaries, yet the benefits provided are typically modest. Moreover, many schemes do not prioritise poverty or vulnerability as core eligibility criteria, leading to a substantial share of resources being directed to non-poor households. When stipend programmes and other schemes that do not directly or indirectly target poor or vulnerable groups, such as allowances for freedom fighters and pensions for retired government employees, are excluded, effective coverage declines sharply. Under this narrower definition, HIES 2022 data show that only 24.8 per cent of households benefit from at least one social protection scheme, with coverage falling to just 14 per cent in urban areas compared to about 30 per cent in rural areas.

Figure 2.24: Percentage distribution of households and beneficiaries received benefits from SSP



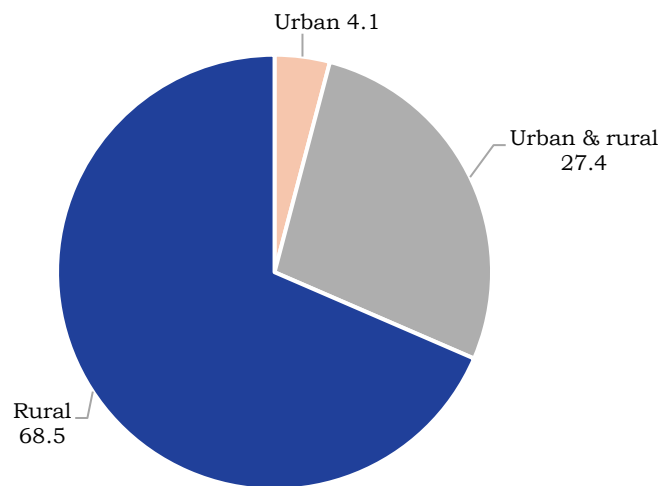
Source: Authors' calculation using the data from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey, various rounds, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

⁶ There are however certain limitations of HIES data, as they cannot capture information on all the programmes.

The predominance of rural coverage is also evident in the allocation of the social protection budget. In FY2024–25, out of more than 100 social protection programmes, only 23 were exclusively targeted at urban populations, together accounting for just 4.1 per cent of total social protection spending, despite the growing size of the urban poor population (Figure 13). In contrast, around 50 rural-focused programmes absorb 27.4 per cent of total social protection expenditure. A further 70 programmes target both urban and rural beneficiaries and together account for more than two-thirds of the social protection budget.

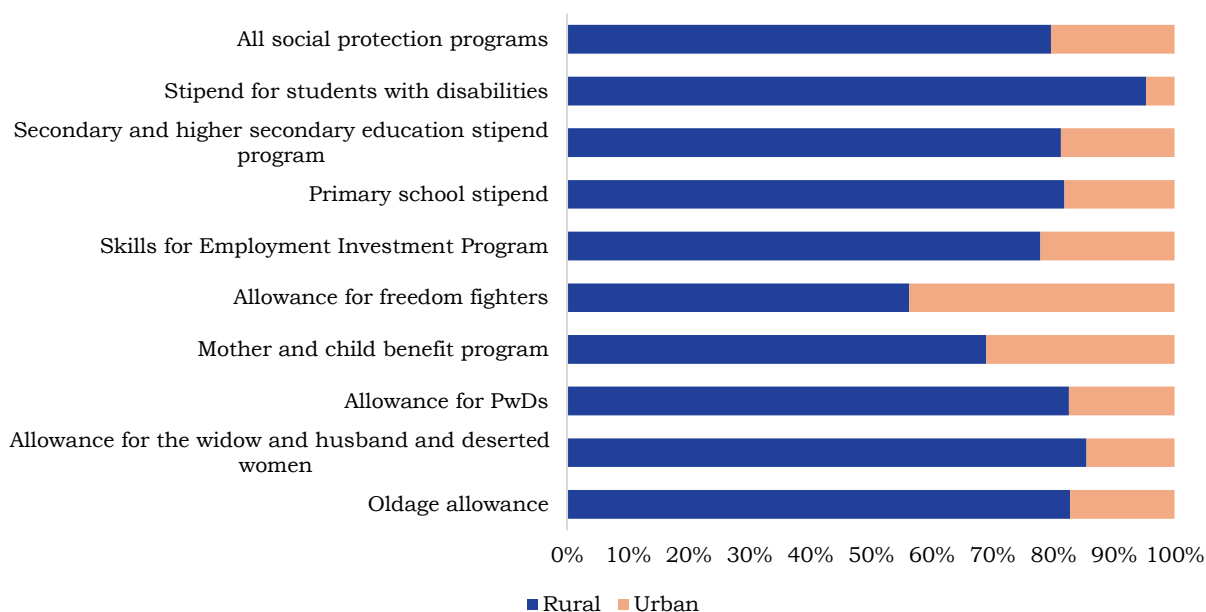
Evidence from HIES 2022 reinforces this imbalance, showing that only about one in five social protection beneficiaries—roughly 20 per cent—reside in urban areas (Figure 21). Even within major schemes that are formally designed to cover both urban and rural populations, urban participation remains limited. Under the old-age allowance scheme, only 17 per cent of beneficiaries are urban residents. The widow allowance programme covers just 15 per cent urban beneficiaries and is not implemented in city corporation areas. Similarly, the Allowance for Persons with Disabilities includes only 17 per cent urban recipients. Urban coverage under the primary school stipend programme stands at 18 per cent, while the stipend for students with disabilities is particularly low at just 5 per cent. The secondary and higher secondary stipend programme shows a marginally higher urban share, at 19 per cent.

Figure 25: Distribution of social protection programmes by urban and rural areas (%)



Source: Razzaque et al. (2025) based on Social Protection Budget Report 2024-25, Ministry of Finance (MoF).

Figure 26: Urban-rural social protection coverage (% of total), 2022



Source: Razzaque et al. (2025) based on Social Protection Budget Report 2024-25, Ministry of Finance (MoF).

Beneficiaries of social protection and systematic exclusion

Although the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) recognises poverty reduction, vulnerability mitigation, and protection against economic shocks as the central objectives of social protection, the absence of large-scale and well-targeted interventions substantially weakens the effectiveness of the system. Evidence from HIES 2022 data reveals a significant mismatch between stated policy goals and actual beneficiary coverage. Among households receiving at least one social protection benefit, only 6.6 per cent were extremely poor, 13.5 per cent were moderately poor, and 17.1 per cent were vulnerable, while nearly two-thirds (62.8 per cent) were neither poor nor vulnerable (Figure 23). This misalignment is even more pronounced in urban areas. Only 4.9 per cent of beneficiary households were extremely poor, 12 per cent were moderately poor, and 16.2 per cent were vulnerable, whereas about 62 per cent were neither poor nor vulnerable. Rural areas display a similar pattern, though marginally less severe, with 7.1 per cent of beneficiary households classified as extremely poor, 13.9 per cent as moderately poor, and 17.3 per cent as vulnerable, while 61.8 per cent fell outside poverty and vulnerability.

Figure 27: Households with any social protection coverage, by poverty status (%), 2022

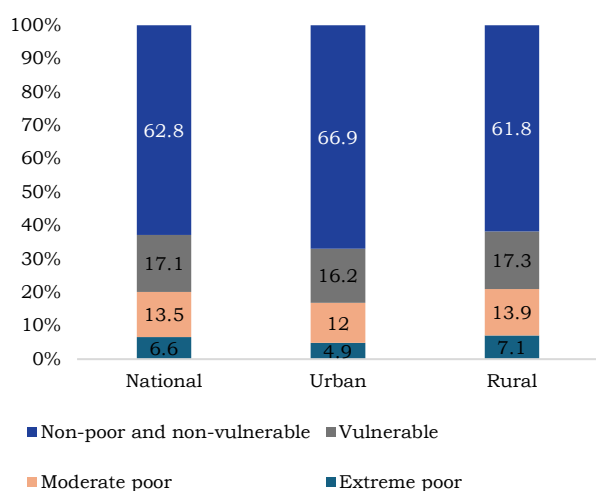
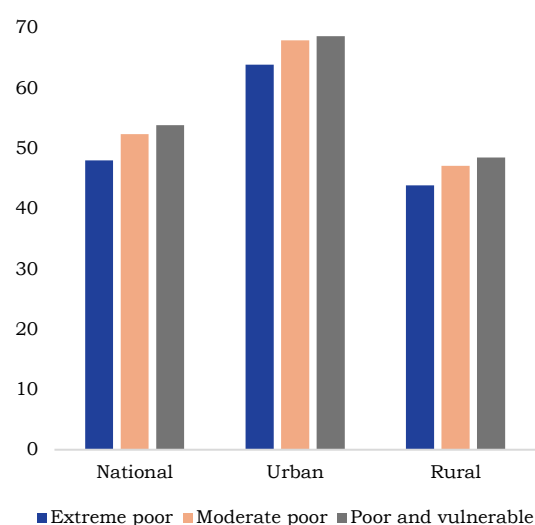


Figure 28: Poor and vulnerable households not covered by any social protection schemes (%)



Source: Authors' analysis using HIES 2022 data.

The disproportionately large share of non-poor and non-vulnerable households among social protection recipients points to inefficiencies in programme targeting. The exclusion of many poor and vulnerable households from receiving any form of assistance further exacerbates these disparities. HIES 2022 data show that nearly half (48 per cent) of extremely poor households nationwide receive no social protection support (Figure 24). Exclusion rates are particularly high in urban areas, where 63.9 per cent of extremely poor households are left uncovered, compared to 43.9 per cent in rural areas. Among moderately poor households, more than two-thirds in urban areas receive no assistance, versus 47 per cent in rural areas. Urban vulnerable households face the highest exclusion, with 68.6 per cent receiving no social protection benefits, compared to 48.5 per cent among their rural counterparts.

These figures underscore that, despite an expanding portfolio of programmes and increasing fiscal allocations, a large share of households most in need of assistance remains excluded from the social protection system. At the same time, persistent weaknesses in targeting mechanisms result in a substantial portion of social protection resources being channelled to non-poor and non-vulnerable households who do not require such support, undermining both the efficiency and equity of the system.

Social protection benefits

Social protection benefits in Bangladesh remain low relative to income levels and are irregularly adjusted for inflation, resulting in a gradual erosion of their real value over time. Regular monthly cash transfers under major programmes are modest, typically amounting to only about 2–4 per cent of per capita GNI. For example, the Old-age Allowance and the allowance for widowed, deserted, and destitute women provide Tk. 650 per month, equivalent to just 2.3 per cent of per capita GNI. Allowances for persons with disabilities range from Tk. 900 to Tk. 1,300

per month, corresponding to about 3.2 per cent of per capita GNI, while the Mother and Child Benefit Programme provides Tk. 850 per month, or roughly 3 per cent of per capita GNI.

Primary school stipends range from Tk. 100 to Tk. 200 per student per month, translating into between 0.7 and 2.4 per cent of per capita GNI, while benefits under the harmonised stipend programme for secondary and higher secondary students range to 0.7–1.7 per cent of per capita GNI. Although public works and food-based programmes provide relatively higher short-term support, their duration is limited. Under the Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest, beneficiaries receive Tk. 400 per day for 80 days during the lean season, amounting to about 9.4 per cent of per capita GNI on a monthly equivalent basis. Similarly, food-based programmes such as Vulnerable Group Feeding and the Vulnerable Women Benefit programme provide in-kind transfers equivalent to roughly 0.6–1.8 per cent and about 4.2 per cent of per capita GNI, respectively.

Estimates suggest that monthly benefits from key programmes, such as the Old-age Allowance (OAA) and Widow Allowance (WA), amount to just 14 per cent of the national poverty line income per person, while the Allowance for Persons with Disabilities is slightly higher at 22 per cent (RAPID, 2024).⁷ The limited adequacy of these benefits is further compounded by the absence of systematic inflation indexation for most programmes, which steadily reduces their purchasing power over time. As a result, despite relatively wide coverage, the current level and real value of transfers remain insufficient to effectively protect beneficiaries from poverty and vulnerability.

Table 2.3: Benefits of major SSP programmes in Bangladesh⁸

Programme	Programme benefit	Nature of the transfer	Allowance as % of corresponding per capita GNI
Old-age allowance	Tk. 650 per month	Regular, monthly	2.3%
Allowance for widow, husband deserted and destitute women	Tk. 650 per month	Regular, monthly	2.3%
Allowances for persons with disability	Tk. 900-1300 per month	Regular, monthly	3.2%
Primary school stipends	Tk. 100-200 per student per month	Regular, monthly	20.4%-0.7%
Harmonized stipend programme	Tk. 200-400 per student per month	Regular, monthly	0.7%-1.7%

⁷ Between FY10 and FY24, the real values of the OAA and WA declined to BDT 77.6 and BDT 71.2, respectively (normalised at BDT 100), as irregular inflation adjustments failed to offset rising costs, rendering these benefits too low to have a meaningful impact (RAPID, 2024).

⁸ Note: 1) Employment Generation Program for the Poor (EGPP), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) are programs that are run for a short period (mostly during the lean season or after a natural disaster has taken place). 2) The price of per Kg rice/wheat is considered TK 40. The cost for training on alternative income generating activities are not considered VWB scheme.

Mother and child benefit program (MCBP)	Tk. 850 per month	Regular, monthly	3%
Employment generation programme for the poorest (EGPP)	TK 400 for 7 hours work per day (for 80 days in a year)	Short period (lean period)	9.4%
Vulnerable group feeding (VGF)	10-30 Kg of food grain per month (for 2-5 months)	Short period (lean period)	0.6%-1.8%%
Vulnerable women benefit (VWB)	30 Kg of food grain per month (for 2 years)	Regular, monthly for 2 years	4.2%
Underprivileged people's livelihood development programme	Tk. 600-1200 per month	Regular, monthly	2.1%-4.2%

Source: Authors' estimation.

Targeting errors in social protection programmes

Targeting errors continue to be a major weakness in Bangladesh's social protection system, undermining the effective delivery of transfers to those who need them most. These inefficiencies take two main forms: exclusion errors, where eligible individuals or households are left out of social protection programmes (also referred to as coverage inefficiency), and inclusion errors, where benefits are provided to those who are not eligible (targeting inefficiency) (Razzaque & Rahman, 2019). Limited resources for social protection often make beneficiary selection a subjective process, compromising the effective distribution of transfers to those in need. The lack of sufficient resources prevents the inclusion of all eligible individuals, leading to significant exclusion errors. Additionally, political influence and corruption in the selection process frequently cause inclusion errors, allowing ineligible individuals to receive benefits. These inaccuracies contribute to social inequities, as both inclusion and exclusion errors remain widespread. At the local level, the complexity of eligibility criteria—such as income, land ownership, and age—further complicates the process, often resulting in the unintended omission or inclusion of individuals.

A key challenge in assessing targeting errors is determining whether to base eligibility on poverty and vulnerability levels or adhere to programme-specific criteria. The NSSS clearly sets poverty reduction and vulnerability mitigation as key objectives of social protection programmes, but many schemes still rely on categorical or individual criteria. For instance, the Old Age Allowance (OAA), Widow Allowance (WA), and Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) determine eligibility by age, sex, marital status, or individual income, without considering the broader welfare status of the household. This often allows relatively better-off households to enter the programmes, while poor families remain excluded because they do not match the specific categories. Similarly, a large proportion of beneficiaries are drawn from school stipend schemes or allowances for freedom fighters, which do not take poverty or vulnerability into account at all. The absence of robust income support measures, such as cash transfers or employment guarantees tailored for households below the poverty line, creates a

critical gap in addressing both moderate and extreme poverty. The result is that the system spends substantial resources on groups that are not always poor and vulnerable.

To capture the scale of these challenges, targeting errors can be measured in three ways: (i) by poverty and vulnerability status, (ii) by programme-specific eligibility criteria, and (iii) by a broader vulnerability scorecard that combines indicators such as income, asset ownership, housing, land, and household's socio-economic status. The first two approaches are straightforward and show whether households qualify on the basis of poverty and vulnerability or according to programme-specific rules, while the vulnerability scorecard method provides a more nuanced view of vulnerability by considering multiple dimensions at once.⁹

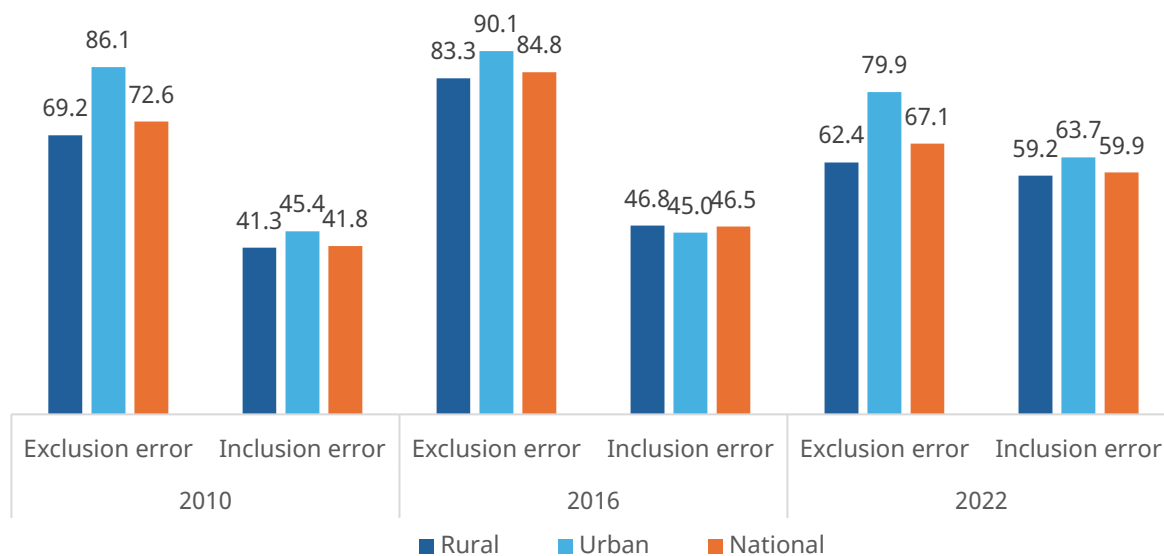
Targeting errors based on poverty and vulnerability criteria

Figure 2.29 presents the estimated exclusion and inclusion errors based on poverty and vulnerability criteria. Exclusion errors were already high at 72.6 per cent in 2010 and increased further to 84.8 per cent in 2016 before declining to 67.1 per cent by 2022. This means that more than two-third of eligible poor and vulnerable families are not covered under the existing social protection programmes. The recent coverage expansion of flagship social protection programmes, such as oldage allowance, widow allowance, allowance for PwDs, mother and child benefit programme, helped reaching the eligible beneficiaries, thus reducing the exclusions. The exclusion errors in rural areas stood at 62.4 per cent in 2022. Urban areas consistently exhibit higher exclusion errors compared to rural areas, reaching as high as 90.1 per cent in 2016 and remaining at 79.9 per cent in 2022. This pattern highlights persistent challenges in urban beneficiary identification and enrolment.

Meanwhile, inclusion errors have increased markedly over time, meaning that non-poor and non-vulnerable people are receiving social protection benefits. At the national level, the share of inclusion errors rose from 41.75 percent in 2010 to nearly 60 percent in 2022, suggesting that roughly six out of every ten beneficiary households are neither poor nor vulnerable. This figure would be even higher if pension schemes, freedom fighter allowances, and stipend programmes—none of which rely on poverty or vulnerability criteria for eligibility—were included in the assessment. Inclusion errors are consistently more pronounced in urban areas than in rural settings, reflecting greater challenges in accurately identifying eligible beneficiaries. By 2022, inclusion errors reached 63.7 percent in urban areas, compared with 59.2 percent in rural areas, underscoring persistent targeting inefficiencies, particularly in urban contexts.

⁹ Stipend programmes, government service pension, and allowances for freedom fighters were excluded from these exercises since they do not apply income or poverty criteria.

Figure 2.29: Targeting error based on poverty and vulnerability criteria (%)



Source: Authors' estimation based on HIES data (2010, 2016, and 2022), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Disaggregating by district highlights the geographical disparities embedded in these errors. Figure 2.30 shows that central and peri-urban districts record the highest exclusion, with Dhaka at 94 per cent, Gazipur at 89 per cent, Narayanganj at 84 per cent, and Kishoreganj 84 per cent. Despite being regions with high concentrations of poor households, programme coverage here remains the weakest. In contrast, districts such as Bagerhat (27 per cent), Pirojpur (30 per cent), Rangamati (33 per cent), and Bhola (35 per cent) have significantly lower exclusion errors, pointing to comparatively better coverage and targeting outcomes in the coastal south and hill tract regions. Similar variation is observed in inclusion errors, displayed in Figure 2.31. Districts such as Lakshmipur (93 per cent), Noakhali (90 per cent), and Feni (84 per cent) show very high inclusion rates, indicating that a large share of beneficiaries do not actually meet poverty and vulnerability criteria. On the other hand, coastal districts like Barguna (13 per cent), Bhola (14 per cent), Barisal (30 per cent), and Gopalganj (38 per cent) perform relatively better targeting outcomes.

Figure 2.30: Exclusion errors based on poverty and vulnerability criteria, by district (%)

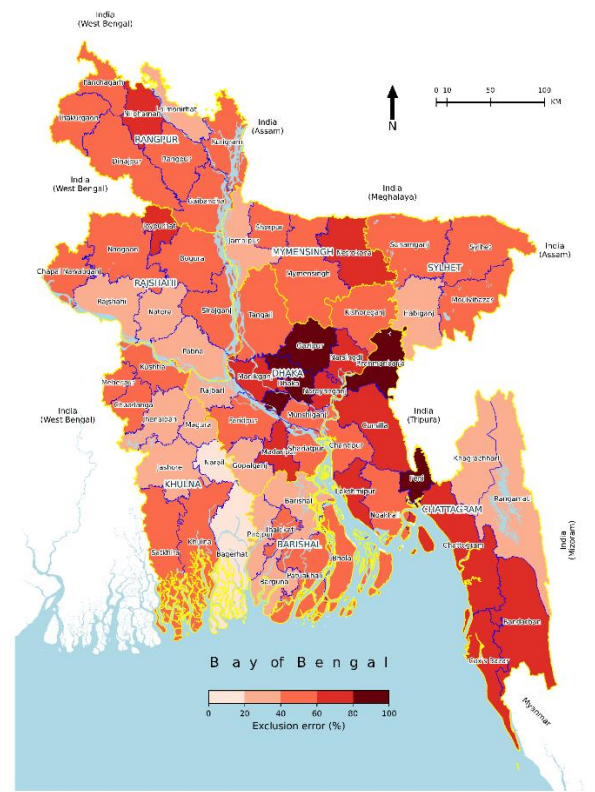
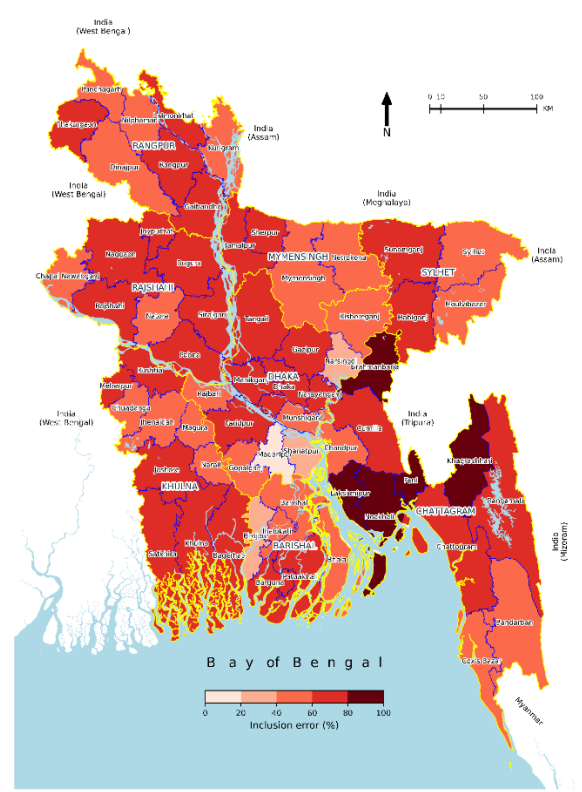


Figure 2.31: Inclusion errors based on poverty and vulnerability criteria, by district (%)



Source: Authors' estimation based on HIES data (2022), BBS.

Targeting errors based on programme-specific criteria

Using programme-specific eligibility criteria and HIES 2022 data (Table 2.4), targeting errors have been estimated for major social protection schemes, revealing substantial variation in performance across programmes and locations. Among the major schemes, the Old Age Allowance (OAA) shows comparatively stronger targeting outcomes, with a national exclusion error of 25 per cent, though this is notably higher in urban areas (34.7 per cent) than in rural areas (22.7 per cent). Inclusion errors under OAA remain relatively low at around 16 percent nationally, reflecting, in part, the programme's expanded coverage in recent years. In contrast, other programmes exhibit significant inefficiencies. The Widow Allowance (WA) records exceptionally high exclusion errors nationwide (84.8 per cent), particularly in urban areas (90.1 per cent), alongside a national inclusion error of 26.5 percent, driven mainly by higher inclusion in rural areas. The Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) faces significant targeting challenges, with an almost universal exclusion error at the national level (98.9 per cent) and very high inclusion errors (64.2 per cent), indicating a significant disconnect between programme objectives and implementation. Similarly, the Disability Allowance (DA) continues to experience substantial mistargeting: despite recent moves toward universal coverage, the prevailing income-based eligibility threshold results in a high national exclusion rate (75.5 per

cent), especially in urban areas, while inclusion errors remain elevated at 56.1 per cent, although these decline when broader definitions of disability are applied. Overall, exclusion errors tend to be higher in urban areas, reflecting lower programme coverage, while inclusion errors decline when programme-specific eligibility criteria are strictly applied. The relatively higher coverage of social protection in rural areas may partly explain higher inclusion errors in some schemes. These findings underscore the need to refine eligibility criteria, strengthen beneficiary identification mechanisms, and address persistent urban-rural disparities in programme implementation.

Table 2.4: Programme-specific targeting errors by region, 2022 (%)

Programmes and specific criteria	Inclusion error (%)			Exclusion error (%)		
	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
Old age allowance: Minimum age (male 65 years, female 62 years) and annual personal income below Tk. 10,000	16.28	16.21	16.90	25.03	22.66	34.73
Widow allowance: Widow/deserted by husband/destitute, annual individual income less than Tk. 15,000	26.47	27.62	19.84	84.8	83.7	90.1
Disability allowance: Severe disability and annual income of beneficiary (less than 36,000)¹⁰	56.07	55.77	57.52	75.49	73.42	82.3
Mother and child benefit programme (MCBP): Age (20-35) and income criteria (up to Tk 8,000 for rural areas; and up to Tk 12,000 for urban areas)	64.18	64.76	62.87	98.88	98.97	98.8
Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF): Moderate poor and landless/ a maximum of 0.15 acre of land	80.65	78.54	90.29	97.69	97.11	99.24
Secondary and higher secondary education stipend programme: Class 6 to 12 students from poor and vulnerable households	70.98	70.73	72.05	87.06	85.74	90.9
Open Market Sales (OMS): Poor and vulnerable	66.35	67.38	62.47	98.51	98.45	98.69

Source: Authors' estimation based on HIES data (2022), BBS.

Targeting errors based on vulnerability scorecard

Poverty and vulnerability criteria largely focus on income-based measures, while programme-specific eligibility often relies on complex and sometimes non-quantifiable factors. As a result, these criteria fail to capture the broader reality of multidimensional deprivation faced by many households. This disconnect leads to a mismatch between the objectives of social protection

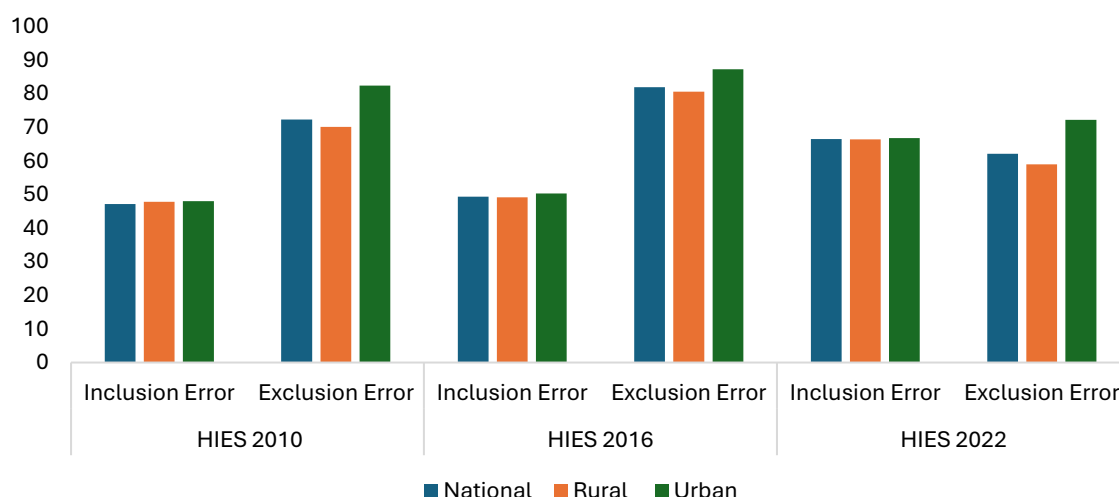
¹⁰ The government has universalised the Disability Allowance for all persons with disabilities. If all level of disabilities (mild, moderate, and severe) is considered, exclusion errors will be much higher.

programmes and the households that ultimately receive support.¹¹ In order to bridge this gap, an alternative approach has been introduced through the development of a vulnerability scorecard. This scorecard takes into account a wide range of factors that jointly determine the well-being of households. Rather than focusing on a single criterion, it considers education of children, type of housing, access to clean energy, ownership of basic household assets, and exposure to health and demographic risks such as the presence of widows, elderly members, chronic illness, or disability. Income-based poverty status and recent experience of shocks are also included so that the measure captures not only financial deprivation but also other aspects of vulnerability that affect resilience and quality of life.

The vulnerability threshold serves as the benchmark for determining eligibility for social protection, with targeting errors identified by comparing household vulnerability scores against this cutoff.¹² The results point to persistent inefficiencies in beneficiary selection across all three rounds of the HIES surveys. Exclusion errors rose from 72.3 per cent in 2010 to 82 per cent in 2016 before falling to 62.2 per cent in 2022, indicating progress but also showing that over six in ten vulnerable households remain outside social protection programmes (Figure 3.32). The improvement is most visible in rural areas, where exclusion declined from 80.7 per cent in 2016 to 59 per cent in 2022, aided by the expansion of flagship schemes such as the Old Age Allowance, Widow Allowance, and Disability Allowance. In urban areas, however, exclusion errors remain very high at 72.2 per cent.

Inclusion errors, by contrast, have risen steadily over the years. Nationally, the share of non-vulnerable households among programme beneficiaries increased from 47.2 per cent in 2010 to 66.5 per cent in 2022. Urban areas report slightly higher inclusion than rural areas.

Figure 2.32: Targeting errors based on vulnerability score threshold



Source: Authors' estimation based on HIES data (2010, 2026, and 2022), BBS.

¹¹ The scorecard is built on twelve indicators, with each indicator comprising categories that are assigned point values to reflect household conditions. Total scores range from 0 to 150, where lower scores indicate chronic vulnerability and exposure to multiple deprivations in living standards and livelihoods, while higher scores reflect relatively better-off households. See Annex XXX for the details on the vulnerability scorecard.

¹² A vulnerability threshold is defined as the mean score of income-based vulnerable households within each subregion.

Poverty impact of social protection programmes

Social protection in Bangladesh is intended to act as both a cushion against vulnerability and a pathway for reducing poverty. International evidence shows that higher investments in social protection are associated with lower poverty levels, while the absence of such systems leaves the poor far more exposed to economic and social shocks (ILO, 2021; Rahman et al., 2011). To design effective social protection strategies, it is crucial to understand their impact on reducing poverty and vulnerability.

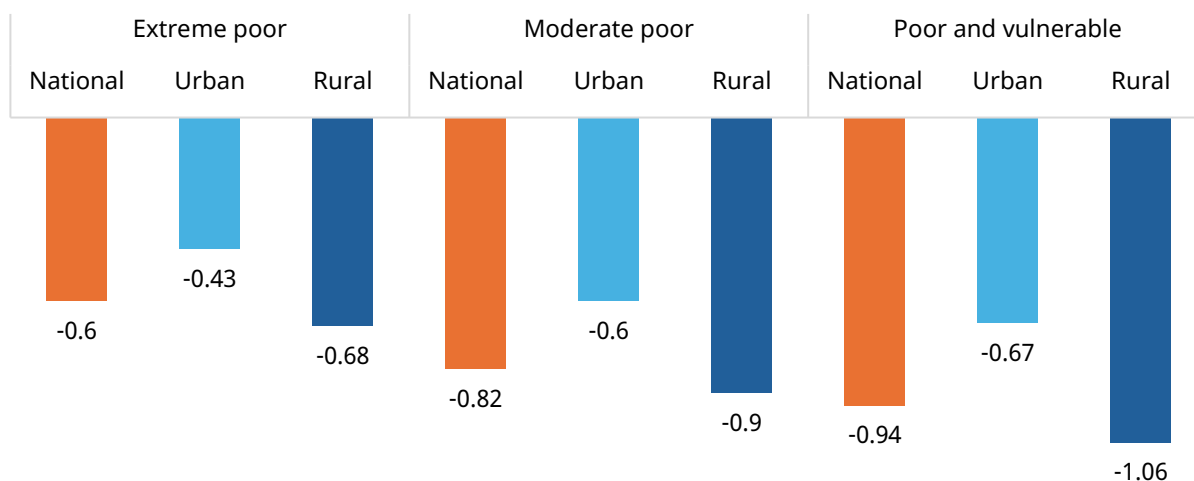
This study employed microsimulation analysis using HIES 2022 data, which provides detailed information on social protection coverage, aggregate and per capita income, and household expenditure. To estimate the impact of social protection on poverty and vulnerability, counterfactual consumption data were generated by deducting monthly social protection allowances from household per capita expenditure. It was assumed that the marginal propensity to consume (MPC) is unity, meaning that all social protection transfers were fully allocated to consumption. Using the counterfactual consumption data, the headcount poverty and vulnerability rates were recalculated based on the poverty line and vulnerability thresholds defined in HIES 2022. These counterfactual estimates represent the levels of poverty and vulnerability in the absence of social protection benefits. By comparing the actual poverty and vulnerability rates with their counterfactual counterparts, the study quantifies the extent to which social protection programmes contribute to poverty reduction and vulnerability mitigation.

The results show that social protection programmes in 2022 helped reduce national moderate poverty by 0.8 per centage points and extreme poverty by 0.6 per centage points. While this demonstrates a measurable contribution, the overall effect remains modest given the scale of poverty in the country. Urban areas in particular show a limited impact, with moderate poverty reduced by only 0.5 per centage points and extreme poverty by 0.43 per centage points. In absolute terms, this means that about 0.25 million urban residents were lifted out of extreme poverty and 0.3 million out of moderate poverty due to social protection transfers. Vulnerability in cities also declined, but only by 0.67 per centage points, which translates to roughly half a million people moving above the vulnerability threshold. The limited impact in urban settings points to higher living costs, relatively low benefit levels, and more restricted programme coverage.

In rural areas, the poverty-reducing effect is somewhat stronger. Extreme poverty fell by 0.68 per centage points, moderate poverty by 0.9 per centage points, and vulnerability by 1.06 per centage points. In terms of people affected, these changes correspond to about 0.8 million individuals lifted out of extreme poverty, 1 million out of moderate poverty, and 1.2 million moving out of vulnerability. The relatively higher impact in rural areas can be attributed to the greater coverage of social protection schemes in these regions, where poverty rates are higher.

While social protection programmes have contributed to poverty and vulnerability reduction, the overall impact remains small, particularly in urban areas. This underscores the need for reforms aimed at increasing benefit sizes and improving coverage in urban areas.

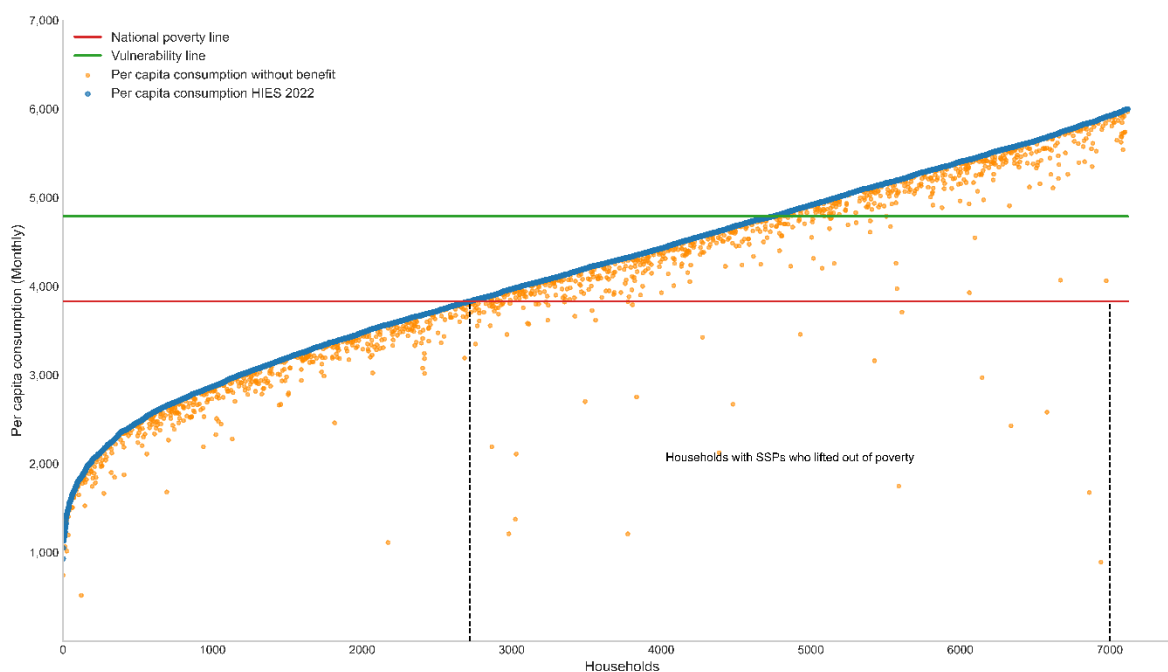
Figure 2.33: Impact of social protection programmes on poverty and vulnerability (percentage points), 2022



Source: Authors' analysis using HIES 2022 data.

A clearer picture of how social protection transfers influence household welfare can be seen from Figure 2.34 and Figure 2.35, which depict household per capita consumption before and after accounting for social protection benefits.

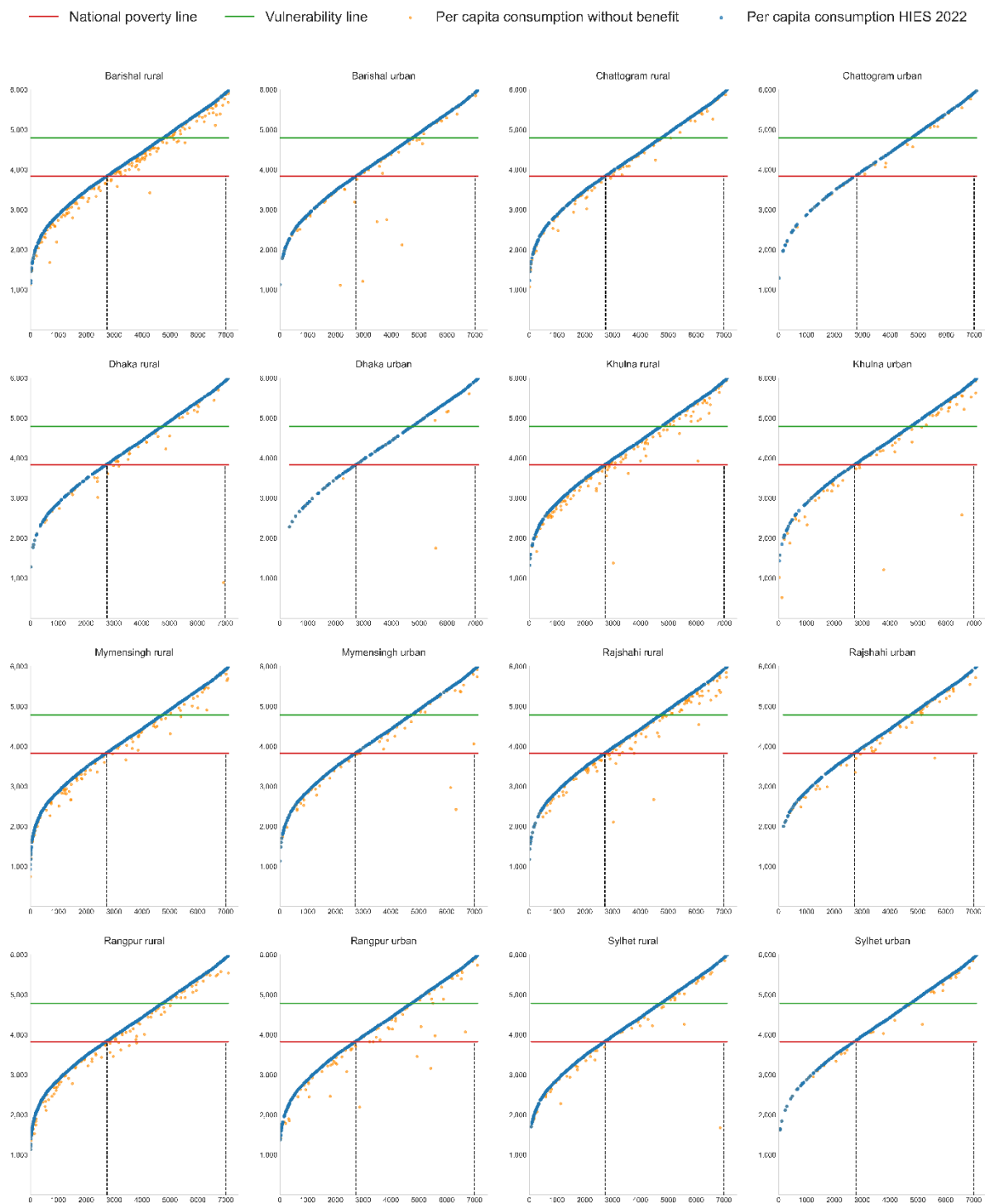
Figure 2.34: Poverty impacts of SSP at the national level



Note: Each dot reflects household monthly consumption expenditure per person. The monthly per capita consumption expenditures are first organised in ascending order and then plotted in the figure (blue dots). At the second stage, monthly per capita expenditure without SSP benefits is plotted (orange dots). This is done by subtracting SSP transfer from the total expenditure. Finally, the headcount poverty rate is calculated comparing the household monthly per capita consumption expenditure with their respective poverty line.

Source: Authors' estimation and presentation using HIES 2022 data, BBS.

Figure 2.35: Poverty impact of SSPs by different regions.



Note: Households' monthly per capita consumption expenditures are arranged in ascending order. Households lying between two vertical bars and below the poverty line income (red line) lifted out of poverty after getting the SSP benefits.

Source: Authors' estimation and presentation using HIES 2022 data, BBS.

Implication of zero inclusion errors on exclusion errors and poverty outcomes

If beneficiary selection were improved so that support reached only households that genuinely need assistance—that is, if inclusion errors were fully eliminated—exclusion errors could be reduced substantially. This insight is particularly relevant for policymakers, as it helps identify which programmes offer the greatest scope for efficiency gains through better targeting and which would continue to exclude large numbers of eligible households even after misallocation to ineligible beneficiaries is corrected. In practical terms, this scenario assumes that resources freed by removing ineligible beneficiaries are reallocated to those currently excluded. Simulation results based on HIES 2022 data are presented in Table 2.5.

The results indicate that all programmes can achieve efficiency gains at the programme level through improved targeting, although the magnitude of these gains varies considerably. For the Old Age Allowance, eliminating inclusion errors would reduce national exclusion errors by nearly 15 percentage points, with similar improvements observed in both rural and urban areas. The Widow Allowance shows more modest efficiency gains, with national exclusion errors declining by around 5.5 percentage points. The Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Stipend Programme (SESP) demonstrates strong responsiveness to improved targeting, with national exclusion falling by more than 31 percentage points.

The findings underscore that while enhanced targeting can significantly improve programme however it requires more fundamental reforms to eligibility criteria, programme design, and selection procedures to meaningfully reduce targeting errors and improve both efficiency and programme outcomes.

Table 2.5: Impact of setting inclusion error at “zero” on exclusion error for major SSPs by region (%)

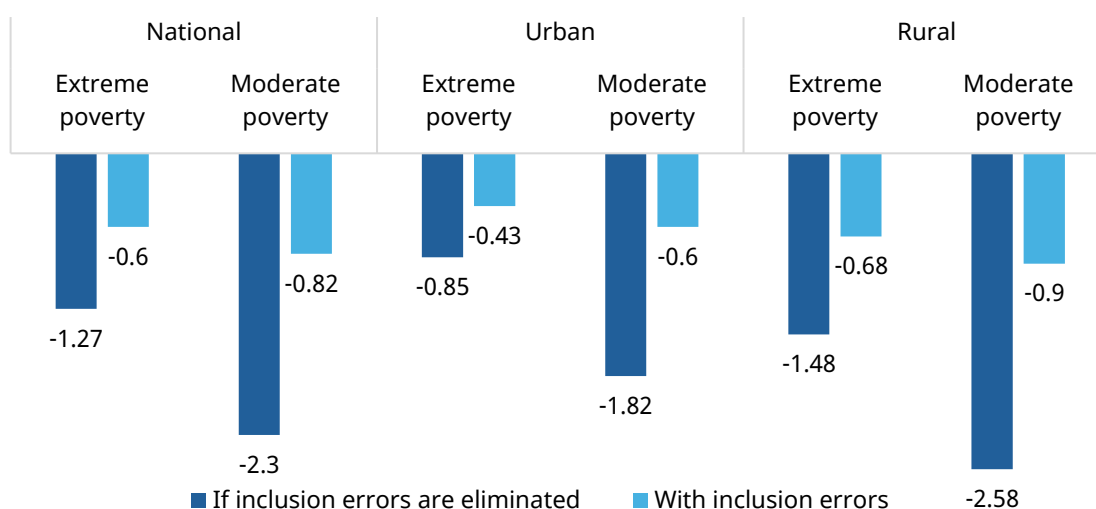
Programmes and specific criteria	Exclusion errors if inclusion errors are eliminated (%)			Decrease in exclusion errors (percentage points)		
	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
Old-age allowance (OAA): Age and average annual income below Tk.10,000	10.45	7.70	21.70	14.58	14.96	13.03
Allowance for the widow, deserted and destitute women: Age, income, and landless/ a maximum of 0.5 acre of land	79.33	76.61	87.65	5.47	7.09	2.45
Mother & Child Benefit Programme: Age and average annual income below Tk.8,000 for rural and below Tk.12,000 for urban households	97.24	97.27	97.19	1.64	1.70	1.61
Moderate poor and landless/ a maximum of 0.15 acre of land	88.06	86.54	92.13	9.63	10.57	7.11
Secondary and higher secondary education stipend programme:	55.42	51.28	67.44	31.64	34.46	23.46

Class 6 to 12 students from poor and vulnerable households						
Open Market Sales (OMS): Poor and vulnerable	95.59	95.25	96.52	2.92	3.20	2.17

Source: Authors' estimation based on HIES data (2022), BBS.

Social protection could have a far greater impact on poverty reduction if inclusion errors were eliminated. To explore this, a simulation was conducted to estimate the effects of redistributing resources saved by removing such errors to poor households (Figure 2.36). The results indicate that fully eliminating inclusion errors and reallocating the saved resources to eligible but currently excluded beneficiaries could more than double the poverty-reducing impact of social protection programmes. Nationally, extreme and moderate poverty would decline by 1.27 and 2.3 percentage points, respectively. The effect is particularly strong in rural areas, where extreme poverty could fall by 1.82 percentage points, compared with 0.85 points in urban areas, reflecting the higher potential of improved targeting in poorer regions. This suggests that ineffective targeting limits the potential of social protection, as resources allocated to ineligible beneficiaries could have a stronger impact if redirected to those in genuine need.

Figure 2.36: Poverty impact of social protection if inclusion errors could have been eliminated, 2022



Source: Authors' analysis using HIES 2022 data.

2.6 Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter shows that Bangladesh has continued to make progress in reducing poverty over the past decades, though the effectiveness of its social protection system remains limited. While sustained economic growth has lifted millions out of poverty, particularly in rural areas, the gains remain uneven. Urban poverty, though lower in prevalence, is growing in absolute terms and remains poorly addressed by the current social protection system.

Anchoring on the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), the social protection system has expanded in coverage and budgetary allocation. Programme spending is heavily concentrated

on a small number of schemes—notably pensions and old-age allowances—while numerous smaller initiatives are underfunded. Benefits are generally low in real terms, eroding their effectiveness as a buffer against poverty. Moreover, the system exhibits pronounced targeting inefficiencies: high exclusion errors leave a majority of poor and vulnerable households without support, while inclusion errors divert substantial resources to non-poor and non-vulnerable households, diluting the poverty impact of social transfers.

Microsimulation results confirm that existing social protection transfers have a modest effect on poverty reduction, with particularly limited impact in urban settings. Simulations also show that eliminating inclusion errors and reallocating resources to the truly needy could more than double the poverty-reduction effect of current spending, highlighting the transformative potential of improved targeting.

Overall, the analysis portrays a system that has expanded in reach but still faces gaps in targeting efficiency, adequacy of benefits, and coverage of vulnerable groups. Strengthening this system will require not only increased resources but also fundamental reforms in targeting, benefit adequacy, urban coverage, and institutional capacity.

Chapter 3: A Review of NSSS Programme Reforms

3.1 Introduction

Nearly a decade has passed since Bangladesh adopted the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) to bring coherence to its social protection system, where the strategy has proposed a clear roadmap of reforms. These reforms were grouped into two categories: i) programmatic reforms, which adopts lifecycle to social protection, at the same time, enhance quality and coverage of the schemes and make the system more inclusive for the poor and vulnerable; ii) institutional reforms, on the other hand, proposed to build stronger administrative capacity, ensuring better use of resources, restructuring programme administration, and improving coordination and monitoring of social protection programme implementation.

The NSSS is a roadmap of an initial 10-year first phase (2015-25) to achieve certain major reform objectives to strengthen the social protection system in Bangladesh. The NSSS was complemented by two detailed action plans which suggested time-bound activities to be undertaken by relevant line-ministries and departments and thematic groups to be attained along with comprehensive measures to track the progress of the programmes. The NSSS action plan Phase I (2016-21) was developed in 2016, outlining specific activities for ministries, divisions, and other cross-governmental bodies responsible for implementing social security. During the 2016-2021 period, some targets were met, but many indicators showed only slow progress. Furthermore, the Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020 significantly hampered the implementation process. After the completion of the first phase of the NSSS Action Plan, the Action Plan for Phase II (2021–2026) was enacted, assigning specific responsibilities to 34 implementing ministries, divisions, and agencies to meet the set targets and indicators.

In 2020, a midterm review of the NSSS was undertaken, which outlined background, progress and several challenges under each proposed reform. According to the review, even though the action plan had set out ambitious targets, progress on many flagship initiatives, including the child benefit, the vulnerable women’s benefit, and the proposed national social insurance scheme, remained at the design or pilot stage. The review also observed that the lifecycle approach to social security had not yet taken shape completely, as many programmes continued to operate in a fragmented manner, with limited consolidation across ministries. Moreover, coverage expansion was uneven, with the elderly allowance absorbing a large share of resources, while support for children, working-age adults, and the urban poor remained underdeveloped. These findings from the midterm review provided an important reference point for the formulation of the Phase II Action Plan and highlighted critical implementation gaps within the NSSS. As the second phase of the NSSS Action Plan approaches its conclusion in 2026, this presents a timely opportunity to assess the extent of progress achieved, identify remaining bottlenecks, and take stock of emerging challenges in Bangladesh’s social protection system.

The objective of this chapter is to track and assess the progress of programmatic reforms under the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) since its adoption, with particular emphasis on developments during the implementation of the Phase II Action Plan. The chapter systematically evaluates the extent to which these reforms have met the targets and objectives set out in the NSSS and its action plan, and examines areas where progress has been uneven or limited. In doing so, it identifies key gaps, challenges, and constraints that continue to hinder the effective implementation of the NSSS reform agenda to transform Bangladesh’s social protection system.¹³

The final review of programme reform implementation adopts a structured and systematic approach, benchmarking actual progress against the objectives articulated in the NSSS and the activities and performance indicators specified in the Action Plan. The Action Plan assigns time-bound activities and associated performance indicators to relevant line ministries and departments, providing a framework for monitoring implementation. Drawing on this framework, the chapter reviews approximately 150 identifiable performance indicators across more than 30 ministries and departments. The assessment is organised around the key areas of programmatic reform identified in the NSSS as essential for building a stronger and more inclusive social security system, and the final review is conducted in alignment with these reform priorities. The NSSS programmatic reforms are the following:

- i. Strengthening Social Security for children
- ii. Strengthening Programmes for working age (age 19-59)
- iii. Strengthening Programmes for vulnerable women (age 19-59)
- iv. Comprehensive pension system for the elderly (age 60+)
- v. Strengthening the system of social security for people with disability
- vi. Strengthening the Social Security System for the urban poor
- vii. Consolidate and reform food security type programmes
- viii. Consolidate small and special schemes/programmes

3.2 Strengthening Social Security for the Children (age <1 – 18)

Children are among the most vulnerable groups in society, and their well-being is often threatened when households experience poverty, economic shocks, or social crises. Ensuring that children have access to essential services such as nutrition, healthcare, education, and safe environments is not only a moral obligation but also a safeguard against the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Well-designed social protection programmes can act as a shield, protecting children from dropping out of school, forced into child labour, or facing neglect and abuse. Therefore, it is

¹³ In updating the current implementation status, the study drew on the most recent data from the Social Protection Budget Reports (FY2025 and FY2026), the Action Plan Progress Report (2024), and other relevant study findings. The Midterm Review (MTR) also served as an important reference point, providing a clear background and contextual understanding of each proposed reform. In addition, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with relevant ministries and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted across selected upazilas were utilised to capture field-level insights and assess implementation progress.

essential to strengthen child-centred social protection initiatives so that every child can grow up with security and realise their full potential.

Investing in social protection for childcare represents a high-impact yet underutilised strategy for promoting inclusive economic development. Evidence indicates that expanding affordable, high-quality childcare services generates substantial economic and social returns by enabling higher labour force participation—particularly among women—thereby increasing household incomes and reducing gender disparities in employment. The macroeconomic payoff is considerable: social protection spending exhibits a strong multiplier effect, with every taka invested generating nearly four takas in GDP in the first year and a cumulative return of almost twelve takas over a decade (Razzaque et al, 2025). Beyond its immediate demand-side effects, the childcare sector itself creates employment opportunities, especially in underserved areas, contributing to poverty reduction and economic diversification. At the same time, access to quality early childcare strengthens children’s cognitive and social development, laying the foundation for improved educational attainment and a more skilled, productive future workforce. Reliable childcare also enhances parental well-being by reducing stress and improving work–life balance, with positive spillovers for productivity and workforce stability.

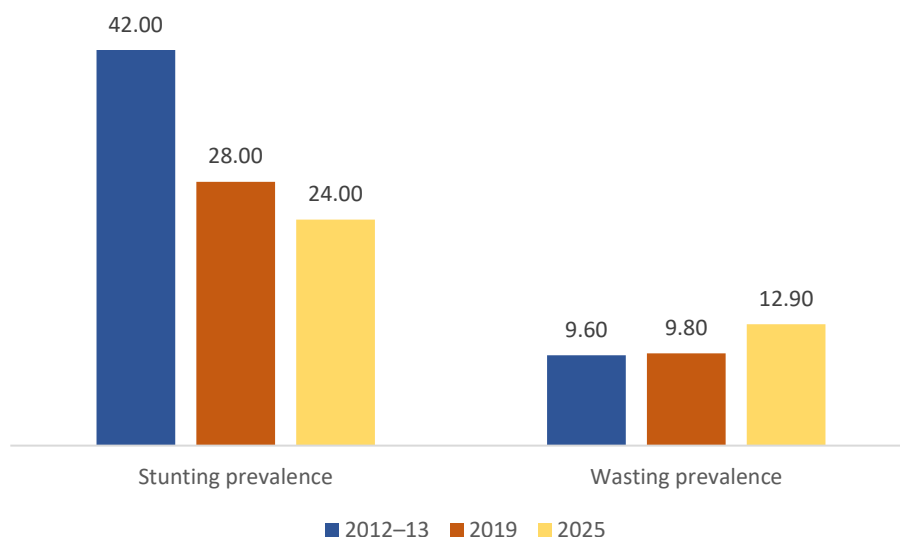
The NSSS places strong emphasis on early childhood welfare and proposed several reforms to strengthen their social security. The reforms for child-specific social protection can be categorised as, i) introducing a child benefit scheme for young children (up to age 4); ii) strengthening school stipend programmes; iii) rolling out school meal programmes; iv) continuing support for orphan; iv) ensuring child maintenance payment for abandoned children; v) strengthening immunisation, child healthcare, nutrition, water and sanitation programme.

3.2.1 Child benefit for young children (up to age 4)

For a child, the first 1,000 days of life are critical for physical growth and cognitive development. During this period nutritional deficiency can lead to irreversible consequences, like stunting, wasting or even long-term learning impairments. This is also apparent from recent MICS survey (2025), which indicates that a sizeable share of children shows signs of nutritional deprivation during early childhood, with 24.0 per cent of under-five children classified as stunted and 12.9 per cent classified as wasted, while stunting has declined over time, wasting has increased (Figure 3.1).¹⁴ Overall, it highlights that both longer term deficits in diets and care as well as shorter term shocks linked to illness, food insecurity, or sudden household stress continue to shape child growth outcomes. This emphasises the need for child-sensitive social protection that can stabilise consumption, protect access to basic services, and reduce the risk that temporary shocks translate into lasting developmental losses.

¹⁴ Stunting is when a child is too short for their age, usually due to long term or repeated malnutrition that can also affect development. Wasting is when a child is too thin for their height, usually due to recent rapid weight loss or the failure to gain weight, moderately or severely wasted children has an increased risk of death, but this can be treated.

Figure 3.1: Stunting and wasting among children under age 5 (%)



Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2025, preliminary report. Recognising this, the NSSS proposed bringing all major child support programmes under one broad intervention to be called the 'Child Benefit', with the aim of covering roughly half of all children in the specific age group (0-4) by 2030. The benefit was envisaged as a monthly transfer, paid to the mother or primary caregiver, and limited to two children per household to avoid creating incentives for larger families. The strategy also recommended periodic revisions to both the eligibility age and the benefit amount, considering that the share of children aged 0-4 is projected to decline to around 7 per cent by 2030.

From MA and LMA to the MCBP: Programme Consolidation and Rollout

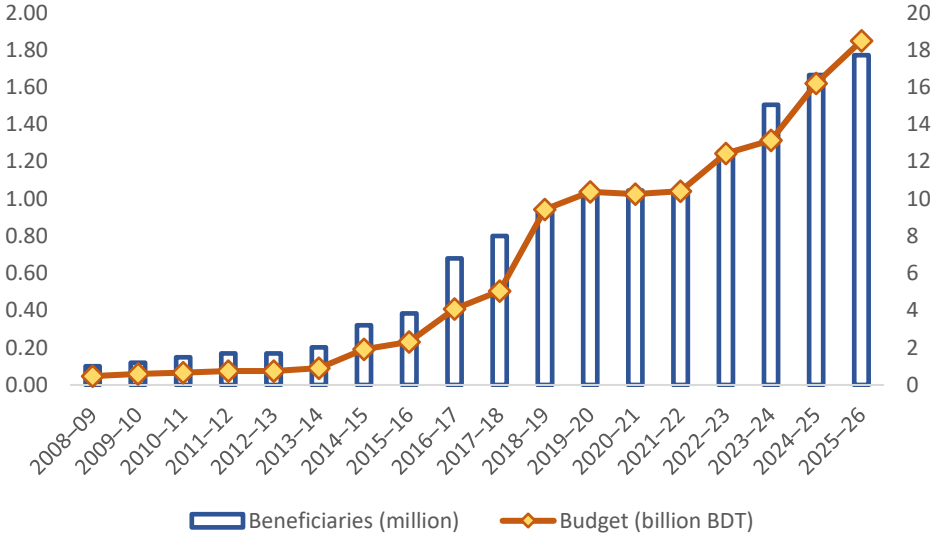
The Maternity Allowance (MA) and Lactating Mother Allowance (LMA) programmes started as two separate cash support schemes under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, with MA operating in rural areas since 2007-08 and LMA in urban areas since 2011-12, and both providing a monthly allowance (BDT 800 for 24 months) alongside basic counselling and training on maternal and child health and nutrition. From 2016-17, the MALMA programmes increased the stipulated duration of receiving the allowances to 36 months, and from 2018-19, the government-to-person (G2P) payment system was adopted. As the two schemes expanded, their separate administrative channels and geographic targeting made it harder to manage them as a single, consistent support package for mothers and very young children, and the NSSS therefore set a direction to combine them under a single intervention, the Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP), for children aged 0-4.

The shift was implemented in phases, with MA and LMA first integrated into IMALMA with revised eligibility criteria, which was intended to be transformed into MCBP. The MCBP was then initiated in July 2019 as a pilot in 64 upazilas and scaled nationally in FY2022-23, including all Union, Municipalities, City Corporations and garments factories. The programme supports poor pregnant

and lactating women through defined eligibility criteria.¹⁵ Payments are made through G2P systems on a quarterly basis, with transaction costs borne by the government, reflecting efforts to improve delivery efficiency and reduce barriers for beneficiaries, and the programme manual has also been revised to strengthen targeting and implementation.

The programme fits broadly with the NSSS emphasis on early childhood, although the earlier recommendation to continue support until a child reaches age four has not yet been built into the current design, as it currently provides benefits for 36 months, with a monthly cash transfer of BDT 850, revised from the earlier BDT 800. MoWCA has also undertaken research to identify suitable benefit packages in collaboration with the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). In terms of coverage, by FY2024–25, MoWCA had gradually scaled up and covered 1.7 million beneficiaries across the country, including poverty and nutrition deficient upazilas, and it is targeted to reach 1.8 million beneficiaries in FY2025–26 (Figure 3.2), which is 30 per cent of an estimated total target of 6 million. Looking ahead, MoWCA aims to expand the programme to about 7.5 million children aged 0–4 by 2030, with the stated objective of supporting safe births and helping reduce stunting and wasting.

Figure 3.2: Number of beneficiaries and budget allocations under MA, LMA and MCBP



Source: Data obtained from the Finance Division, Ministry of Finance.

¹⁵ Eligibility for the MCBP starts once a woman’s pregnancy is confirmed. She must be aged 20–35 and must be in her first or second pregnancy, with a third pregnancy considered only in exceptional cases such as a recent fatal death or child mortality linked to the earlier pregnancy. A NID is required to enrol in the programme. The programme targets low-income households, with a monthly household income ceiling of BDT 8,000 in rural areas and between BDT 8,000 and BDT10,000 in urban areas. In areas where enrolment is conducted through BGMEA and BKMEA, the total household income range is BDT 8,000 to BDT 12,000. If places are limited, priority is given to the most disadvantaged households and to women facing added vulnerability, such as women with disabilities or those who are widowed or deserted (MoWCA, 2024; Social Protection Budget Report, FY2025-26).

Note: The figure shows revised estimates, except data for 2025-26 represents target beneficiaries and proposed budget. The chart presents combined beneficiary and budget data for the Maternity Allowance (MA) and Lactating Mother Allowance (LMA) programmes from FY2008–09 to FY2020–21. From FY2021–22 onwards, the data shown refer to the Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP).

Despite these advances, implementation experience continues to indicate challenges that go beyond the cash transfer itself. Findings from a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices survey conducted in 2024 highlight the influence of social norms and gender roles that deprioritise women’s nutrition, restrictive cultural dietary practices, and inadequate awareness of maternal health and nutrition. The survey also points programme delivery issues, such as beneficiary selection being influenced in some cases by personal or political connections. Together, these factors can weaken service utilisation, reinforce unequal food distribution within households, persistent malnutrition among mothers and children, and the exclusion of deserving beneficiaries (EU, UNICEF, MoWCA and RAPID, 2024). At present, the programme implements Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) activities in selected upazilas, to complement the financial support with awareness-based interventions.

Overall, the MCBP represents a significant step toward the NSSS vision of lifecycle-based support for young children, apparent from the programme consolidation, expanding coverage, and recent improvements in benefit levels and administrative systems. Going forward, the effectiveness of the scheme is likely to depend more on improving early enrolment, ensuring consistent targeting practices, strengthening linkages with health and nutrition services, and aligning programme design more closely with the lifecycle intent set out in the NSSS. Addressing non-financial barriers through stronger community engagement, and sustained BCC efforts remains critical for the programme to achieve its intended outcomes. How these issues are addressed during the remaining action plan period will largely determine whether the child benefit evolves into a robust early childhood protection instrument or remains primarily an expanded maternal assistance programme.

Table 3.1: Implementation progress on child benefit scheme

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicators	Time frame	Progress (October 2025)
Introduce and scale up Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) for children of 0-4 years.	Prepare, consult, and submit a detailed implementation plan of the Mother and Child Benefit Programme to the Cabinet Division. Existing MA and Lactating Mother Allowance (LMA) programme renamed as Mother and Child Benefit	Detailed implementation plan prepared and submitted. Mother and Child Benefit Programme applicable for the whole country	Dec 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MoWCA introduced and scaled up Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) and currently providing benefit for 36 months. - Detail Implementation Plan of Mother and Child Benefit Programme prepared, consulted, submitted and approved by Cabinet Division in June 2022. - MA (Maternity Allowance) and Lactating Mother Allowance (LMA) programme were renamed as Mother and Child Benefit Programme in FY 2022-23.

	Programme			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mother and Child Benefit Programme started to be implemented for the whole country including all Union, Municipalities, City Corporations and garments factories from FY 2022-23. - MCBP Implementation Directive Approved by MoWCA in 2024
	Review both the benefits and age of eligibility from the pregnancy period to the 4th birthday of a child as per NSSS direction. Gradual scale-up of Mother and Child Benefit Programme in poverty-stricken and nutrition-deficient Upazilas.	The evidence available on benefits packages and age of eligibility.	Dec 2022 Jun 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MoWCA has undertaken research to identify the best benefits packages in collaboration with United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) as part of evidence generation. -
	Establish efficient and effective convergence and coordination between relevant line ministries and departments at central as well as field Level – MoWCA, MoHFW, MoLG, A2i, etc. to ensure integrated health, nutrition and other services are available at the field level. Age-specific learning on nutrition, stimulation, early childhood care, and cognitive development was rolled out.	MCBP programme MIS Interoperable with health, family welfare and birth registration data. Number of beneficiaries raised to 2.6 million covering poverty and nutrition-deficient Upazilas Relevant training modules are available	Jun 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Department of Women Affairs under MoWCA has signed MoU with the Health Service Division, Family Welfare Division and Office of the Register General of Birth and Death Registration to ensure effective convergence of health and birth registration services for children under MCBP. DWA also successfully conducted interoperability between MCBP MIS and with Election Commission NID database to avoid double dipping and ghost beneficiaries. - The number of beneficiaries originally covered was 1.3 million in FY 2022-23.
	Introduce and operationalize telehealth and nutrition counseling services for pregnant and lactating mothers.	The number of beneficiaries raised to 4 million covering poverty and nutrition-deficient Upazilas.	Jun 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DWA developed, approved, and printed age-specific 3 learning modules, organized master trainer ToT and facilitated training for beneficiaries on nutrition, stimulation, early childhood care, and cognitive development.
	Design and test climate and shock responsive elements into the programme.	The number of beneficiaries raised to 6 million (50% of children from 0 to 4 years) covering poverty and undernutrition Upazilas. A telehealth and nutrition counselling platform established and operationalized Climate and shock-	Jun 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MoWCA has undertaken a pilot initiative to test climate and shock-responsive elements into the Mother and Child Benefit Programme in the North-Western region of the country covering four districts (Kurigram, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, and Sirajganj) which are mostly disaster prone such as monsoon floods, with the purpose of ensuring the protection in shock so that the beneficiaries covered by the social protection & shock responsive framework with the technical assistance from UNWFP.

		responsive elements tested and operationalized.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total 3912 MCBP beneficiaries received BDT 5000 cash transfer before flood in this location as part of Anticipatory Action. - Regarding the target beneficiary number, by FY2024-25 MoWCA gradually scaled up and covered 1.7 million beneficiaries from the whole country including poverty and nutrition-deficient Upazilas. - Targeted to reach 1.8 million beneficiaries in FY 2025-26 which is 30% of actual target of 6 million.
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Source: MoWCA Progress Report Up to October 2025.

3.2.2 Strengthening the school stipend programmes

The stipend programmes are the largest form of social protection support for children in Bangladesh in terms of coverage, reaching millions of students across primary and secondary education. Despite this scale, transfer amounts remain low, and inflation has steadily reduced their real value, limiting how far they can ease education costs for poor households. Moreover, in families where more than one child receives a stipend, the support often has to cover the needs of several children at once, so the effective value per child becomes smaller in practice. Recognising these shortcomings, the NSSS proposed two critical reforms:

- i) extend coverage to the poorest 50 per cent of children in both primary and secondary schools, irrespective of gender; and
- ii) increase and index the transfer amount to inflation, ensuring that the value of the stipend remains stable in real terms.

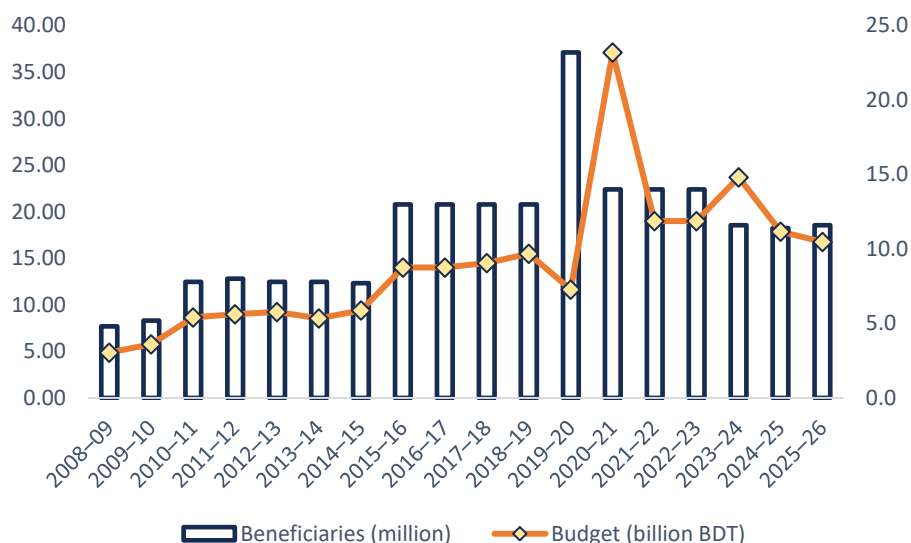
The strategy also recommended that up to two children per family be allowed to benefit concurrently without any reduction in entitlement. These reforms aimed to reduce dropout rates, alleviate the financial burden on poor households, and make education more inclusive. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and the Ministry of Education were tasked with preparing detailed implementation plans, with the revised schemes scheduled for rollout in July 2016.

The Primary Education Stipend Programme, introduced in FY1999-00, was originally designed to encourage school enrolment among children from extremely poor households. From FY2015-16, however, the programme was made universal across all government primary schools and madrasahs, removing selection criteria and thereby largely sidestepping beneficiary targeting challenges linked to eligibility determination. In 2020, the stipend amount was increased by 50 per cent to strengthen incentives for enrolment and attendance and to reduce dropout, while current monthly transfers under the scheme remain modest at around BDT 75 to 200.

The number of stipend recipients peaked sharply in FY2019-20 at around 23.2 million, before declining to 11.6 million by FY2025-26. A notable drop is observed from FY2020-21, which is widely understood to reflect administrative clean-up linked to the introduction of a single registry MIS and

the shift to G2P electronic fund transfers, which helped remove ghost beneficiaries and reduce double dipping in the payment system. Budget allocations follow a similar pattern, with a spike in FY2020–21 (BDT 37.12 billion) followed by a lower, steadier level, reaching BDT 16.76 billion in FY2025–26 (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Number of stipend recipients and budget allocations under Primary Education Stipend Programme (PESP)



Source: Data obtained from the Finance Division, Ministry of Finance.

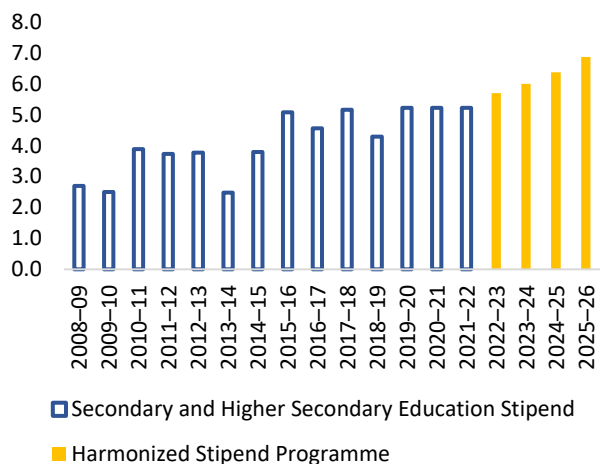
Note: The figure shows revised estimates, except data for 2025-26 represents target beneficiaries and proposed budget.

At the secondary level, the Secondary Education Stipend Programme or the Harmonised Stipend Programme (SESP/HSP) supports students in grades 6–12, including those enrolled in madrasah and technical streams. The stipend amount under this scheme ranges from BDT 200–400. The harmonised structure reflects an earlier consolidation under the Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED), where four separate programmes, the Secondary Education Stipend Project (SESP), Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP), Secondary Education Sector Investment Programme (SESIP), and the Higher Secondary Stipend Project (HSSP), were brought together in 2020 into a single programme now referred to as the Stipend for Secondary, Higher Secondary and Madrasah Education. In the FY2025–26 Social Protection Budget Report, it is described as means-tested, pro-poor stipend programme to increase access to education and to reduce dropout in secondary education, with a target of about 6.89 million beneficiaries and an allocation of BDT 27.32 billion (Figure 3.4 and 3.5).

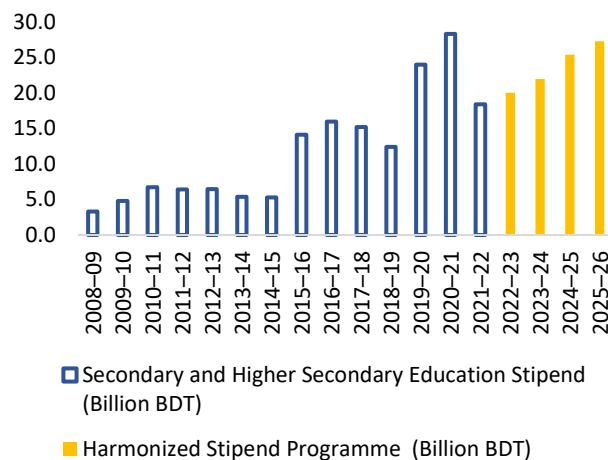
Taken together, the primary and secondary stipend schemes were expected to cover more than 18.48 million students in FY2025–26, confirming their role as a major channel of education-linked social assistance, with support provided for up to two students per household. There is also a stipend programme under the Technical and Madrasa Education Division, which targets low-

income and poor students and provides stipends linked to students' merit-based results. In FY2025–26, the scheme aims to reach 2.1 million beneficiaries with a budget allocation of BDT 6.57 billion.

3.4: Number of stipend recipients (in million)



3.5: Budget allocation for stipends (billion BDT)



Source: Authors' representation using data from the MoF.

Despite these achievements, several constraints continue to limit how far the stipend can ease schooling costs for poorer households. Coverage is still more concentrated at the primary level and stipend amounts have not been adjusted regularly to keep pace with inflation, as recommended by the NSSS. Recent findings from a BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) field survey in 2025, reveals several operational challenges in mobile money distribution, such as blocked SIM cards, transaction delays, and account security concerns, that prevent some beneficiaries from accessing their stipends. Communication and outreach also remain weak in many areas, leaving some eligible families unaware of application procedures or programme benefits. Moreover, targeting issues continue to result in the exclusion of deserving students, particularly from the poorest families, due to weaknesses in identification systems, limited community awareness, and administrative inefficiencies.

The NSSS and Midterm review highlighted that education stipends were expected to be strengthened over time, including through periodic increases and indexation to inflation so that their real value would not erode, yet stipend amounts have remained modest in nominal terms even as living costs have risen. In the current design, benefits are calculated per student in the household, but support is provided for a maximum of two children per household, which sets a clear ceiling on how much a family can receive. For primary students, stipend levels vary by grade, with the benefit set at around Tk 75 for pre-primary, Tk 150 for classes 1–5 (revised in 2021 from Tk 100), and Tk 200 for classes 6–8.

In terms of action plan progress, implementation updates indicate mixed outcomes. While coverage under primary and secondary stipend programmes has expanded and stipend amounts have been revised, the envisaged rationalisation of transfer values in line with inflation has not been systematically applied. In parallel, complementary measures such as timely distribution of free textbooks have faced implementation delays, pointing to uneven progress across different components of the school stipend reform agenda.

3.2: Implementation progress on school stipend programmes

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Time frame	Implementation Ministry/Division	Progress
Early Childhood Education and Stipend Programmes	Sustain Primary Education Stipend Programme	Transfer amount rationalised considering inflation	Jul-23	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME)	Stipend amount increased.
	Expand coverage of Primary and Secondary Stipend Programmes	Number of stipend recipients increased	Continuous	MoPME / SHED	Coverage expanded.
	Maintain free textbook distribution to school-aged children	Textbooks distributed on time annually	Annual	SHED / MoPME	Not timely delivered.

Source: KII with relevant ministries.

3.2.3 School meals programme

The school meal programme represents a key component of the NSSS vision to improve child nutrition, learning outcomes, and school attendance through regular, nutritious meals provided to all students. After recognising the success of the school meals pilot run by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, NSSS proposed its continuation and possible expansion. The programme also encourages active community participation; particularly through the engagement of local people and mothers in meal preparation, aligning with the NSSS-proposed Mother’s Club model. In addition, it highlights the importance of involving local food suppliers to ensure sustainability and community ownership of the initiative.

It is crucial to distinguish between the school feeding programme and the school meal programme envisioned by the NSSS. The feeding programme operating since 2001, has primarily relied on distributing micronutrient fortified biscuits, largely in areas with high poverty prevalence and low educational outcomes. The school meals model, on the other hand, is a more structured package in which children receive freshly cooked meals alongside fortified biscuits in a weekly pattern, aligned with explicit nutritional standards. MoPME has taken an important policy step by adopting the National School Meal Policy 2019, which sets out a framework for expanding school meal initiatives, with universal coverage treated as a longer-term goal.¹⁶ However, KII feedback from MoPME indicates that the cooked-meal approach was paused and the programme was re-established

¹⁶ The policy aims to meet at least 30 per cent of students’ daily caloric intake and 50 per cent of their micronutrient requirements through school meals, in addition, 10–15 per cent of energy from protein and 15–30 per cent from fat (less than 10 per cent from saturated fats) following the Bangladesh Desirable Dietary Guidelines.

primarily under the school feeding modality. Additionally, the Government has completed a feasibility study for a new National School Feeding Programme with WFP’s technical support.¹⁷ At present, the programme reaches students in 19,419 schools across 150 upazilas (Table 2), although coverage has varied across years. Similarly, budget allocations also varied, rising to 6.43 billion BDT in 2020–21, falling sharply to 0.35 billion BDT from 2021–22 onwards, and then increasing to a record high of 21.64 billion BDT in 2025–26 (Table 3).

Evidence from a recent assessment suggests that, while fortified biscuits are comparatively straightforward to deliver at scale, moving to cooked meals is operationally more demanding because it depends on reliable infrastructure, food safety arrangements, and routine monitoring, which is why the shift has been approached as a phased transition rather than an immediate nationwide shift (Sustainable Financing Initiative for School Health and Nutrition, 2022). Moreover, the same assessment notes that the biscuit modality offers a predictable daily nutritional intake,¹⁸ and that evaluations have often linked it with better participation outcomes, including enrolment, attendance, and completion, alongside improved nutrition indicators in some study areas. However, it also flags implementation and measurement weaknesses, reinforcing the importance of stronger monitoring systems as coverage expands.

Table 3.3: Implementation progress on school meal programme

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicators	Time frame	Progress (October 2025)
School Meal and Nutrition Programmes	Develop and implement effective school meal model	Suitable modality identified	Dec 2023	School meal program stopped and reestablished as school feeding program.
	Expand school meal programme to all primary schools	Number of schools and beneficiaries increased	Continuous	Currently 31 lac students from 19,419 schools in 150 upazilas.

Source: KII with MoPME.

Table 3.4: Budget and coverage of school feeding programme

Year	Beneficiaries (million)	Budget (billion BDT)
2008–09	0.6	0.04
2009–10	0.12	0.07
2010–11	0.31	0.18
2011–12	2.44	2.95
2012–13	2.44	4.57
2013–14	4.21	5.16

¹⁷ WFP has continued to support the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education in finalising a national school feeding programme proposal for the period July 2023 to June 2026. Source- docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000149670/download/

¹⁸ A 75g packet providing around 338 kcal, with micronutrient fortification sufficient to meet a large share of daily micronutrient needs on average.

2014–15	3.3	4.55
2015–16	3.5	5.08
2016–17	3.5	5.4
2017–18	3.5	4.84
2018–19	1.93	5.18
2019–20	0	4.65
2020–21	4.1	6.43
2021–22	0.13	0.35
2022–23	4	0.52
2023–24	3.52	0.45
2024–25	3.6	0.45
2025–26	—	21.64

Source: Social protection budget report, different years.

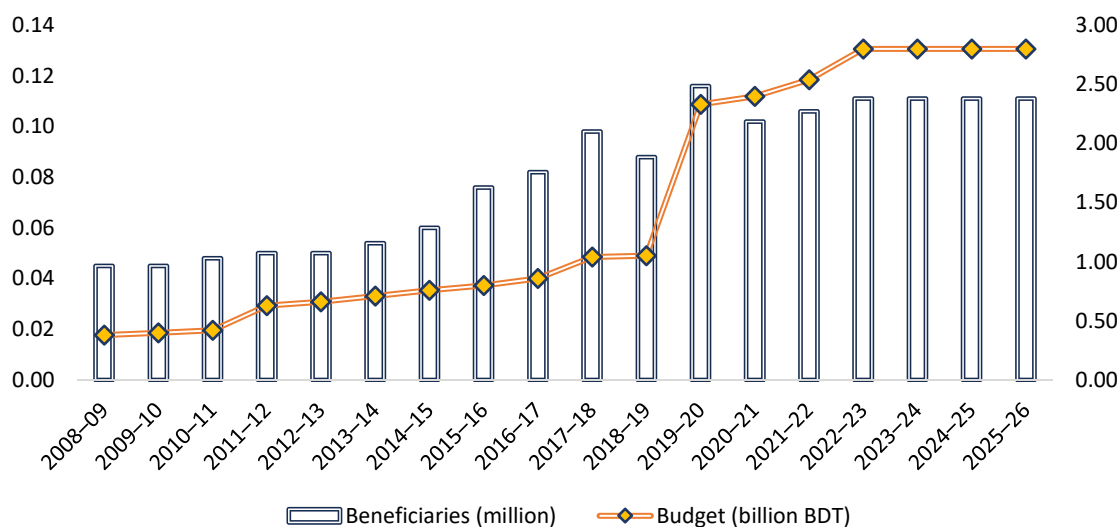
3.2.4 Continuing Support for Orphan

Since the 1950s, the Government has played an active role in the care and rehabilitation of orphans by establishing state orphanages, initially managed by the Directorate of Primary Education and later transferred to the Department of Social Services (DSS). Over time, the DSS has expanded its scope, establishing several institutions dedicated to the education, training, and rehabilitation of destitute children, street children and abandoned infants. Recognising that orphaned and abandoned children require special attention and resources, the Government through the MoSW has committed to further strengthening and expanding these initiatives as outlined in the NSSS. These interventions aim not only to meet basic needs but also to promote long-term development and inclusion for disadvantaged children. Recent implementation updates suggest that the orphan care system has continued to expand through government run and supported institutions, including the construction of additional facilities, alongside increases in the subsistence allowance in recent years; however, operational constraints remain visible, particularly staff shortages and difficulties in recruiting and retaining care providers, which has affected service quality in some institutions (Table 4).

Currently, two key programmes “Food Support to Residents in Government Orphanages and Other Institutions” and “Grants to Non-Government Orphanages” are ongoing. Both target poor and vulnerable children and combinedly targeted to reach 1,29,000 orphans in FY2025-26.

Under Grants to Non-Government Orphanages, the MoSW has recently doubled the support, increasing the monthly allowance from BDT 1,000 to BDT 2,000 per child (BDT 1,600 for food, BDT 200 for clothing, and BDT 200 for medical and other expenses). Beneficiary coverage under this scheme increased gradually from about 0.05 million in FY 2008–09 to around 0.12 million by FY 2019–20 and then remained stable after FY 2022–23 at 0.11 million. Over the same period, budget allocations rose steadily and then increased sharply from FY 2019–20 onwards, reaching 2.80 billion BDT by FY 2022–23 and staying at that level thereafter (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Budget and coverage of capitation grants for orphans in non-gov. orphanages programmes



Source: Social protection budget report, different years.

There are 21 categories of institutional care for child protection, apart from the state-run orphanages, a large number of privately managed orphanages operate at the local level to support the upbringing and development of parentless children from poor families, established through community efforts and supported by voluntary donations. The DSS, under the MoSW, provides assistance to these orphanages, which are officially registered under the Voluntary Organizations (Registration and Control) Ordinance, 1961. The nurturing, treatment, and education of children in these institutions are supported through Capitation Grants, aimed at helping orphaned children become skilled and productive members of society.

Table 3.5: Implementation progress on programme for orphans

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Timeframe	Implementation on Ministry/Division	Status
Improve programmes for orphans	Maintain quality of services.	Programme continued.	Every year	Ministry of Social Welfare	There is 85 "Shishu Poribar" with 18 being constructed and 6 "Baby Home" with 1 being constructed- for the orphans and vulnerable children. Increasing the coverage has been a priority along with the Subsistence Allowance being increased from BDT 2200 to BDT 5000 gradually. However, the care provider positions remain empty in most of the institutions. Young women are hired to provide care in these homes, but the positions are titled as

					"Aya" or "Khalamma" which creates a barrier for people to apply or join in such positions. Currently, all the institutions are facing this and they have a smaller number of workers than required which is making it difficult to provide quality service.
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Source: Progress report 2023 NSSS Action Plan (2021-26).

3.2.5 Ensuring child maintenance payments for abandoned children

The NSSS introduced a forward-looking proposal to address the growing problem of child maintenance in single-parent families. It recognised that many children were being raised by a single parent after the other had abandoned their responsibilities, leaving families vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. To address this challenge, the government planned to pass legislation that would make both parents legally and financially responsible for their children, irrespective of their living arrangements. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) was tasked with designing the system in 2015, with the aim of enforcing maintenance payments by 2017.

Over time, the Department of Social Services (DSS) has established six Baby Homes across the six administrative divisions, known as Chhoto Moni Nibash, to provide comprehensive care for unclaimed, abandoned, and trafficked children up to the age of six. These facilities offer food, healthcare, protection, education, and nursing services, with the primary objective of rehabilitating and reintegrating children into society. Each Chhoto Moni Nibash at the field level is overseen by a management committee chaired by the Deputy Commissioner, with the caretaker serving as member-secretary to ensure effective implementation of committee activities. Once children reach the age of six, they are transferred to Sarkari Shishu Paribar (government orphanages), where they continue to receive care, protection, education and training up to the age of 18 years.

To expand geographic coverage, two additional baby homes have been proposed and total BDT 1.40 billion has been allocated in FY2025–26 to support the ‘Establishment/re-establishment of Sarkari Shishu Paribar and Baby Home’ programme.” Regarding the progress, a law has been prepared on child maintenance payments in line with the NSSS proposal; although, it remains at the draft stage and has yet to be enacted. The government remains committed to providing institutional care and long-term protection for abandoned and parentless children from birth to eighteen years of age, ensuring that no child is left without support or protection. Additionally, based on the NSSS recommendation of increasing coverage for abandoned children, the government has assessed that the existing capacity is adequate, as the number of abandoned children has declined in recent years.¹⁹ Overall, the initiatives are expected not only to improve the overall well-being of children but also to strengthen accountability, enhance the financial stability of single-parent households, particularly those headed by mothers and enable greater participation of women in the labour market.

¹⁹ Information drawn from Key Informant Interview (KII) with the Department of Social Services (DSS).

On services for children in conflict with law and children in contact with law, children are both victim and offenders; witness or victim are under contact with the law and offenders under conflict with the law. KII with DSS informed that only a draft manual has been prepared at this stage for effective operation. In terms of service infrastructure, eight Child Development Centres are planned, with three currently operational, and another three has been approved and being constructed specifically for the children in conflict with law. DSS also mentioned that additional centres need to be constructed soon for improving the quality of service as the current capacity of the institutions/homes are 600 but around 922 children are staying in them.

Table 3.6: Implementation progress on programmes for abandoned children

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Timeframe	Implementation Ministry/Division	Status
Improve programmes for abandoned children	1. Update manual for effective operation. 2. Maintain quality of services. 3. Increase coverage.	1. Manual prepared. 2. Programme continued. 3. Coverage increased annually.	Every year	Ministry of Social Welfare	The "Baby Home" for 0-7 year old children and "Shishu Poribar" for 7-18 years old children, these are being used for the abandoned and street children as well, where the same issue of under-staffing remains. However, there were no separate guideline for the abandoned or street children for which there has been a draft law prepared but it has not yet been passed. In terms of coverage, it is already enough given the declining number of abandoned children.
Child Maintenance Payments	Implement Cabinet-approved Child Maintenance Payment Policy for abandoned children	Implementation framework operational	Up to June 2025	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	Implementation on progress.
	A study was conducted on the pattern of parental support for abandoned children.	Study report submitted to the Cabinet Division.	June 2023	MoWCA	The study yet to undertake.

Source: Progress report 2023 NSSS Action Plan (2021-26) and information drawn from KII with DSS.

3.3 Programmes for the working-age population

The existing social security system in Bangladesh provides limited support to the working-age population through various programmes. However, the majority of the labour force remains engaged in the informal sector, lacking formal livelihood security and access to contributory

protection mechanisms. This makes them highly vulnerable to economic and physical shocks such as inflation, workplace accidents, or sudden income loss. Moreover, working women continue to face additional disadvantages due to gender-based discrimination, informal employment conditions, and the absence of maternity protection, further exacerbating their vulnerabilities. Acknowledging the challenges, the NSSS proposed comprehensive reforms to strengthen social protection for the working-age group (19–59 years), these include:

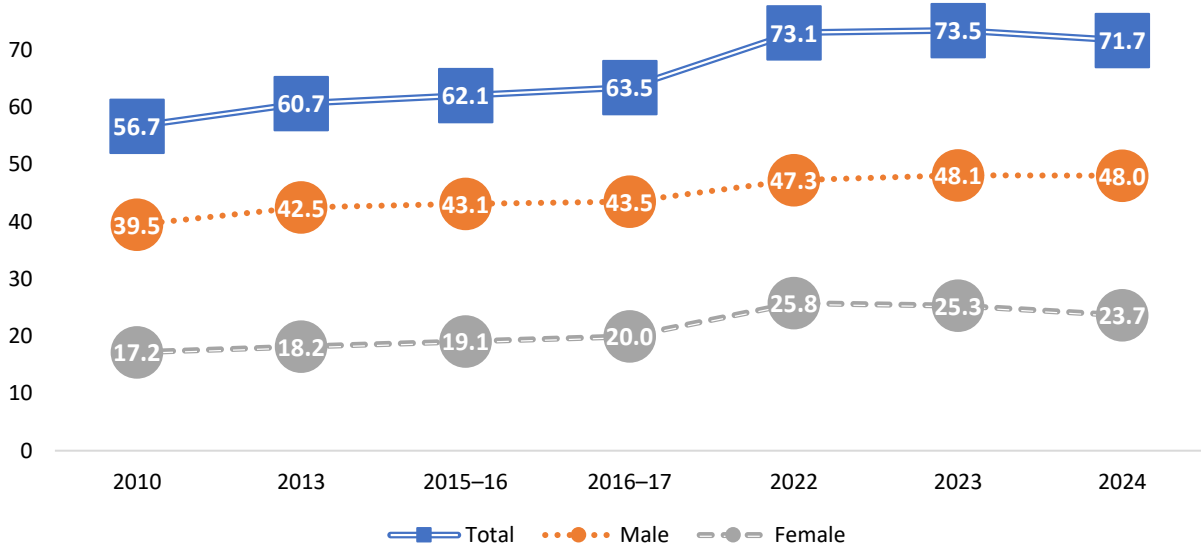
- i expanding education and vocational training to enhance employability;
- ii strengthening workfare programmes to ensure temporary income support; and
- iii introducing unemployment, accident, sickness, and maternity insurance under the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS) framework.

Recent labour force survey (2024) shows that out of 121.75 million people aged 15 and above, 71.71 million (58.9%) are in the labour force, with a large gender gap, as around 80.0 per cent of men (48.02 million) participate compared with 38.4 per cent of women (23.69 million).²⁰ Over the years, the total labour force rose from 56.7 million in 2010 to 73.1 million in 2022, then fell slightly to 71.7 million in 2024, with much of the recent fluctuation coming from women’s participation, which increased sharply by 2022 and then declined by 2024, while men’s participation rose more steadily (Figure 3.7). This weakening of women’s employment presence is particularly visible in manufacturing, where a “defeminisation” trend is observed, with women employed in manufacturing declining from over 3.75 million in 2013 to 1.95 million in 2024, moreover a declining industrial employment also noted in subsectors such as textiles, food products, and tobacco (Razzaque et. al., 2025). Despite the large share of working age population, the social security benefit for this age group has not expanded accordingly, 23 programmes are listed in the current budget report (FY 2025-26) with 84 billion allocations, equivalent to 7.2 per cent of the social protection budget.

Alongside these shifts in participation and sectoral employment composition, unemployment pressures are most pronounced among young people, reflecting uneven labour market inclusion. The youth unemployment rate (ages 15–29) fell from 8.1 per cent in 2013 to 7.3 per cent in 2023, but it rose again to 8.07 per cent in 2024, which is still well above the national unemployment rate of 3.66 per cent. The age pattern is also evident, unemployment is highest among the youngest cohorts, with 10.44 per cent for ages 15–19 and 9.24 per cent for ages 20–24 in 2024, while 6.14 per cent for ages 25–29 (Figure 3.8). By sex, reported youth unemployment is consistently higher for young men than young women, though this needs to be read alongside the much lower labour force participation of women, which can mask wider underutilisation and the NEET challenge.

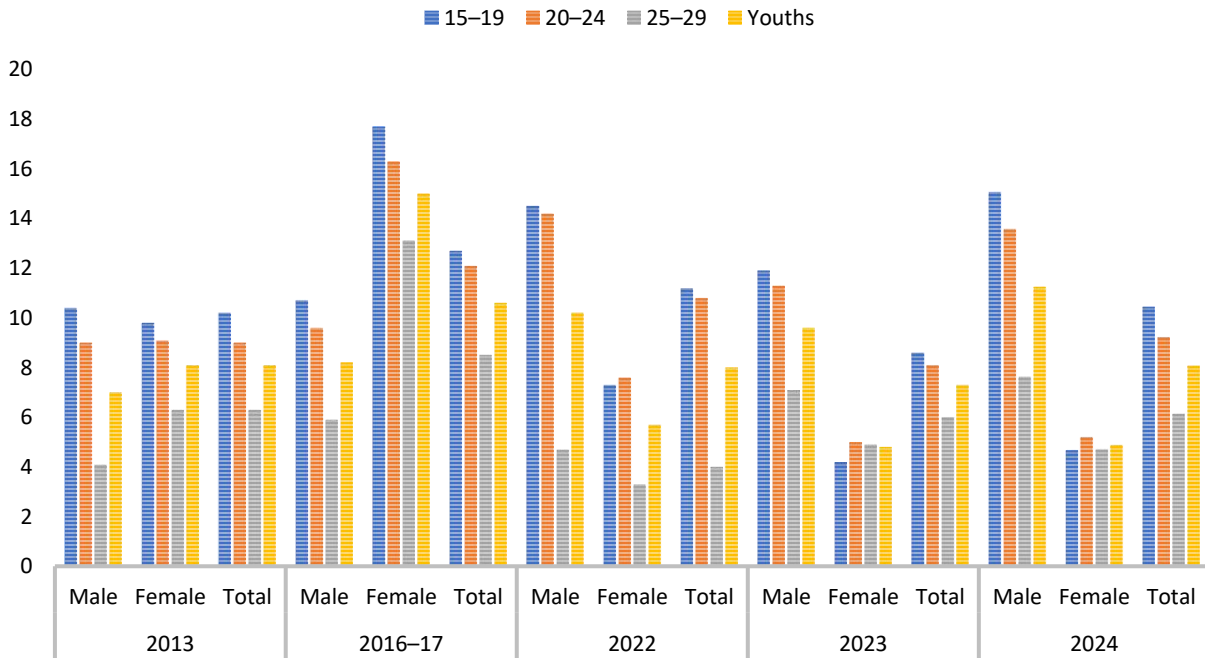
²⁰ The population aged 15+ will be 146.68 million in 2035 and 156.52 million in 2040, according to UN World Population Prospects.

Figure 3.7: Labour force participation over the years (%)



Source: LFS 2024.

Figure 3.8: Youth unemployment over the years and across gender (%)

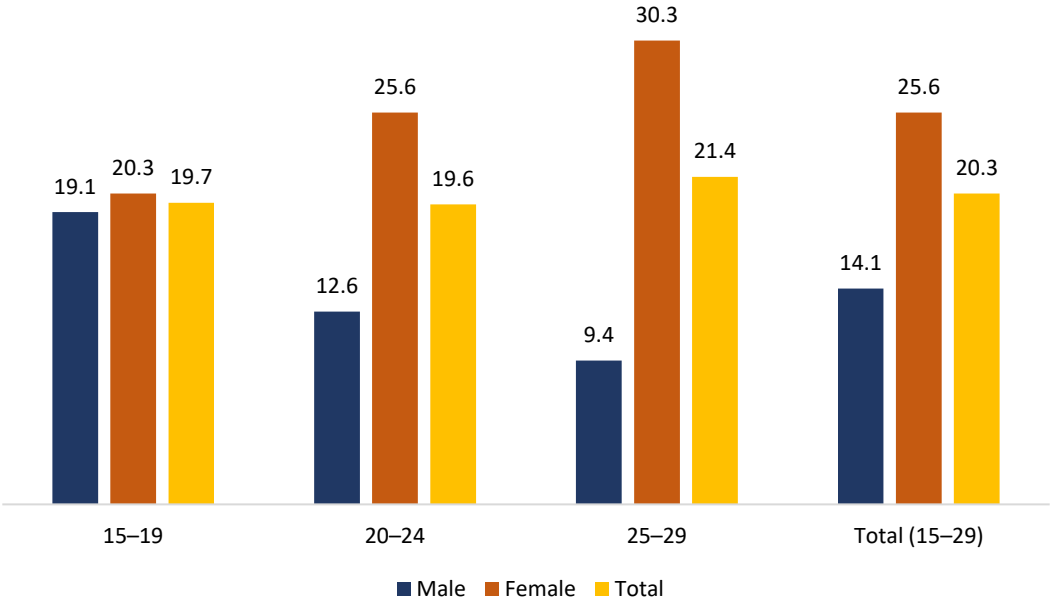


Source: LFS 2024.

Alongside measured unemployment, a sizeable share of young people is not in education, employment, or training also known as NEET. In 2024, around 8.56 million youth aged 15 to 29 were in NEET category, which was equivalent to 20.3 per cent of the youth population in that age band, with a gender gap of 25.6 per cent for young women compared with 14.1 per cent for young men.

High youth NEET is concerning as it signals a large pool of underutilised human potential at the point when skills and work experience are typically built, which can weaken lifetime earnings prospects, slow the transition into stable employment, and raise the risk of long-term exclusion from productive work, particularly for young women where NEET is more likely to be linked to unpaid care burdens and constrained mobility.

Figure 3.9: NEET ratio among youth population (15-29 years)



Source: LFS 2024.

3.3.1 Strengthening Education and Training

The NSSS treats education and skills development as essential for improving the welfare of working age people, particularly when stable and productive work is not guaranteed for many entrants to the labour market. The action plan places employment creation and skills development, particularly for overseas employment and migrant workers, at its core, with implementation led primarily by the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) in coordination with agencies such as BMET, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Social Welfare. Progress includes the establishment and operation of new Technical Training Centres (TTCs) and Institutes of Marine Technology (IMTs), alongside ongoing programmes to train and accredit instructors and expand apprenticeship linkages with industries. The action plan has also supported research to identify new overseas employment opportunities and skill demand, with several national and international studies completed. For migrant workers and returnees, measures have focused on expanding welfare coverage, including the issuance of a circular mandating insurance for aspiring migrant workers using formal migration channels, although reintegration support through training and financing

remains limited in scale. Overall, implementation has advanced in institutional expansion and regulatory steps, while deeper support for returnee reintegration continues to lag behind stated objectives.

Table 3.7: Implementation progress on education and training for working age population

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Time frame	Implementation Ministry/Division	Progress
Employment Creation and Skills Development	Establish new Technical Training Centres (TTCs) and Institutes of Marine Technology (IMTs)	New TTCs / IMTs established	Continuous	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) / BMET	8 TTCs and one Bangladesh Institute of Marine Technology (BIMT) are operational.
	Provide training of trainers and enhance instructor capacity	Trainers trained / accredited	Continuous	MoEWOE / BMET	Program is operational
	Identify new areas of overseas employment and training	Research studies conducted; new skill sectors identified	Continuous	MoEWOE	Several studies conducted by national and international institutions.
	Strengthen apprenticeship training and link training with industries	Apprenticeship programmes expanded	Continuous	MoEWOE / MoLE / BMET	Apprenticeship programmes in operation
Early Human Capital and 4IR (4th Industrial Revolution) Preparedness	Strengthen adult skills development and continuing education for 4IR workforce adaptation	STEM-oriented training and reskilling programmes implemented	Continuous	MoLE / TMED / MoEWOE / NSDA / MoYS	Several STEM oriented training programs are in operation.
Support for Migrant Workers and Returnees	Increase social allowance and welfare schemes for migrant workers and families	Number of programmes increased	Continuous	MoEWOE	Limited coverage of program under Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB)
	Issue circular for mandatory insurance coverage for aspirant migrant workers	Circular issued	Dec-23	MoEWOE	Circular issued. Workers migrating through formal channel pay mandatory insurance premium.
	Strengthen reintegration support for returnee migrants through training and financing	Reintegration training and credit programme implemented	Continuous	MoEWOE / MoF / MoYS / MoDMR	Limited support.

Source: Author's compilation from different sources.

Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS)

Under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Youth Development Directorate is currently implementing several skills and employment projects, with a focus on training that links more directly to income opportunities. One major initiative aims to create employment for working age youth across 48 districts through freelancing related training, scheduled for January 2024 to December 2026, with an estimated budget of BDT29,999.00 lac (around Tk 300 crore). Alongside this, an additional project is being implemented to build the skills of young people who already have basic IT knowledge by introducing artificial intelligence-based training, planned for January 2025 to December 2026, with an estimated budget of BDT 9,991.56 lac (around BDT 100 crore). The Ministry is also running two targeted skills programmes in the Chattogram region, one on life skills development for youth from the Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals' (FDMN) community and another on skills development and employment support for youth in the host community under Chattogram Division, both scheduled for July 2025 to June 2028, with estimated budgets of BDT 10,742.00 lac and BDT 13,304.00 lac respectively, reflecting a parallel emphasis on inclusive skills support in areas affected by displacement alongside broader national training initiatives.

The National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)

In Bangladesh, the policy ambition is to expand Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) enrolment from 17.18 per cent in 2021 to 25 per cent by 2025, 30 per cent by 2030, and 41 per cent by 2041, which places added importance on system coordination, quality assurance, and labour market relevance (Hasan, 2025).²¹ The National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) plays a central regulatory role in the skills ecosystem, with 504 training institutes registered in 2022–23, including 154 new registrations in that year, and 368 institutes authorised to deliver 2,569 courses, while 340 institutes are approved to conduct assessments for 1,989 courses, supporting more standardised quality and certification across providers. Implementation priorities reflected in the action plan include efforts to strengthen public private partnership, introduce demand driven courses linked to overseas labour markets, and respond to Fourth Industrial Revolution needs through occupation related skills training in TTCs and IMTs. NSDA has advanced 4IR preparedness by developing more than 35 ICT-related competency standards and progressively integrating digital and 4IR concepts into curricula, supported by initiatives to identify future skill needs, build a digitised skills database, upgrade instructors' digital competencies, and strengthen the capacity of training providers to deliver emerging technology related courses. These initiatives, however, are constrained by institutional capacity gaps, as only 56 of 88 approved positions are currently filled, with significant vacancies at both deputy and assistant director levels, limiting the Authority's ability to implement programmes at scale and fully utilise available resources.

²¹ Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) covers education, training, and skills development across occupations in production, services, and livelihoods, with an emphasis on practical competencies that support employment and lead to recognised qualifications, delivered through pathways that span secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary levels, including work based learning and lifelong skills upgrading.

Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)

Regarding the implementation status on education and training reforms, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) has been working to expand and upgrade its training system so that it can support both domestic skills development and preparation for overseas employment. BMET's total 68 training institutions have delivered two types of courses, skills training and pre departure training, across 48 trades, a total of 567,729 women and men have received training through these programmes so far. Beyond the core technical courses, BMET has also introduced more market-oriented preparation for migration, including Korean language training for Korea bound workers and English language training delivered through four Technical Training Centers (TTCs). On infrastructure expansion, ongoing work is also reported, including 40 TTCs in 40 upazilas and one Institute of Marine Technology in Chattogram under construction, alongside other upgrading and modernisation initiatives aimed at widening training access and improving delivery capacity.

Social protection support

Labour market interventions still account for a relatively small share of Bangladesh's overall social protection spending, yet the FY2025–26 budget composition suggests that the focus within this sub portfolio has been shifting, with a larger share being directed towards interventions that support self-employment and small business activity for unemployed youth and other vulnerable groups. In particular, the budget report shows the share of entrepreneurship support within labour market programmes increasing from 10.76 per cent in FY2023–24 to 36.83 per cent in FY2025–26, which is presented as evidence of a more deliberate labour market strategy that places greater weight on economic inclusion instruments alongside conventional training provision.

Flagship initiatives, including the Promoting Gender Responsive Enterprise Development and TVET Systems (ProGRESS) project and the Economic Acceleration and Resilience for NEET (EARN) project, are part of a wider shift in labour market programming towards entrepreneurship and economic inclusion, with a stronger emphasis on interventions that combine skills, enterprise support, and access to finance for vulnerable groups, particularly women and young adults. Consistent with this direction, the economic inclusion type interventions now account for a large share of labour market programme spending in FY2025–26, alongside a continued, though smaller, allocation for conventional vocational training initiatives, while newer, market oriented modalities, such as expanded freelancing training and driving training linked to overseas employment, are also reflected in the programme mix.

Table 3.8: Social protection programmes linked to training and education

Programme	Target group and benefit	Ministry	Budget (FY2025-26, Tk crore)
Providing Driving Training or Employment at Home and Abroad	Working age people Benefit: Vocational skill Development	MoEWOE	50.00
Integrated Management Resources for Poverty Alleviation Through Comprehensive Technology	Working age people Benefit: Vocational skill Development	MoYS	34.00
Economic Acceleration and Resilience for NEET (EARN)	Working age people Benefit: Entrepreneurship support	MoYS	1,053.64
Leaving No One Behind: Skills and Economic Opportunities for Cox's Bazar Youth in Bangladesh	Working age people Benefit: Entrepreneurship support	MoYS	48.22
Employment Generation Through Freelancing Training for Educated Jobseekers Youth in 48 Districts of the Country	Working age people; Educated, job-seeking youth, including both males and females. Benefit: Training to foster entrepreneurship.	MoYS	105.78

Source: Social protection budget report FY2025-26.

3.3.2 Strengthening Workfare Programmes

Workfare programmes are social assistance measures where short term support is provided through organised work opportunities, so that households facing seasonal hardship, disaster related losses, or temporary unemployment can stabilise income and consumption while community assets such as rural roads, embankments, canals, or earthworks are maintained. Within the social protection budget classification, workfare is treated as a poverty targeted transfer delivered through public works, with support provided either as cash or food, and the NSSS policy direction has generally leaned towards cash based modalities where feasible because flexibility is higher for recipients and delivery can be streamlined through digital payment channels, while food based modalities continue to be retained in contexts where local food availability, price spikes, or emergency conditions make in kind support more appropriate. The public workfare delivered in cash accounted for around 6.85 per cent, suggesting that workfare remains a smaller component within social assistance even though it continues to be relied upon during shocks and lean seasons.

In cash based public workfare schemes, wages are paid to participants for a fixed number of workdays, increasingly through G2P channels, and in the food based public workfare, participants receive food grains or an equivalent value linked to work performed, often used in locations affected by disasters, seasonal distress, or market disruptions. Under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), the main workfare portfolio for FY2025-26 includes Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP) as a cash workfare programme, alongside the Development of Rural Infrastructure (Earthwork) as another cash linked public works intervention, and Food for Work (FFW) as the core food-based workfare programme. The budget and beneficiary targets under this cluster show a large operational footprint, with EGPP topped the list in terms of budget allocation.

EGPP is structured as a seasonal employment scheme delivered in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of 40 days of work, daily work requirements of 7 hours, and a stated daily wage of BDT400, revised from the earlier BDT 200. alongside a savings linked feature where participants deposit BDT25 per day into their bank account and can withdraw the accumulated amount after a defined date. The implementation instructions for the Employment Generation Programme have also been revised to make it more climate adaptive. Eligibility is framed around employable individuals from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, with priority given to the landless and low-income households with limited productive assets, and recent updates indicate that the charge for G2P payment transfer is borne by the government, which aligns with the broader push towards cash-based delivery. EGPP+ is a disaster focused variant of EGPP, also cash based, intended for the poorest groups in Cox's Bazar and other disaster affected areas, with eligibility criteria that place greater emphasis on low income and vulnerable households. An age range of 18 to 65 years, and an annual income threshold of below BDT48,000, the payment is delivered weekly under the scheme. Food for Work is a food-based workfare programme implemented under MoDMR, with Ministry of Land implements this program through the earth work component of the Climate Victims Rehabilitation Project , that supports rural labour markets and infrastructure maintenance needs during seasonal distress or disaster impacts by providing 8 kg of rice per day (or an equivalent value) linked to work.

Overall, the NSSS direction towards a simpler and more cash-based workfare system has not been fully realised, and consolidation of the workfare programmes under one umbrella has not progressed as planned. Even so, the ongoing mix of cash and food based programmes reflect a practical choice, because the best modality depends on local conditions during a crisis.

Across the workfare landscape, cash transfers are increasingly seen as the preferred modality because they are simpler to administer and tend to generate stronger welfare gains, particularly when local markets are functioning and households can purchase essentials at stable prices. At the same time, food-based workfare retains a practical role under certain disaster conditions such as floods and droughts, when local food availability can become constrained and sharp price increases can reduce the effective value of cash support. In these contexts, food support can provide a more direct consumption buffer, whereas in more stable situations cash-based approaches are generally expected to deliver greater benefits for recipients. At the same time, the way workfare has often been used remains largely need-based and episodic, rather than operating through predictable and regularised cycles of support.

Table 3.9: List of existing workfare programmes

Workfare programme	Implementing ministry	Benefit	Target beneficiaries (FY2025-26) in million	Budget (FY2025-26) in billion BDT
Development of Rural Infrastructure (Earthwork)	MoDMR	Provide short-term employment to rural poor and to build and maintain rural roads. Cash equivalent to 8 kilograms of rice/wheat for 7 hours of work per day.	1.60	15.10
Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP)	MoDMR	Daily wage of TK. 400 (2 cycles, 40 days each) for 7 hours of work per day.	0.40	16.51
Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest Plus (EGPP+)	MoDMR	Daily wage of TK. 400 for 7 hours of work per day.	0.16	1.00
Food for Work (FFW)	MoDMR	8 KG of rice or cash equivalent per day for 7 hours of work per day.	0.98	9.28
Valuation of Food under Food for Works	MoL	Generate seasonal food-based employment for the rural poor	-	1.17

Source: Social protection budget report FY 2025-26.

3.3.3 Introducing Unemployment, Accident, Sickness and Maternity Insurance under NSIS

Despite policy commitments to establish the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS) as a contributory platform protecting working-age people against major income shocks, implementation has progressed more slowly than envisaged in the original action plans, with uneven advances across the four proposed branches: unemployment, employment injury, sickness, and maternity insurance. Among these, the Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) has recorded the most tangible progress.

Officially launched on 21 June 2022, the EIS was implemented as a pilot initiative primarily in the export-oriented ready-made garment (RMG) sector, later expanding to the footwear, leather, and EPZ sectors. The pilot tested a no-fault, insurance-based, centrally administered model for employment injury protection. While designed as a contributory social insurance arrangement, financing during the pilot relied on transitional sources, notably contributions from international brands (0.019% of sourcing value per brand) alongside allocations from the Central Fund, rather than regularized employer contributions under a statutory framework.

The pilot operationalized core insurance functions, including employer and factory registration, claims processing, disability assessment, and payment of periodic pensions to workers with permanent employment-related disabilities, as well as survivors' pensions to dependants of workers who died due to workplace injuries. Administered through the EIS Pilot Unit under the

Central Fund and governed by a tripartite board representing government, employers, and workers, the scheme has generated valuable institutional, administrative, and actuarial experience. Reflecting this progress, the Labour (Amendment) Ordinance 2025 introduced an explicit provision recognizing a dedicated fund for employment injury protection, signaling a policy shift toward institutionalizing EIS within the national legal framework. While still in a pilot phase with limited coverage, these developments position EIS as the most advanced and operationally mature branch of the NSIS and as a practical foundation for a permanent national employment injury insurance system.

Following EIS, unemployment insurance has progressed furthest among the remaining branches in analytical terms. A feasibility study was undertaken in 2022, and technical design work was completed, culminating in a roadmap prepared in 2023. However, the proposed pilot has not yet commenced, indicating a gap between design work and operational rollout. Maternity insurance remains at a preparatory stage, with background work and development partner-supported studies continuing but no finalized framework. Sickness insurance has received the least attention, remaining largely conceptual, with few studies undertaken and no agreed design, pilot initiative, or institutional arrangements in place.

The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) Action Plans provide the broader policy context. The first Action Plan (2016–2020) envisaged the development of core design features for contributory social insurance across all four branches. The second Action Plan (2021–2026) anticipated the initiation of pilot implementation, particularly for unemployment insurance, along with the further development of maternity and sickness insurance through inter-ministerial coordination. In practice, only EIS has moved into piloting, while unemployment, maternity, and sickness insurance remain largely in the analytical and preparatory stages, with limited inter-ministerial coordination and no operational rollout.

To oversee and coordinate these reforms, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) established the Social Security Unit (SSU). The SSU is responsible for facilitating inter-ministerial and tripartite coordination through a Tripartite Consultative Committee, supporting the transition of EIS from pilot to permanent national scheme, and assisting the design and future implementation of unemployment insurance in line with ILO-supported roadmaps. It also coordinates with relevant ministries, notably the Health Services Division, to review maternity and sickness arrangements and assess pathways for progressive upgrading to meet international standards. In addition, the SSU is developing a comprehensive plan to extend social security coverage to all workers, guided by the Assessment-Based National Dialogue (ABND) framework, and taking preparatory steps toward a unified social security institution under MoLE.

Overall, the reform agenda has progressed primarily through studies, roadmaps, and limited piloting, most notably in the case of EIS, rather than full operationalization. Moving from framework development to delivery will require clearer legal and regulatory foundations, stronger inter-ministerial coordination, and sustainable financing and implementation arrangements. These

steps are essential to translate policy commitments into an effective, contributory social insurance system that protects working-age workers against major income shocks.

Table 3.10: Implementation progress of each branch of NSIS

Components	Implementing Agency	Original Timeline (Action Plan Phase: I+II)	Current Status	Key Progress & Next Steps
Employment Injury Insurance (EIS)	Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE); with ILO technical support.	Phase I (2016–2020): Design and preparatory work for employment injury insurance. Phase II (2021–2026): Pilot implementation and transition towards a national scheme aligned with ILO C.121.	Pilot Phase (Active) Pilot launched in June 2022; will end in 2027; Interim Government commits for a statutory EIS Fund; structural set-up in progress.	A pilot is currently operational in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, testing a contributory model. It covers long-term benefits for permanent disability and death.
Maternity Insurance (MI)	MoLE, in coordination with the Health Services Division (HSD) and relevant ministries	Phase I (2016–2020): Review existing maternity protection and develop a maternity insurance framework under NSIS. Phase II (2021–2026): Finalise scheme design and move towards implementation or piloting.	Preparatory Stage	Progress has been slow, with no specific framework agreed upon yet. Technical groundwork has advanced through feasibility studies by partners like PwC and CPD.
Unemployment Insurance (UI)	MoLE / Social Security Unit (SSU), with ILO technical support	Phase I (2016–2020): Feasibility analysis and scheme design. Phase II (2021–2026): Pilot implementation and gradual scale-up.	Feasibility Stage	Feasibility studies were conducted in 2022, and a roadmap was developed in 2023.
Sickness Insurance (SI)	MoLE, in coordination with the Health Services Division (HSD)	Phase I (2016–2020): Concept development and institutional design. Phase II (2021–2026): Preparation for implementation or piloting.	Conceptual Stage	This branch has received the least attention and has no concrete structures in place. Framework studies have been conducted, but implementation has stalled.

Source: Author’s compilation of information from different sources.

3.4 Strengthen social protection support for vulnerable women

Women in Bangladesh remain disproportionately vulnerable to economic and social risks due to persistent gender inequalities in access to income, employment, and assets. These vulnerabilities are further intensified by widowhood, abandonment, domestic violence, and the lack of childcare support in both formal and informal employment sectors. Recognising these challenges, the NSSS calls for a stronger and more coherent system of protection for vulnerable women aged between 19–59, by undertaking the following initiatives:

- i) The strategy proposes the consolidation of fragmented programmes into a single Vulnerable Women’s Benefit (VWB) scheme

- ii) It also emphasises the provision of childcare services across all formal and informal employment sectors
- iii) expanded maternal healthcare and
- iv) vocational training programmes to improve women’s resilience and empowerment.

Progress reported through the KII with MoWCA indicates that implementation of social protection programme for vulnerable women has advanced gradually, a major operational milestone was reached in July 2022, with the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme rebranding as Vulnerable Women Benefit. Alongside this, the VWB has increasingly been treated as a platform for “package” elements, with ICVGD training modules being integrated into the VWB training package for the current cycle (July 2025–June 2027). Under the VWB programme, the government currently provides 30 kg of rice per month to destitute, widowed, and divorced women. In parallel, investment support has been expanded through ICVGD-linked actions, with MoWCA reporting that the one-time investment grant amount was revised from BDT 15,000 to BDT 20,000 and successfully transferred to 97,012 ICVGD beneficiaries through a G2P process in June 2024.²²

At the same time, the KII indicates that progress has been uneven across reform components. For instance, the urban VWB component has not been rolled out, due to a lack of budget allocation, MoWCA requested Finance Division for additional resource allocation to reach urban areas, which is yet to be approved. Coverage levels also remain below the longer-term ambition set out in the action plan, with the report stating that the current (FY2025-26) VWB cycle has been running with 1.04 million of beneficiaries which is nearly 70 per cent of total target. Due to financial and logistical constraints, it is substantially challenging to expand the VWB program to remote areas. Many remote and underserved regions may still lack access to the programme, hindering its effectiveness in reaching all vulnerable women. Additionally, ensuring that all eligible women are aware of and enrolled in the VWB program can be difficult due to illiteracy, lack of access to information, and socio-cultural barriers that may prevent women from participating fully.

Alongside these interventions, the Strengthening Women’s Ability for Productive New Opportunities (SWAPNO) project supports ultra-poor rural women, particularly those who are widowed, divorced, abandoned, or living in households where the husband is disabled, through a package that links time-bound public works employment with skills and livelihood support. Implemented by the Local Government Division (MoLGRD&C) with UNDP, SWAPNO began in 2014 and expanded in phases. After the initial and extension phases (2014–2022) and an initiation period (2022–2023), it entered Phase II (2023–2026), which is the current implementation phase. Coverage information indicates operations in 14 districts, across 50 upazilas and 441 unions, reaching 22,680 women-headed households to date. Alongside wages, participants receive training on basic financial literacy, savings practices, and livelihood skills, and are supported to transition into income-generating activities, including small enterprises, after completing their work tenure, with development partners over time including the Embassy of Sweden, UNDP, ILO, and others.

²² The ICVGD Phase II project was implemented during 2019–2025 and was completed in June 2025.

In line with the NSSS focus on childcare and skills support for vulnerable women, recent implementation updates report that the legal basis for workplace childcare has been put in place through the enactment of the Day Care Act 2021, while the supporting Day Care Rules 2022 have been drafted and are still under revision for finalisation. On the training side, MoWCA has drafted and reviewed an SBCC strategy with technical assistance from UNWFP, and three age specific training modules have received approval from the IEC committee of MoHFW for use under MCBP. In parallel, MoWCA has conducted a joint study with UNWFP on enabling digital financial inclusion and women’s economic empowerment through social assistance in Bangladesh, followed by the development of digital learning elements, including a financial literacy module, and the preparation of practical communication materials such as leaflets, cut outs, short video clips, and social behaviour focused recommendations. Together, these steps indicate gradual progress towards the NSSS intent to expand childcare support and strengthen skills and economic resilience pathways for women.

Table 3.11: Implementation progress for vulnerable women programmes

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Time frame	Progress
Design and implement Vulnerable Women’s Benefit (VWB) programme in rural and urban areas	Develop a detailed implementation plan, in consultation with MoSW, for VWB along with budgetary requirements and submitted to the Cabinet Division.	Detailed implementation plan prepared and submitted	Dec 2021	MoWCA drafted a detailed implementation plan for the VWB programme and proceeded with its submission to the Cabinet Division for approval.
	Consolidate all programmes (VGD, ICVGD, and urban VWB) and rebrand as VWB programme with suitable components (i.e., investment grant, food/cash transfer, skill development, financial inclusion etc.) to facilitate economic and social empowerment of women and increase their contribution to national development.	VWB programme rolled out in areas with 6000 beneficiaries (in 1 city corporation and 1 municipality) VWB programme rolled out in urban areas.	Jan 2022 Jul 2023	MoWCA rebranded the VGD programme as the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) Programme in July 2022. API interoperability with WA of MoSW and FFP of MoFood have been integrated with the VWB programme. Under the current VWB cycle (July 2025-June 2027), ICVGD training modules have been integrated with the VWB training package. However, due to a lack of budget allocation, the VWB Urban programme has not been rolled out yet.
Workplace Childcare Services	Enactment of daycare Act.	Daycare Act approved.	December 2022	The Day Care Act 2021 has been enacted.

Source: NSSS Action Plan (2021-26) progress report up to October 2025 and KII.

The current set of programmes for vulnerable women combines three quite different forms of support, such as regular income support for women facing widowhood or abandonment, economic inclusion support that tries to move beyond consumption smoothing, and smaller crisis or area based interventions that respond to specific risks. The largest programme by coverage remains the Allowance for Widow and Husband Deserted Destitute Women, which is a cash transfer intended to reduce immediate income insecurity for widowed and deserted women. In line with the NSSS emphasis on expanding coverage and improving adequacy, the programme has seen both scale-up and benefit enhancement over time. A major implementation milestone was the universalisation of the Widow Allowance programme across all 262 upazilas, supported under ADB’s budget support, which removed geographic gaps in access and ensured nationwide availability of the benefit. Coverage has continued to expand, with the number of beneficiaries increasing to 2.9 million in FY2025–26, up from 2.8 million in the previous fiscal year, alongside a budget allocation of BDT 22.78 billion. At the same time, the monthly allowance has been raised from BDT 550 to BDT 650 in FY2025–26, reflecting a gradual improvement in benefit adequacy since the adoption of the NSSS, and the government now bears the cost of G2P transaction fees, reducing barriers for beneficiaries. Beyond routine adjustments, the programme has also been brought under a more systematic benefit review process. The Finance Division established a working committee to review benefit levels for six major social assistance programmes, including the Widow Allowance, with the mandate to assess adequacy against inflation trends and recommend annual revisions to the Cabinet Committee on Social Security Programs. Following this review, the committee recommended a further increase in the Widow Allowance from BDT 650 to BDT 700 per month for the next fiscal year (FY2026–27), and the recommendation was subsequently approved by the Cabinet Committee, signalling a shift towards more rules-based and inflation-aware benefit setting. Out of 2.9 million widowed and husband-deserted destitute women, 2,875,000 women will receive a monthly allowance of BDT 700, while 25,000 beneficiaries aged 90 and above will receive a higher monthly allowance of BDT 1,000.

Alongside this, the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) is positioned more as an economic inclusion pathway for ultra poor women. The remaining interventions are smaller in scale but fill specific gaps, including revolving small loans through the Rural Mother Centre (RMC) programme, limited emergency support through the Distressed Women and Children Welfare Fund, and labour market or community development initiatives that focus on entrepreneurship, employment support, and climate related vulnerability in coastal areas.

Table 3.12: List of existing programmes for vulnerable women

Programme	Function Category	Target beneficiaries (million)	Budget (billion BDT)
Allowance for Widow and Deserted Women	Social Assistance	2.90	22.78
Rural Mother Centre (RMC) Programme: Revolving small loan	Labor Market Programme	0.01	0.25
Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) Programme	Labor Market Programme	1.04	23.34
Distressed Women and Children Welfare Fund	Social Assistance	0.02	0.05

Promotion of Women Entrepreneurs for Economic Empowerment in Grass root Level	Labor Market Programme	-	0.72
Enhancing Adaptive Capacities of Coastal Communities, especially Women, to Cope with Climate Change Induced Salinity	Community Development	-	0.33
Integrated Rural Employment Support Project for the Poor Women (IRESPPW)	Labor Market Programme	-	1.06

Source: Social protection budget report FY 2025-26.

Despite targeted interventions, addressing issues of gender discrimination and ensuring the effective implementation of gender-responsive policies across various sectors remains a complex challenge. Additionally, changing harmful gender norms and bringing a paradigm shift in society requires sustained long-term efforts and a comprehensive strategy. Therefore, despite the ongoing progress, achieving the goal of empowering vulnerable women will take longer. Field visits often reveal that women have very limited agency over using the social protection allowances they get and are subject to domestic violence when they refuse to hand over the money to their male counterparts. Financial support given to a handful of women without capacity-building to develop their livelihoods is of limited benefit.

Living on the Edge of Coverage: Field Insights on Women’s Vulnerability

In Shahrasti upazila, one woman in her mid-thirties described how widowhood had turned every expense into a weekly negotiation, because the allowance that reached her account arrived only once in several months, typically as a quarterly payment, and by the time it came it was already spoken for by rice, medicine, and small debts taken to manage the weeks in between; she said the amount felt less like “support” and more like a brief pause in pressure, especially when a child’s school cost or an unexpected illness arrived at the same time. Around them, information about who can apply, where forms go, and why someone gets selected was described as something that travelled mainly through ward-level representatives and neighbours, which kept the system moving, but also meant that those without the right links, or those living slightly farther away, often stayed unsure about the steps and were left to accept decisions they could not see or question.

In Bakshiganj and Derai, women’s vulnerability was narrated through care responsibilities and health costs, rather than only through income poverty, since several participants linked their hardship to the rising price of treatment, the need for regular medicine, and the gradual thinning of family support, with older women and caregivers describing how the allowance was quickly absorbed by healthcare spending, leaving little for food or basic household needs. Women with disabilities said that while the allowance mattered, it did not change the bigger constraint, which was the absence of accessible work options and services, so the benefit reduced strain without creating a pathway out of dependence. When complaints arose, the first stop was usually a local representative, and formal grievance channels were rarely mentioned, which kept resolutions personal and local, but also made accountability feel informal and uneven.

3.5 Establishing a comprehensive pension system for the elderly

As Bangladesh moves steadily toward an ageing population, the need for a comprehensive system of old-age protection has become increasingly critical. The share of the population aged 60 and above is projected to surpass the share of children under 15 by the mid-2040s. While the working-age group (15–59) is currently dominant, its proportion will begin to decline after 2030, highlighting the gradual end of the demographic dividend. This means that a growing number of elderly citizens will depend on a shrinking labour force for economic and social support.

With traditional family-based care systems weakening due to urbanisation, migration, and changing social norms, many older people face heightened risks of poverty, ill-health, and social exclusion. Recognising these challenges, NSSS proposed building a more comprehensive pension system for the elderly, it set out a three-tier approach;

- i) a strengthened Old Age Allowance as a basic state-supported minimum income to all elderly citizens above the age of 60 and who meet the income criteria (income below 1.25 times the upper poverty line). Additionally, it proposed increasing the monthly transfer value of the allowance in terms of current value to ensure it is aligned with the value of similar pension schemes in other developing countries. Considering greater vulnerability and needs, the strategy also suggested a higher allowance for beneficiaries aged above 90.
- ii) a National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS) to provide contributory pensions as well as address other contingencies (i.e., disability, sickness, workplace accidents, unemployment and maternity), starting with formal sector workers and gradually extending coverage over time; and
- iii) Finally, the strategy outlined a private voluntary pension, for individuals seeking additional old age protection and willing to self-finance.

Together, these measures aim to build a sustainable, multi-tiered pension structure capable of supporting Bangladesh's rapidly ageing population and ensuring that all elderly citizens can live with dignity and security.

Tier 1: Old Age Allowance (age 60 +)

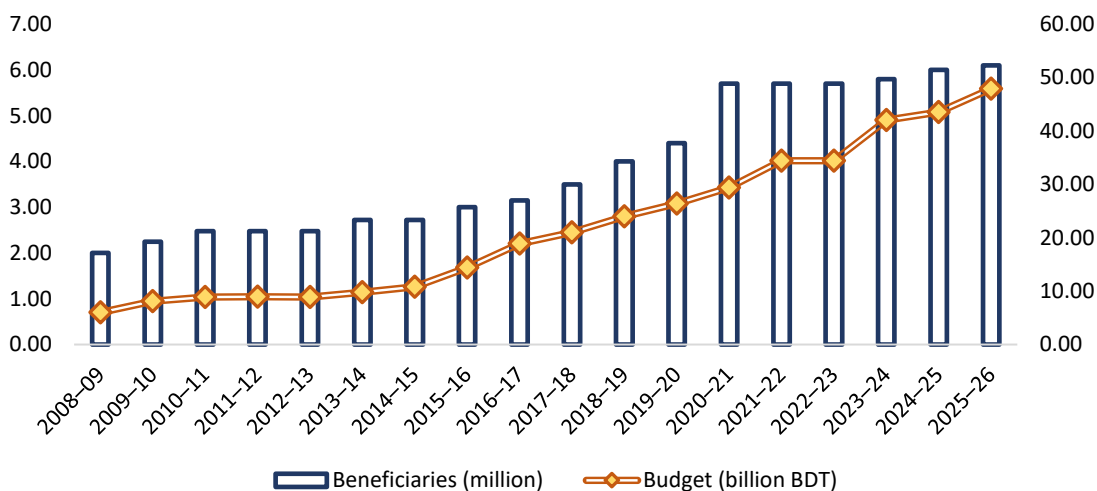
Since its inception in 1998, the Old Age Allowance (OAA) has remained one of the central pro-poor social protection programmes in Bangladesh, designed as an unconditional cash transfer to support elderly men and women who face heightened economic vulnerability in old age. The eligibility is based on age thresholds (65 years for men and 62 years for women), income criteria, and vulnerability status, with priority given to landless and disadvantaged elderly individuals.²³ The programme seeks to strengthen the basic livelihoods of older persons while also improving their social standing within households and communities. By providing a regular income stream, the allowance is widely perceived as easing the financial and psychological burden on families and

²³ The NSSS recommended aligning the eligibility age at 60 years for both men and women, but this change has not been implemented.

reinforcing the dignity and social recognition of older people. The programme is administered by the MoSW, with all payments delivered through the G2P system on a quarterly basis, and implementation guided by the Manual for Old Age Allowances (2013).

Currently, the OAA scheme is being implemented in over 260 upazilas against a target of 250 upazilas, while the MoSW is working toward achieving full national coverage. In FY2025–26, the programme was designed to support 6.1 million beneficiaries, with a total allocation of BDT 47.91 billion. Building on this scale-up, the number of beneficiaries will be increased by a further 0.10 million in FY2026–27, bringing total coverage to 6.2 million older persons.

Figure 7: Coverage and allocation of Old Age Allowance over the years



Source: Data obtained from the Finance Division, Ministry of Finance.

To ensure benefit amount remains responsive to changes in the cost of living, the Finance Division established a working committee to conduct periodic reviews of benefit amounts for six social security programmes, including the OAA. The committee is mandated to assess benefit adequacy annually using national inflation and CPI trends and to submit its recommendations to the Cabinet Committee on Social Security Programmes (CCSSP). In its most recent review, the committee recommended increasing the monthly Old Age Allowance from BDT 650 to BDT 700 for FY2026–27, and this recommendation was subsequently approved by the CCSSP. Under the approved structure, 5,995,000 older persons will receive BDT 700 per month, while 205,000 older persons aged 90 years and above will receive a higher transfer of BDT 1,000 per month.

The review process also considered the fiscal implications of smaller, incremental adjustments. It estimated that even a BDT 50 per month increase for around 6.1 million people, would require an additional BDT 368.20 crore in annual public spending. This illustrates that relatively modest increases in allowance rates can have substantial budgetary consequences, which explains the cautious and incremental approach adopted in revising benefit levels.

Alongside these policy adjustments, programme administration has also been strengthened. Between September and December 2025, the Department of Social Services (DSS) conducted a pilot verification exercise in eight upazilas, one from each administrative division, to assess beneficiary eligibility. Open meetings were organised with the participation of local government representatives, and existing beneficiaries were asked to provide updated information on age, income, landholdings, and employment status. Based on the verification results, ineligible beneficiaries are expected to be replaced by eligible older persons who are not currently covered, although the verification report had not been finalised yet.

Growing Old in Insecurity: Community Voices on Elderly Vulnerability

In the FGDs conducted across several upazilas, elderly participants were consistently described as the most vulnerable group in the community. In Derai and Bokshigonj, older men and women explained that support from their children had become irregular or had stopped altogether, leaving them dependent on small allowances to meet daily needs. A 70-year-old man receiving the Old Age Allowance shared that his children provided help only occasionally, while his regular expenses were for medicine and treatment. A 66-year-old woman living alone reported that although she received the allowance, it was not enough to cover her ongoing health costs, forcing her to reduce spending on food and other essentials.

Participants across FGDs noted that even after recent increases in benefit amounts, the allowance remained inadequate in the face of rising living and medical costs, particularly for elderly people with disabilities or those aged above 90. Many elderly individuals described using the allowance almost entirely for medicine, with little left for food or household expenses. In some cases, elderly persons below the eligibility age for the OAA, such as those around 55 years old who were no longer able to work, expressed a strong sense of exclusion, stating that their vulnerability was similar to those slightly older but not recognised by the programme criteria.

Overall, the FGDs highlighted that while the OAA provides some relief, it does not sufficiently address the combined pressures of declining health, lack of family support, and high medical costs faced by elderly individuals, leaving many to continue living in persistent insecurity despite being programme beneficiaries.

Table 3.13: Implementation progress on elderly benefit

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Time frame	Progress
Old Age Allowance (OAA): Strengthening and Expansion (60+)	1. Examine and review the age threshold	Consultations held and decisions taken	Jun-22	Age threshold has been reviewed and updated after Action Plan Phase I
	2. Update the OAA implementation manual (if age-threshold change recommended)	Manual prepared	Dec-22 Jul-22	Manual has been updated accordingly Currently 262 upazilas are covered
	3. Make the programme universal for eligible people	At least 250 upazilas covered	Each year	Benefit value has been increased but it is not inflation adjusted periodically. A recent issue has been published by FD that major 6 programme from MoSW will be reviewed for adjustment. However, in
	4. Review benefit value in line with inflation			

	and circumstances	Allowance increased periodically		that review committee no one from the ministry has been included which should be addressed as requested by DSS.
Special Benefit for the Very Old (90+)	Introduce special allowance for people aged 90+ – list preparation	List of people aged 90+ prepared Programme designed Scaled up nationwide	Jan 2022 Jul 2023	From FY2026–27, a monthly allowance of BDT 1,000 will be provided to older persons aged 90 years and above.

Source: KII with DSS and Finance Division.

Government service pension

The government service pension remains the core social insurance arrangement in Bangladesh, operating as a budget financed monthly transfer deposited to a pensioner’s bank account and typically linked to the individual’s last basic pay, with coverage extending to retired government employees and, in relevant cases, their families. Under the NSSS vision for a more complete pension system for elderly people, the government service pension was meant to continue under the Finance Division. At the same time, the strategy proposed building longer term options so that old age income security would not depend mainly on this single, employment based pension route, by exploring a contributory National Social Insurance Scheme for a wider group of workers and encouraging private voluntary pensions for those who are able to save, so that the overall architecture could move beyond reliance on a single employment based pension channel.

In terms of NSSS commitments, the emphasis was placed less on redesigning the government service pension itself and more on improving how it is administered. Reported implementation steps have included the creation of a pensioner database linked to NIDs, the introduction of electronic payment arrangements to reduce delays and improve payment regularity, as well as the strengthening of institutional arrangements within the Finance Division to oversee pension management functions. The FY2025-26 social protection budget also indicates that the pension function continues to account for a very large share of elderly related spending, with Pension Management budgeted at BDT 352.83 billion for 0.85 million beneficiaries, while the National Pension Authority (Samata Scheme) is shown as an additional social insurance initiative with BDT 1.51 billion allocation, which, taken together, signals continued fiscal priority for the government service pension alongside an emerging expansion of pension related programming through the National Pension Authority.

Table 3.14: Beneficiary and allocation under government pension support

Workfare programme	Function Category	Target beneficiaries (FY2025–26) in million	Budget (FY2025–26, in billion)
Pension Management	Social Insurance	0.85	352.825
National Pension Authority (Samata Scheme)	Social Insurance	-	1.5143

Source: Social protection budget report FY 2025-26.

Table 3.15: Progress on Government Service Pension (Public Pension)

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Time frame	Progress
Government Service Pension (Public Pension)	Continue government pension with improved approval/disposal and fiscal sustainability	Pension continued with improved management and supervision	Continuous	Approximately 8 lac elderly people currently receive pensions in Bangladesh.
	Maintain digitised pensioner database linked to NID/UID	Database created and maintained	Continuous	
	Implement Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) in pension payments	Payment system digitised	Implemented for monthly pensions	

Source: KII with DSS.

Tier 2: National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS)

The National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS), envisaged under the NSSS as a contributory system financed through joint employer and employee contributions, was intended to protect working-age people against income shocks related to unemployment, workplace injury, maternity, and sickness, while also supporting longer-term income security through structured entitlements. Progress in operationalising this vision, however, has lagged behind the planned timeline, and the contributory financing model has not yet been realised in practice, with current initiatives remaining heavily dependent on donor and transitional funding.

A core constraint has been the absence of a shared consensus between employers and employees, which is a minimum requirement for a contributory social insurance system to function effectively. Awareness of social insurance principles also remains limited beyond government institutions. While recent dialogues, consultations, and workshops have increased familiarity among government officials, engagement with employers and workers outside the public sector has been more limited, weakening ownership and buy-in. In addition, a common long-term vision across key stakeholders and political parties has yet to emerge, and the lack of a clearly articulated and widely endorsed roadmap has contributed to delays in moving from design to implementation. Although a roadmap for NSIS is currently under preparation, it has not yet translated into a visible acceleration in programme rollout.

These challenges are evident in the Employment Injury Scheme (EIS), which has been piloted primarily in the export-oriented RMG sector and later extended to footwear, leather, and EPZ sectors. While the pilot has tested core administrative functions, its financing has relied on temporary arrangements, including contributions from international brands and allocations from the Central Fund, rather than a statutory employer contribution mechanism. Beyond the EIS, progress across other NSIS branches has remained largely preparatory. Unemployment insurance

has advanced through analytical work, with a feasibility study completed in 2022 and a roadmap developed in 2023, but the planned pilot has yet to commence. Maternity insurance remains at an early preparatory stage, with partner-supported studies ongoing but no agreed framework finalised, while sickness insurance has seen the least movement and remains largely conceptual, without a defined design, pilot, or institutional arrangements.

Implementation updates also highlight continuing constraints, including gaps in legal and regulatory foundations, limited inter ministerial coordination, and continued confusion about social insurance principles, which has become more visible as the NSSS Action Plan Phase II period nears its endpoint. In response, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has strengthened its coordination role through the Social Security Unit, which has been tasked with supporting tripartite coordination, guiding the transition of the EIS towards a national scheme, advancing the unemployment insurance agenda, and engaging with relevant ministries to explore pathways for maternity and sickness coverage, including preparatory work for wider coverage expansion through the Assessment-Based National Dialogue approach. A more detailed discussion of NSIS is provided in the section on working-age.

Tier 3: Private Voluntary Pensions

Under the NSSS, private voluntary pensions were envisaged as a complementary route for individuals who want additional income security in old age and are willing to finance this protection themselves, with early actions focused on building the policy and institutional foundation rather than pursuing immediate large-scale enrolment. The NSSS action plan assigned the Finance Division (FD) to commission a study on the format of private and voluntary pensions, hold stakeholder consultations and workshops on private pensions, and establish a pension authority for private and voluntary schemes (Table ...).

Building on this pathway, the Government introduced the Universal Pension Scheme (UPS) in August 2023 with the establishment of the National Pension Authority (NPA) in the same year to oversee the system, signalling a shift from preparatory work towards an operational platform intended to expand old age income security beyond formal employment and towards much wider population coverage. The scheme covers all citizens aged 18 to 50, while those above 50 may also enrol under specific conditions. The UPS comprises four schemes (Pragati, Surokha, Samata, and Probash) each designed to meet the needs of distinct population groups. Pragati targets private-sector employees; Surokha covers informal and self-employed workers such as farmers, rickshaw pullers, labourers, blacksmiths, potters and fishermen; Samata is dedicated to low-income citizens living below the poverty line; and Probash serves Bangladeshi citizens working or residing abroad. Participation across all schemes is voluntary, with monthly contributions ranging from BDT500 to BDT10,000, depending on income and scheme type. Another proposed scheme called Prattay, intended for employees of autonomous and state-owned bodies, was discontinued shortly after its launch due to stakeholder concerns.

Four Different Schemes under Universal pension Schemes

Probash	Progoti	Surakkha	Samata
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangladeshi citizens abroad can join by contributing in foreign currency • After returning, contributions can be made in local currency or the scheme can be changed • Pension payments will be received in local currency upon completion of the scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector employees and owners can participate • If an institution joins, contributions are split in 50–50 among employee and employer • Company registration in the pension system is required for institutional participation • Employees can still join individually, even if their employer doesn't participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal sector workers and self-employed individuals (e.g., farmers, rickshaw pullers, labourers, blacksmiths, potters, fishermen, weavers) can participate • Participation is possible by paying the specified contribution rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income individuals below the poverty line (annual income < 60,000 BDT) can join the scheme • No proof of income is required for participation • Participation requires paying the subscription rate specified in the schedule

Source: Author's presentation using information from UPS website.

Despite the completion of the key action plan milestones, in May '24, almost one year after the introduction of the universal pension scheme, the number of subscribers to the National Pension Scheme was 0.16 million, whereas the target was to bring 100 million citizens under the pension scheme. As per KII findings, the National Pension Authority (NPA) grapples with capacity constraints, such as a lack of skilled technical staff and communication support, among others, which hinder the proper implementation of the UPS.

Table 3.16: Progress on Private and Voluntary Pension Schemes

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Time frame	Implementation Ministry/Division	Progress
A.3.6 Private and Voluntary Pension Schemes (Complementary Pillar)	Conduct study on the format of private/voluntary pensions	Study report submitted to Cabinet Division	Plan period (2022–26)	Finance Division; Financial Institutions Division (FID)	Study completed
	Hold stakeholder consultations on private pensions	Workshops held	Plan period (2022–26)	Finance Division; Financial Institutions Division (FID)	Workshops held
	Establish pension authority for private/voluntary schemes (if approved)	Authority established	Plan period (2022–26)	Finance Division	National Pension Authority established.

Source: KII with FID.

3.6 Strengthening Social Security for Persons with Disabilities

Disability support has become an increasingly visible part of Bangladesh's social protection agenda, not only because a significant share of the population lives with limitations, but also because the barriers they face in schooling, employment, health care, and everyday mobility often require sustained and predictable assistance. National data indicate that around 2.8 per cent of the population lives with at least one government defined disability, and the NSSS treats this as a matter of rights and state responsibility, reflecting constitutional commitments as well as Bangladesh's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007. In practical terms, the strategy emphasised on a more comprehensive and inclusive social protection system that persons with disabilities can navigate more easily, while also improving how support is targeted and delivered across different stages of life.

To operationalise this, the NSSS proposed a structured, lifecycle approach comprising three core schemes: (i) a Child Disability Benefit for children with disabilities up to age 18, (ii) a Disability Benefit for adults aged 19–59 with severe disabilities, and (iii) a transition to the Old Age Allowance at age 60 for persons with severe disabilities. A more detailed assessment of disability-related reforms under the NSSS is presented in Chapter Four.

3.7 Strengthening Social Security for the Urban Poor

As Bangladesh continues to urbanise rapidly, the divide between those who succeed and those who remain vulnerable is widening. The pace of urbanisation has supported economic growth, industrial expansion, and new opportunities, yet these gains have not been shared evenly. As a result, a significant proportion of the urban population continues to live in poverty, often in precarious conditions with limited access to basic services and decent employment. This pressure is expected to intensify as urban population growth continues, with projections indicating that the urban population will surpass the rural population by the late 2030s and reach 58.4 per cent by 2050.

Within the existing social protection landscape, the Open Market Sales (OMS) channel remains the most visible form of consumption support for low-income urban residents, providing access to rice and flour at below-market prices through the Ministry of Food. In FY2025–26, OMS is targeted to reach about 12.25 million beneficiaries, with an allocation of BDT 34.33 billion, which is substantially larger than the set of explicitly urban focused schemes that exist alongside it. By contrast, most non-transfer urban interventions are organised as service delivery or area-based investments led by the Local Government Division, including the Chattogram Hill Tracts Inclusive and Resilient Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project (BDT 0.65 billion), the Urban Primary Health Care Services Delivery Project (BDT 0.54 billion), and the Livelihood Improvement Project for Urban Poor Communities (BDT 0.23 billion). A smaller, more targeted example of urban support under the Ministry of Social Welfare is the Urban Community Development (UCD) programme, which revolves around small loans for poor urban households and is shown with an allocation of BDT 0.14 billion and coverage of about 0.006 million beneficiaries.

Table 3.17: Social security programmes for the urban population

Programme	Beneficiaries (FY2025–26) in million	Allotment in 2018–19 in billion Tk	Responsible ministry
Open Market Sale (OMS)	12.25	34.33	MoF
Chattogram Hill Tracts Inclusive and Resilient Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project	–	0.65	LGD
Urban Primary Health Care Services Delivery Project	–	0.54	LGD
Livelihood Improvement Project for Urban Poor Communities	–	0.23	LGD
Urban Community Development (UCD) Programme: Revolving small loan	0.006	0.14	MoSW

Source: Social protection budget report FY2025-26.

The NSSS action matrix also reflects an intent to build a more deliberate urban response, although progress has been uneven and has tended to move through studies and incremental scale-up rather than a consolidated urban package. Efforts to strengthen urban workfare and livelihood support have included an assessment of social protection needs in urban areas, which was completed in 2025, alongside the gradual expansion of employment generation through the SWAPNO platform, currently covering around 50 upazilas with plans to extend to a further 150, including climate-vulnerable and disaster-prone areas. For urban food security and price stabilisation, continued reliance on Open Market Sales and its expansion into denser urban locations remains consistent with the programme’s role as the primary consumption support for low-income urban households. Service-linked interventions have also progressed in parallel, with skills training for poor urban women delivered through VWB and income-generating support provided through urban community development initiatives. Overall, OMS dominates in scale and visibility, while targeted livelihood, skills, and service-oriented interventions remain comparatively small and fragmented, with urban social protection evolving through gradual adjustments rather than through a single, integrated framework.

Table 3.18: Progress on performance indicators envisaged for urban social protection

Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicator	Time frame	Implementation Ministry/Division	Progress
Urban Workfare and Livelihood Support	Conduct study on social protection needs in urban areas	Study report submitted to Cabinet Division	Dec-22	Local Government Division (LGD) / GED	SSPS program conducted a study in 2025.
	Introduce and scale up SWAPNO Project for employment generation of poor women	Number of Upazilas covered extended to 200	Continuous	LGD / UNDP / Finance Division	Expanded to 50 upazilas. Expansion to another 150 upazilas are planned, including climate vulnerable and disaster prone

					areas.
Food Security and Price Stabilisation for Urban Poor	Continue Open Market Sales (OMS) programme for low-income households and expand to dense urban areas	Programme continued	Continuous	Ministry of Food	OMS is being continued.
Urban Health and Family Planning Services	Scale up urban family planning pilot to major city corporations (Mymensingh, Chattogram, Dhaka North & South)	FP services expanded to selected city corporations	Jun-24	Medical Education and Family Welfare Division (MEFWD)	
Urban Livelihood and Skills Development (Linked with Social Protection)	Implement skills training for urban poor women under VWB Programme	Training modules developed and delivered	Continuous	MoWCA / MoSW	Training is being provided under VWB
	Support entrepreneurship and self-employment initiatives for urban poor under Social Welfare programmes	Beneficiaries engaged in income-generating activities	Continuous	MoSW	Beneficiaries of UMC are engaged in income generating activities.

Source: KII with relevant ministries.

3.8 Reform and Consolidation of Food Security Programmes

Bangladesh’s social protection system has long recognised food security as a crucial pillar of poverty reduction and disaster resilience. The NSSS underscored that social security must not only address everyday poverty but also help households withstand shocks such as floods, droughts, global price hikes, and economic downturns. To support this objective, the strategy called for i) consolidating food transfer programmes ensuring coordination with food stocking policy and ii) food distribution for disaster relief to continue as a disaster relief programme. Alongside these reforms, the NSSS also prioritised a gradual transition from food-based workfare programmes to cash transfers, since in-kind delivery often incurs higher administrative costs due to storage, transportation, and distribution, which can reduce cost effectiveness.²⁴

To ensure that vulnerable populations remain protected during disasters or inflationary shocks, the NSSS proposed maintaining food distribution as a core disaster relief intervention, while strengthening programmes such as Open Market Sales (OMS) and the Food Friendly Programme (FFP) under the Ministry of Food. Nutrition-focused initiatives, including school feeding and therapeutic feeding for malnourished children, continue to operate with the involvement of mothers’ clubs.

Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Open Market Sales (OMS), the Food Friendly Programme (FFP), Food for Work and the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) truck sales are central to Bangladesh’s food security related social protection, but they operate through different entry

²⁴ Administrative costs of food transfers can go up to 2.5 times higher than those of cash-transfer programmes (World Bank, 2021).

points. VGF is primarily a disaster response instrument that provides short term food assistance to poor and extreme poor households affected by shocks, typically through a monthly rice entitlement of around 10 to 30 kg per household. OMS functions as a price stabilisation and affordability channel rather than a relief scheme, making subsidised rice and flour accessible for low-income households, which becomes especially important during food price hikes; however, when market prices rise sharply, demand tends to outstrip supply, and queues often expand beyond the poorest. The FFP is more explicitly pro poor and rural focused, supplying eligible households with 30 kg of rice per month for six months each year at a nominal price of Tk 15 per kg through local dealer networks, and it functions as seasonal consumption smoothing for very low-income rural households. Food for Work links food support with short term employment, typically in disaster affected or erosion prone areas, where beneficiaries receive a stated daily benefit of around 8 kg of rice or its cash equivalent, in return for labour on public works.

Alongside OMS, TCB truck sales have become a prominent subsidised sales mechanism for stabilising prices and improving access to essentials when market prices rise beyond the reach of low-income households, although TCB is not listed as a formal social protection programme. TCB sells key items such as rice, sugar, edible oil, and lentils at subsidised rates to around 10 million low-income families, now largely targeted through a Family Card system to reduce leakage and limit capture by better-off households. Under this arrangement, cardholders receive monthly quantities such as 5 kg rice, 1 kg sugar, 2 litres of soybean oil, and 2 kg lentils at administered prices below prevailing market rates, with distribution supported by a nationwide dealer network and an increasingly digitised verification process using card scanning or biometric checks.

Table 3.19: List of food Security Programmes

Programme	Implementing ministry	Main objective	Target beneficiaries (FY2025-26) in million	Budget (FY2025-26) in billion
Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)	MoDMR and MoFL	Provide temporary food support to poor and extreme poor households affected by shocks and disasters.	19.1	18.08
Open Market Sales (OMS)	MoF	Stabilise food grain prices and improve affordability by selling rice and flour at subsidised prices, especially during market instability.	12.25	34.33
Food Friendly Programme (FFP)	MoF	Support seasonal food security for the poorest rural households by providing rice at a nominal price during a defined period.	5.5	45.32
Food for Work (FFW)	MoDMR and MoL	Offer short-term employment and food support during seasonal hardship or post-disaster recovery, often linked to small rural works.	0.98	10.45

Source: Social protection budget report FY2025-26.

The mid-term review noted that, although progress was uneven across reforms, food-related initiatives were among the more timely implemented components of the strategy. Recent progress has included the formulation of the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2021–2024) and the piloting of cash transfers as substitutes for selected in-kind food assistance schemes. As per the action plan phase II progress report, the transition from food to cash transfers for most workfare programmes is still ongoing, with the Food for Work program gradually shifting to cash-based schemes in phases and was set to be completed by December 2024.

Despite the progress challenges remain such as seasonal food insecurity among fishing communities, the inadequacy of support for small and marginal farmers during climate-related shocks, and constraints in promoting value addition in livestock, dairy, and poultry sectors, which were further complicated by the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, Evidence from an IFPRI survey on the FFP during the pandemic points to delivery gaps, reporting that only 64 per cent of respondents received their full entitlements over the distribution period and 58 per cent reported receiving less than 10 kg of the promised 30 kg, which highlights operational fragilities during crisis conditions (IFPRI, 2021). Overall, continued efforts are required to build an integrated system that ensures both immediate relief and long-term resilience for the most vulnerable populations.

3.9 Consolidation of Small and Special Schemes

Bangladesh’s social protection system has become increasingly fragmented over time, with too many small and special schemes. As a result, the budget is now thinly spread over these programmes, reducing the efficiency of each. Recognising these inefficiencies, the NSSS identified the consolidation of small and special schemes as one of the key reform priorities. The objective is to reduce duplication, strengthen administrative efficiency, and ensure that limited resources were channelled toward impactful programmes.

Within this agenda, the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) was envisaged as a major reform that would bring together existing support for poor and vulnerable women under a single, more coherent programme. The strategy proposed consolidating the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme with the Allowance for Widows and Husband-Deserted Destitute Women, and the integration of related schemes such as VGD, ICVGD, and urban VWB interventions into a unified benefit package. In practice, however, this consolidation did not take place as envisaged, and the main change that occurred was that the existing VGD programme was rebranded as the VWB programme. Similarly, the gap is also visible in the freedom fighter support portfolio, where the NSSS proposed merging the schemes related to Freedom Fighters into a single Freedom Fighters’ Benefit Programme, the consolidation did not proceed instead nine separate schemes were introduced.²⁵

²⁵ As per KII conducted with MoLW, consolidation of these programmes is not possible, as payments are generated based on individual programme codes; the target beneficiaries and criteria are also different.

Table 3.20: Freedom fighters–related social protection programmes (FY2025–26)

Programme	Beneficiaries (million)	Budget (BDT billion)
Assistance for Freedom Fighters	0.197	47.28
Allowances for War-Wounded and Other Freedom Fighters	0.012	4.80
Honorarium Programme for Freedom Fighters with Gallantry Awards	0.001	0.17
Bangla New Year Allowance for Freedom Fighters	0.200	0.43
Victory Day Allowance for Freedom Fighters	0.103	0.70
Festival Allowance for Freedom Fighters	0.200	4.56
Food at Concession Rate for Privileged Heroic Freedom Fighters	0.010	0.90
Assistance to Families of Martyrs and Medical Assistance to the Injured (July Uprising)	0.015	2.33
Housing Construction Project for Insolvent Heroic Freedom Fighters	–	7.98

Source: Social protection budget report FY2025-26.

The NSSS also pointed out that many small schemes had emerged over time, often supported by development partners and donors, while valuable as pilots for testing new approaches, they also added to fragmentation. To manage this, the NSSS placed responsibility on concerned ministries and divisions to assess the usefulness of their small programmes and to prepare a business case where continuation was proposed. In line with the lifecycle framing, these schemes were expected to be reshaped into one of four routes: merged into a similar major lifecycle programme, continued but managed outside the social security portfolio where more appropriate, discontinued upon expiry or termination, or scaled up where justified by performance and relevance. To facilitate the process, the General Economics Division (GED) prepared a standard business case template and shared it with focal points across relevant ministries, with the understanding that GED would synthesise ministry submissions into a consolidation review plan and submit it to the Cabinet Division for decisions on retention, merger, or closure. In practice, consolidation has remained difficult for some agencies, including the Financial Institutions Division, where multiple donors, differing objectives, varied implementing arrangements, and non-aligned reporting systems have complicated alignment into a smaller number of schemes. In FY 2025-26, the number of social protection programmes were reduced to only 95, a significant decline from the previous year's 140 programmes (Figure 3.10). However, the NSSS Midterm Review (2020) previously mentioned that although the number of schemes declined over the years, this has often reflected the natural expiry of projects or funding cycles rather than systematic consolidation. To date, only eight programmes have been consolidated into three unified schemes:

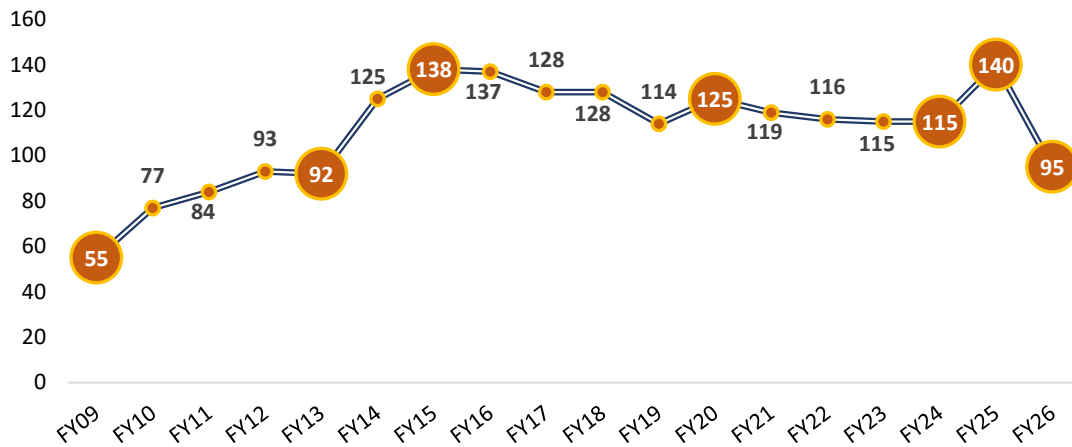
- The former Maternity Allowance (MA) and Lactating Mother Allowance (LMA) schemes have been consolidated into a single Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) in 2019, reflecting the NSSS direction to reduce fragmentation by merging closely related schemes that served similar beneficiary groups and objectives, while moving towards a more unified support package for mothers and young children.
- The Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED) previously implemented four separate programmes the Secondary Education Stipend Project (SESP), Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP), Secondary Education Sector Investment

Program (SESIP) and Higher Secondary Stipend Project (HSSP). In 2020, these were brought under a single, harmonised structure, now known as the Secondary Education Stipend Programme.

- In May 2025, the Advisory Committee on Social Security Programs (ACSSP) approved the consolidation of four livelihood support schemes for tea garden workers, Bede communities, Hijra/transgender groups, and other disadvantaged groups into a single unified programme, “Underprivileged People’s Livelihood Development Programme.” As part of the reform, benefit levels were harmonised, and the monthly cash transfer for transgender individuals, Bede communities, and other disadvantaged groups was increased to BDT 650 from FY2025–26, while the support for tea garden workers was also revised to an equivalent rate of BDT 650 per month (set as an annual transfer). The ACSSP also approved additional components, including a stipend for 5,000 students from tea garden worker families and dedicated funding for training on alternative income-generating activities for tea garden workers, with an allocation of BDT 30 million for this purpose.
- Two disability benefit programmes were consolidated into one “Disability Allowance and Education Stipend Programme.” Finalising the consolidation of the two disability programmes required a single implementation manual that could guide delivery under one scheme. In November 2024, the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) confirmed that the manual would be revised and approved within the required timeline. In response, DSS drafted the manual for the consolidated disability allowance and education stipend and shared it with MoSW, after which MoSW reviewed the draft and held two inter-ministerial meetings to incorporate feedback, leading to an updated version. The consolidation decision was then formally confirmed in May 2025 by the Advisory Committee on Social Security Programs (ACSSP), which agreed that the two programmes would be merged from FY2025–26. MoSW subsequently approved the manual, and an official approval circular was issued on 25 June 2025. Reflecting this change, the FY2025–26 Social Protection Budget Report lists the two PwD programmes under a single operational code, and the Finance Division has aligned both operational and economic codes in iBAS++, enabling unified budgeting and financial tracking under the consolidated scheme.

The reduction in the number of programmes, whether driven by deliberate consolidation or by other factors, still signals a meaningful step towards streamlining.

Figure 3.10: Number of social protection programmes over the years



Source: Finance division.

3.10 Social Security for Socially Excluded Groups

The NSSS recognises that a range of population groups in Bangladesh face persistent forms of social exclusion linked to gender, ethnicity, religion, occupation, disability, and health status, which limit their access to livelihoods, basic services, and mainstream social protection. Addressing these layered disadvantages is framed as an integral part of the Government’s broader Social Development Framework, with an emphasis on reducing discrimination through affirmative action, expanding access to public services, and designing tailored interventions for groups whose needs are not adequately met through general programmes. The NSSS also underscores that progress in this area requires a combination of universal access to core social security programmes and targeted measures that explicitly account for the barriers faced by excluded groups, supported by local government institutions, NGOs, and effective grievance redress mechanisms to improve identification, outreach, and accountability.

In line with this approach, the Underprivileged People’s Livelihood Development Programme, introduced in 2025, represents a significant consolidation of earlier livelihood support initiatives targeting socially excluded communities. Implemented by the Ministry of Social Welfare through the Department of Social Services, the programme aims to promote economic inclusion among underprivileged groups through a mix of special grants, educational stipends, training, and post-training cash or in-kind support. The programme operates under an Integrated Implementation Guideline issued in 2025 and uses a Management Information System to support beneficiary management and payments. In FY2025–26, the programme targets 2.69 lakh beneficiaries with a budget allocation of BDT 223.05 crore, and G2P transaction costs are borne by the government. By bringing together multiple community-specific livelihood schemes under a single framework, the programme reflects the NSSS emphasis on harmonisation, improved delivery systems, and a shift from fragmented assistance towards a more integrated economic inclusion pathway for socially excluded groups.

Alongside this consolidated livelihood intervention, targeted rehabilitation support continues for people engaged in begging through the Programme on Rehabilitation and Alternative Employment for the People Engaged in Begging, implemented since 2018 by the Ministry of Social Welfare. The programme is designed to address extreme forms of social and economic exclusion by supporting working-age homeless people and beggars to transition into alternative livelihoods through one-off grants, skills training, and working capital support. For FY2025–26, the programme aims to reach 40,000 beneficiaries with a budget allocation of BDT 12 crore. Although modest in scale relative to need, the programme reflects the NSSS commitment to addressing highly visible and entrenched forms of destitution through rehabilitation rather than punitive or exclusionary approaches.

The social protection framework FY2025–26, also includes targeted interventions for ethnic and minority communities, such as the Improvement of Socio-Economic and Livelihood Development of Tribal and Minor Races People through Integrated Livestock Project, implemented by the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, with a budget allocation of BDT 50 crore. While beneficiary numbers are not explicitly reported, the programme is intended to support livelihood diversification and income generation among historically marginalised communities through asset-based and sector-specific interventions, complementing broader livelihood and social assistance measures.

In addition to the consolidation and scaling of programmes for socially excluded groups, recent decisions also signal a shift towards improving benefit adequacy and inclusiveness for disadvantaged populations. For FY2026–27, benefit amounts are set to be increased across three key programmes targeting disadvantaged groups, reflecting recognition that existing transfer levels have been eroded by rising living costs. As part of this adjustment, the monthly allowance rate has been revised upward from the prevailing level, with corresponding budgetary provisions made for the next fiscal year. Importantly, eligibility conditions have also been eased for some highly marginalised groups: the age threshold for Hijra beneficiaries has recently been removed, expanding access to social assistance for transgender individuals who often face lifelong exclusion from formal employment and family support systems. Taken together, these changes suggest a gradual move beyond static programme design towards more responsive benefit setting and eligibility rules that better reflect the lived vulnerabilities of socially excluded groups, in line with the broader NSSS emphasis on equity, inclusion, and adequacy.

Overall, these programmes indicate that the NSSS vision for socially excluded groups is being operationalised through a combination of consolidated livelihood support, targeted rehabilitation, and sector-specific economic inclusion initiatives. The emphasis on programme harmonisation, integrated guidelines, digital delivery systems, and nationwide coverage aligns with NSSS principles on efficiency and inclusion. At the same time, the relatively limited scale of some interventions and the continued reliance on targeted schemes highlight ongoing challenges in fully mainstreaming socially excluded populations into the wider social protection system, underscoring the importance of sustained institutional capacity, coordinated implementation, and strengthened local-level outreach in the next phase of NSSS implementation.

3.11 Social Protection Responses to Covariate Shocks and Natural Disasters

Covariate shocks, especially floods, cyclones, droughts and river erosion, continue to shape Bangladesh's social protection needs because they affect large groups at the same time and can quickly overwhelm household coping capacity in disaster prone areas. Within the NSSS framing, this vulnerability was treated as a priority concern, given both the scale of exposure and the way shocks can reverse poverty reduction gains, so disaster response and mitigation support was positioned alongside lifecycle programmes, rather than being treated as a marginal add on.

To manage these risks, the NSSS approach centred on strengthening existing disaster mitigation and response instruments and using them more flexibly when crises hit, including programmes such as VGF and Gratuitous Relief, public works related support such as Food for Work, Cash for Work and EGPP to address seasonal and shock related employment loss, and subsidised food access through mechanisms such as OMS to reduce the impact of food price spikes. It also envisaged a more responsive delivery model, using MIS based electronic cash delivery in priority schemes, temporary increases in transfer values during emergencies, and clearer mechanisms to identify the worst affected geographic areas so that payments could be triggered quickly, with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief expected to coordinate with relevant ministries on these processes, and budget allocations for disaster related social protection remaining significant in recent years.

3.12 Programme Reforms: A Summary of Performance Using a Scoring Analysis

Implementation progress for child-focused reforms under NSSS shows a clear improvement between the midterm review and the final evaluation, although important gaps remain. At the time of the Midterm Review in 2020, progress was uneven across the 18 assessed indicators, with a large share either seriously or moderately off-track (10 out of 18 indicators), and only three indicators assessed as on-track. One indicator could not be assessed due to timing constraints, underscoring the early stage of implementation for several planned reforms. Overall, the midterm picture reflected slow initial momentum with overall score of 54.86 per cent, particularly for reforms requiring new programme design, coordination across ministries, or institutional restructuring.

In the Final Evaluation, the scope of assessment had expanded substantially to 27 activities and 27 indicators, reflecting both scale-up and greater operational clarity. The distribution of performance ratings suggests a shift away from severe implementation delays: no indicators were classified as seriously off-track, while seven indicators were assessed as on-track and six as nearly on-track. However, progress has been largely incremental rather than transformative, with nearly half of all indicators (13 out of 27) still assessed as moderately off-track. The composite progress score of 72.64 per cent indicates that while the child social security agenda has moved forward since 2020, implementation remains partial, with reforms advancing unevenly and several measures still falling short of NSSS ambitions, particularly those related to coverage expansion, benefit adequacy, and system integration.

Figure 3.11: Strengthening social security for children



Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final Review of NSSS (2026)

Progress under the working-age pillar shows gradual improvement between the Midterm Review and the Final Evaluation, although implementation challenges remain pronounced. At midterm in 2020, the overall progress score was 49.85 per cent, performance across the 28 indicators was weak overall, with nearly half assessed as seriously off-track (13 indicators) and only eight indicators rated as on-track. This reflected the complexity of reforms in this area, many of which depend on cross-ministerial coordination, labour market institutions, skills systems, and employment-linked programme design, where progress was uneven and often delayed.

By the time of the Final Evaluation, assessment covered 25 activities and 25 indicators, with a more balanced distribution of performance ratings. The number of seriously off-track indicators declined to five, while fourteen indicators were assessed as on-track or nearly on-track. Nonetheless, moderately off-track indicators remain significant at six, indicating that several reforms have advanced but not at the pace or scale envisaged under the NSSS. The overall progress score of 72.86 per cent suggests steady forward movement since 2020, but also highlights that reforms targeting the working-age population continue to face structural and implementation bottlenecks, particularly in translating policy intent into sustained employment outcomes and integrated programme delivery.

Implementation progress for the elderly individuals shows a clear improvement between the Midterm Review and the Final Evaluation, and this is reflected in the much higher overall progress score (91.2 per cent). At midterm in 2020, with the overall score of 55.58 per cent, the progress was uneven across the 16 indicators, with seven assessed as seriously off-track and only five rated as on-track, suggesting that several reforms were still at an early stage or were progressing more slowly than intended. Only one indicator was assessed as almost on-track, and one as moderately off-track, which meant the distribution was heavily tilted towards either strong progress in a few areas or limited movement in many others.

Figure 3.12: Strengthening social security for working age



Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final Review of NSSS (2026)

By the Final Evaluation, coverage expanded slightly to 17 activities and 17 indicators, and the results shifted towards stronger implementation. Ten indicators were assessed as on-track and a further five as nearly on-track, while only two remained moderately off-track, and none were categorised as seriously off-track. Compared with the midterm distribution, the reduction in seriously off-track indicators and the increase in on-track indicators suggests that reforms affecting older people moved from slower, partial implementation into more established delivery and policy execution over the later period, even though a smaller group of actions still shows incomplete progress and requires continued follow-through.

Figure 3.13: Comprehensive pension system for the elderly



Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final Review of NSSS (2026)

Implementation progress for urban poor interventions shows a sharp change between the Midterm Review and the Final Evaluation, and the overall score (83.89%) largely reflects that the

reform agenda expanded and began moving beyond a single stalled action. In 2020, the pillar effectively rested on one activity and one indicator, and that indicator was assessed as seriously off-track, meaning that the core action expected under the strategy had not been delivered during the review period. With such a narrow indicator base, the midterm assessment mainly signalled that the urban pillar had not yet been operationalised in a meaningful way, the overall score in 2020 was 40 per cent.

By the Final Evaluation, the scope broadened substantially to 15 activities and 15 indicators, and progress became more mixed rather than uniformly stalled. Four indicators were assessed as on-track and two as nearly on-track, which suggests that some components of the urban response were put in place or advanced to a functional stage. At the same time, six indicators were assessed as moderately off-track, indicating that while implementation has started across a wider set of intended actions, several areas remain behind what was envisaged and appear to be progressing through partial delivery or incremental steps rather than a fully consolidated urban package.

Figure 3.14: Programmes for the urban poor



Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final Review of NSSS (2026)

Progress under the persons with disabilities pillar appears substantially stronger in the Final Evaluation, reflected in the high overall score (91.56%) and a clear shift from a small set of mixed results to broader, more consistently positive implementation. In the Midterm Review (2020), the overall score was 60 per cent and the pillar was assessed against only five activities and five indicators, and performance was uneven, with two indicators rated on-track but three others assessed as either moderately or seriously off-track, suggesting that implementation was advancing in some areas but remained stalled or incomplete in others.

By the Final Evaluation, the reform scope expanded markedly to 22 activities and 22 indicators, and the implementation profile improved at the same time, with 12 indicators assessed as on-track and a further eight as nearly on-track. This distribution indicates that most intended actions had either reached an operational stage or moved close to completion, rather than remaining at a planning or

partial-delivery stage, which is a notable improvement compared with the midterm pattern when a large share of the limited indicator set was assessed as off-track.

Figure 3.15: Programmes for the person with disabilities



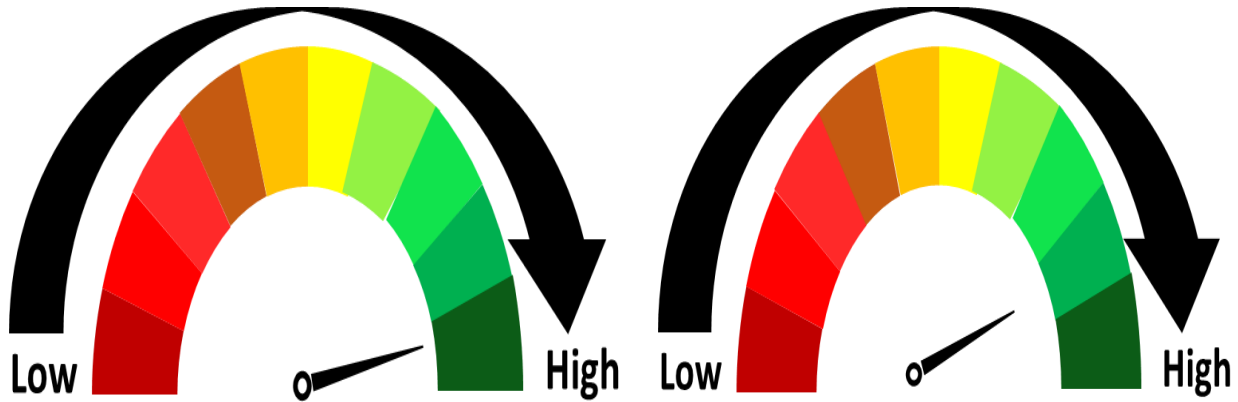
Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final Review of NSSS (2026)

Food security reforms show relatively strong progress in both assessment points, and the Final Evaluation score of 87.99 per cent is consistent with a reform area where most actions were implemented or moved close to completion. In the Midterm Review (2020), the agenda was assessed against six activities and six indicators, with all indicators clustered in the top two categories, as four were rated on-track and the remaining two were almost on-track, suggesting that delivery systems and programme continuity were already comparatively stable at that stage, with 93.33 per cent.

By the Final Evaluation, the scope of tracking expanded substantially to 16 activities and 16 indicators, and performance remained broadly positive even with a larger and more demanding indicator set. Eight indicators were rated on-track and four were nearly on-track, while one indicator was assessed as seriously off-track, indicating that although most actions progressed well, at least one reform element lagged significantly even as overall delivery remained stronger than in several other programme clusters.

Figure 3.16: Programmes for food security

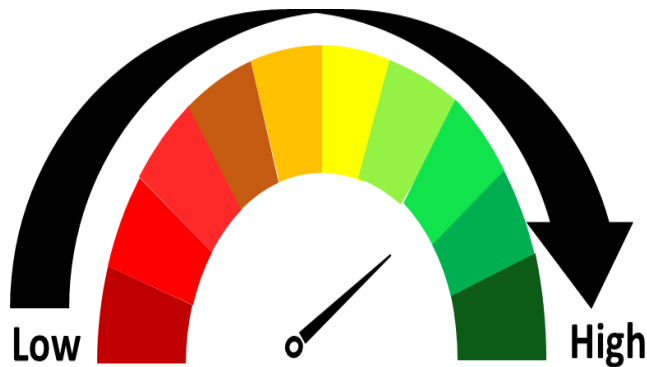


Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final Review of NSSS (2026)

In the Final Evaluation, the progress on strengthening resilience, social inclusion and covariate risk reform area was assessed against 15 activities and 15 indicators, and overall progress was mixed, which is also reflected in the 80 per cent score shown in the dashboard. Only one indicator was rated on-track, with a further three rated nearly on-track, while one indicator was moderately off-track and one was seriously off-track, suggesting that a small set of actions progressed meaningfully but that full operationalisation remained limited for others. A large share of the indicator set was also not assessed, which means the overall picture is shaped by partial evidence rather than a complete performance record across all planned actions.

Figure 3.17: Reform for covariate risk



Source: Final Review of NSSS (2026)

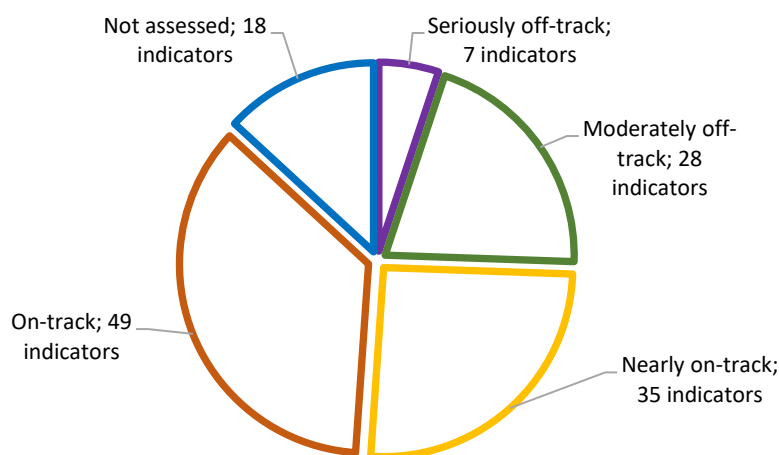
3.13 Implementation Progress: Summary of Individual Performance Indicators

The assessment of implementation progress under the NSSS Final Review is based on the status of 137 individual performance indicators specified across programme areas and reform objectives. As

in earlier reviews, indicators are classified into five categories: on-track, nearly on-track, moderately off-track, seriously off-track, and not assessed, depending on the extent to which the intended actions and outcomes have been achieved.

Overall, the final review indicates a mixed implementation picture. Of the 137 indicators assessed, 49 indicators (36%) are on-track, meaning that the intended actions have been fully achieved or are operational as envisaged in the NSSF and its Action Plan. A further 35 indicators (26%) are nearly on-track, where substantial progress has been made but some gaps remain. Together, these suggest that around 62 per cent of indicators show satisfactory or near-satisfactory progress. However, 28 indicators (20%) are assessed as moderately off-track, and 7 indicators (5%) are seriously off-track, indicating areas where implementation has lagged significantly behind NSSF commitments. In addition, 18 indicators (13%) were not assessed in the final review period.

Figure 3.18: Implementation status of all performance indicators

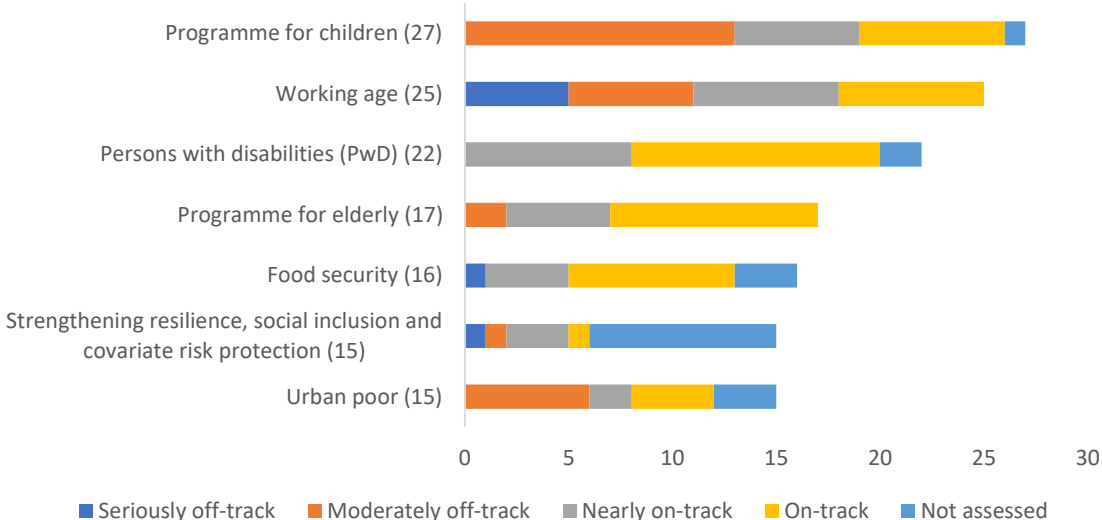


Source: NSSF Final Review.

Progress varies considerably across programme areas. Implementation has been strongest in programmes for older persons and persons with disabilities, where the majority of indicators are either on-track or nearly on-track, reflecting clearer programme design, relatively stable financing, and incremental administrative reforms. Food security programmes also show comparatively strong performance, with most indicators either on-track or nearly on-track, consistent with the long-standing operational maturity of schemes such as OMS, VGF, and relief-based interventions. By contrast, reforms related to the urban poor and strengthening resilience, social inclusion, and covariate risk protection display weaker progress. In the case of the urban poor, progress remains limited largely because several envisaged analytical and design actions were delayed or not undertaken, and interventions continue to be fragmented across agencies. Similarly, indicators related to adaptive and shock-responsive social protection show uneven implementation, with many actions remaining at an early or preparatory stage.

The largest concentration of indicators remains within the working-age population reform area, where progress is mixed. Of the 25 indicators assessed for this group, fewer than half are on-track or nearly on-track, while a substantial number remain moderately or seriously off-track. This reflects the complexity of labour market reforms, skills development, and contributory social insurance initiatives, many of which require multi-institutional coordination and sustained political consensus.

Figure 3.19: Implementation status of individual performance indicators: On-track, almost on-track, moderately off-track and seriously off-track



Note: The number of individual performance indicators is given within the parentheses.

Source: Final evaluation analysis.

Overall, the final review suggests that while the NSSS has achieved meaningful progress in several lifecycle-based programmes, especially those with established delivery systems, implementation has been uneven across reform areas. Structural reforms requiring consolidation, system integration, and new institutional arrangements continue to face delays, underscoring the need for stronger coordination, clearer accountability, and sustained political and administrative commitment in the next phase of social protection reform.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the progress of programme reforms under the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) over the first decade of its implementation, with a particular focus on developments during the Phase II Action Plan period. Overall, the analysis suggests that the NSSS has succeeded in establishing a clearer lifecycle-based framework for social protection in Bangladesh and has helped move several large programmes from fragmented arrangements towards more standardised and systematised delivery. At the same time, progress has been

uneven across reform areas, and many of the more ambitious institutional and structural changes envisaged under the strategy remain only partially realised.

Reforms have advanced most visibly in areas where programmes were already well established and administratively mature. Support for older persons and persons with disabilities shows the strongest overall performance, reflected in high shares of indicators assessed as on-track or nearly on-track in the final evaluation. Incremental but meaningful improvements have been made in benefit adequacy, national coverage, digitised payment systems, and periodic review mechanisms, particularly for the Old Age Allowance and disability-related benefits. Similarly, food security programmes demonstrate relatively strong and sustained performance, drawing on long-standing delivery systems that have been adapted over time to respond to shocks, price volatility, and seasonal vulnerability.

Child-focused programmes also show clear improvement compared with the midterm review, especially through programme consolidation, coverage expansion, and strengthened delivery mechanisms. The transition from fragmented maternal support schemes to the Mother and Child Benefit Programme represents a notable step towards the NSSS vision of early lifecycle protection, even though coverage targets and age eligibility remain below original ambitions. School stipend and feeding programmes continue to provide large-scale support to children, but concerns over benefit adequacy, inflation erosion, and operational challenges highlight the limits of progress where reforms depend on sustained fiscal commitment and system-wide coordination.

By contrast, reforms targeting the working-age population, the urban poor, and shock-responsive social protection have progressed more slowly and unevenly. These areas account for a disproportionate share of indicators assessed as moderately or seriously off-track. In the case of the working-age population, complexity has been a central constraint: reforms depend on coordination across multiple ministries, labour market institutions, skills systems, and social insurance arrangements, many of which are still evolving. While there has been movement in skills development, workfare, and economic inclusion initiatives, the transition towards a comprehensive contributory social insurance system remains incomplete, with only the Employment Injury Scheme moving beyond design into piloting.

Urban social protection remains comparatively underdeveloped within the NSSS framework. Although the scope of interventions expanded substantially between the midterm and final evaluations, progress has largely taken the form of incremental additions rather than a coherent, integrated urban protection package. Existing responses continue to rely heavily on food price stabilisation and scattered livelihood or service delivery projects, leaving gaps in income security, housing-related vulnerability, and predictable support for the urban poor.

Across all reform areas, the consolidation of small and special schemes has proven particularly difficult. While the number of programmes has declined over time and several important consolidations have been achieved, these changes have often resulted from project closure or funding cycles rather than systematic rationalisation. Resistance to merging programmes,

institutional fragmentation, and differing stakeholder interests have limited the pace of reform, underscoring the political and administrative challenges inherent in restructuring long-standing social protection portfolios.

Overall, the findings suggest that the NSSS has been most effective in strengthening and incrementally improving existing programmes, while transformative reforms requiring new institutions, sustained coordination, or contributory financing have advanced more slowly. The final review indicates that a majority of performance indicators show satisfactory or near-satisfactory progress, but a significant minority continue to lag behind, particularly in areas central to building a more adaptive, integrated, and future-ready social protection system.

As Bangladesh moves beyond the first decade of NSSS implementation, the experience documented in this chapter points to several overarching lessons. Sustained progress will depend not only on expanding coverage or adjusting benefit levels, but also on strengthening coordination across ministries, clarifying accountability for cross-cutting reforms, and building institutional capacity to manage more complex instruments such as social insurance and shock-responsive protection. Without renewed political commitment and administrative focus on these harder reforms, the social protection system risks remaining strong in scale but uneven in coherence, falling short of the full transformative potential envisioned under the NSSS.

Chapter 4: Social Protection for Persons with Disabilities

4.1 Introduction

In Bangladesh, persons with disabilities (PwDs), being one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, experience deprivation that cuts across income, age, gender, region and employment.²⁶ Persistent socio-economic challenges, including exclusion, stigma and limited access to public services, add to the severity of these vulnerabilities. However, Bangladesh has made notable policy advances towards disability inclusion. The Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act (2013) provides a legal foundation for equality, accessibility and protection against discrimination, and the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS, 2015) recognises PwDs as a priority group within its life cycle approach, integrating disability considerations into broader social protection reform.

Under the Department of Social Services (DSS), several programmes are currently in operation to support PwDs, including many institutions providing different forms of benefits and services. However, several implementation challenges remain. Gaps in beneficiary identification, benefit adequacy is low, and overlapping databases limit programme effectiveness, and many PwDs remain outside formal support networks due to lack of awareness, mobility barriers, and absence of localized outreach. Mainstream social protection schemes, such as old age or employment generation programmes, rarely include PwDs as a clearly defined beneficiary group, which points to the need for more systematic inclusion across all ministries and programmes.

Looking ahead to the upcoming NSSS 2026+, disability inclusive social protection will need to be strengthened through more reliable and harmonised data on disability, better targeting and certification processes, improved benefit adequacy and clearer protection across the life cycle, with particular attention to women, children and persons with multiple or severe disabilities. Investments in skills training, digital accessibility and community-based rehabilitation will also be important to shift from a predominantly welfare-based approach towards one that supports empowerment and capability building. Continued efforts to mainstream disability within social protection, supported by improved data systems and inter-ministerial coordination, will be critical to realising the country's constitutional commitment to equality and the "Leave No One Behind" pledge under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Against this backdrop, this chapter reviews progress against NSSS disability related social protection commitments and identifies remaining gaps in design, coverage, adequacy and implementation for PwDs.

²⁶ Disability, as defined by the Persons with Disability Rights and Protection Act, 2013, refers to a long-term or permanent physical, mental, intellectual, developmental, or sensory impairment, or the negative impact of societal attitudes and environmental barriers, that hinders a person from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis.

4.2 Prevalence of Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh

Current statistics in Bangladesh still offer differing answers to the question of how many people live with disabilities (Figure 1), largely because major sources of disability datasets rely on different classification criteria, measurement tools, and data collection processes. The National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) 2021, conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), estimated that, only 2.8 per cent of the population or 4.6 million people, were living with at least one form of disability, while the Disability Information System (DIS) reported total 3.4 million registered persons with disabilities as of FY2023-24.²⁷ Interestingly, Household-level survey data add yet another layer of variation, with the HIES 2022 estimating a prevalence of 5.7 per cent, equivalent to approximately 9.4 million individuals. The Population and Housing Census 2022 reported an even higher rate of 9.7 per cent. Even when the highest national estimate, Bangladesh still sits well below the WHO benchmark. In 2023, WHO estimated that about 16 per cent of the world's population or 1.3 billion people, experience significant disabilities. This gap between national and global figures suggests the potentiality of underreporting or misrepresentation of disability data in Bangladesh, influenced not only by methodological differences but also by persistent challenges such as stigma, social barriers to self-identification, and limited public awareness (Razzaque & Hasan, 2024; UNPRPD MPTF, 2022).

Part of this discrepancy can also be traced back to the way disability is identified, certified and recorded within Bangladesh's administrative systems. The process for obtaining a disability identification card (Suborno Card) and certificate is complex, involving multiple visits to local social service offices, medical assessment, and recommendation from local councils before applications are reviewed by Upazila or district committees, and local OPDs often step in to support applicants through this process. The Ministry of Social Welfare has identified and registered more than 1.5 million persons with disabilities, initially through a disability detection survey carried out by the Department of Social Services and subsequently through self-reporting by disability assessment applicants, yet there is still no institutional referral pathway linking certified individuals to assistive devices or other services, so many perceive the limited benefits associated with the Suborno Card as not worth the effort required to obtain it (UNPRPD MPTF, 2022).

²⁷ [DIS-হোম](#)

Figure 1: Disability prevalence estimates from different data sources in Bangladesh

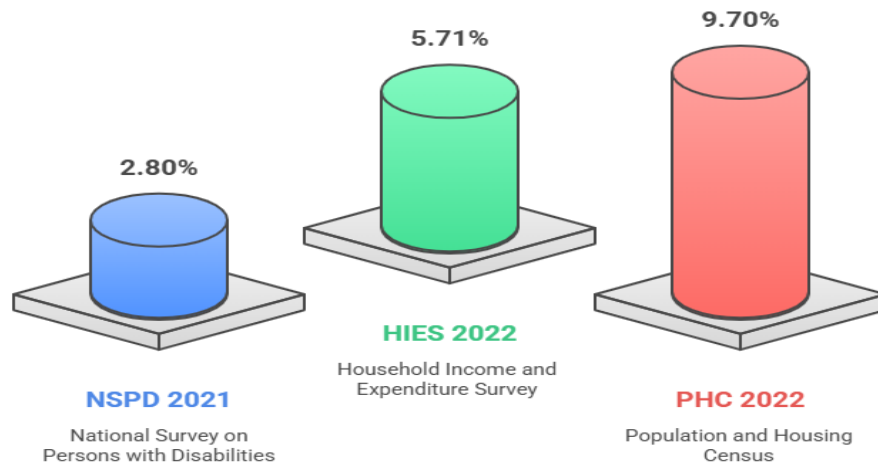
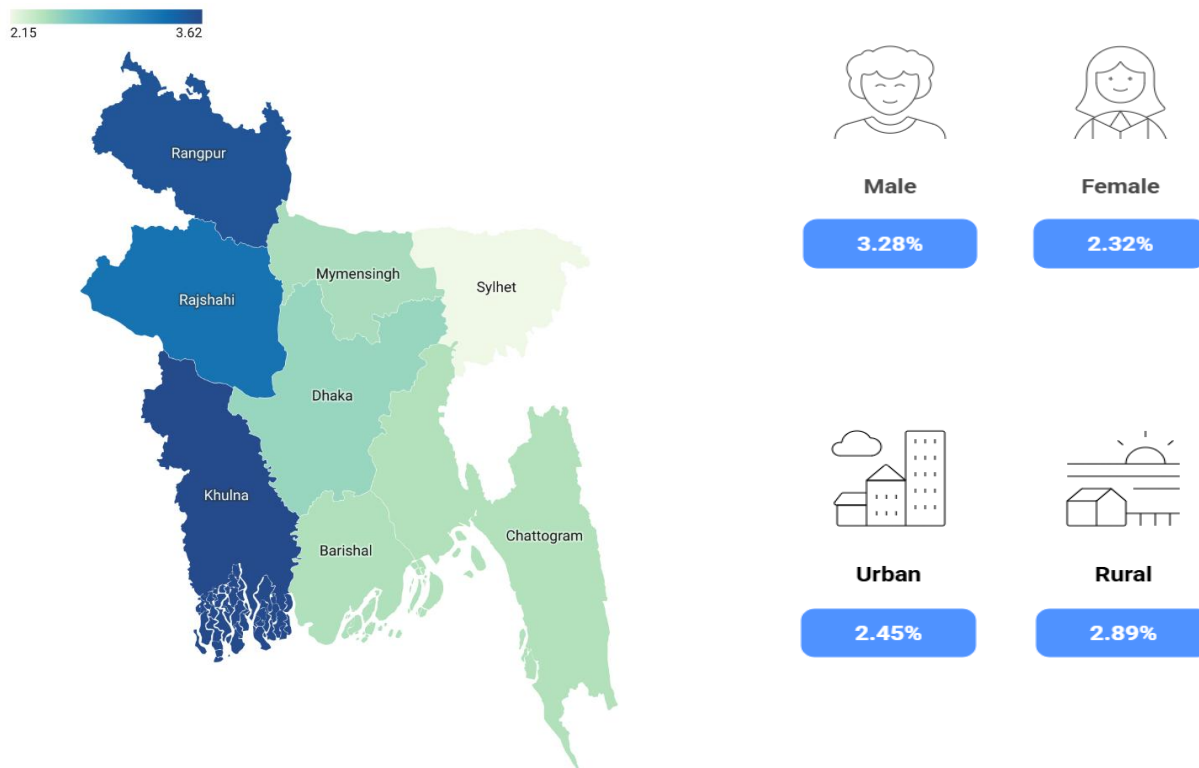


Figure 2: Disability prevalence by sex, area of residence and division



Source: NSPD 2021.

Survey evidence from the NSPD 2021, shed light on disability prevalence across gender, different geographic areas, divisions and age (Figure 2). For instance, a slightly higher disability prevalence was observed among male with 3.28 per cent, compared to females (2.32%). When disaggregated by areas, rural areas have register somewhat higher disability rates than urban areas, perhaps due to potential differences in living conditions and access to healthcare. Regional disparities are also evident in Bangladesh, with Khulna and Rangpur exhibit the highest prevalence with 3.62 per cent and 3.54 per cent, respectively, while Sylhet has the lowest (2.15%). Across most divisions, male prevalence remains consistently higher than female prevalence, although the size of this gap varies from one region to another. Overall, the spatial disparities point to uneven availability of healthcare access, social service delivery and rehabilitation services, as well as differences in reporting practices within regions.

The prevalence also varies by age and by type of disability (Figure 3). Individuals aged 65 years and above report the highest rates of disability (9.83%), reflecting the cumulative effects of ageing, chronic illness, and reduced functional capacity. The prevalence among those aged 50 to 64 stands at 4.8 per cent, while the lowest rates are observed among children aged 0 to 4 years. In terms of disability type, physical and visual disabilities are the most commonly reported, followed by hearing and intellectual impairments, (Figure 4). These patterns point to the need for age-sensitive and need-specific interventions, particularly for elderly people who account for a disproportionate share of disability related vulnerabilities and who are likely to require both income support and care related services rather than income transfers alone.

Figure 3: Disability prevalence by age group

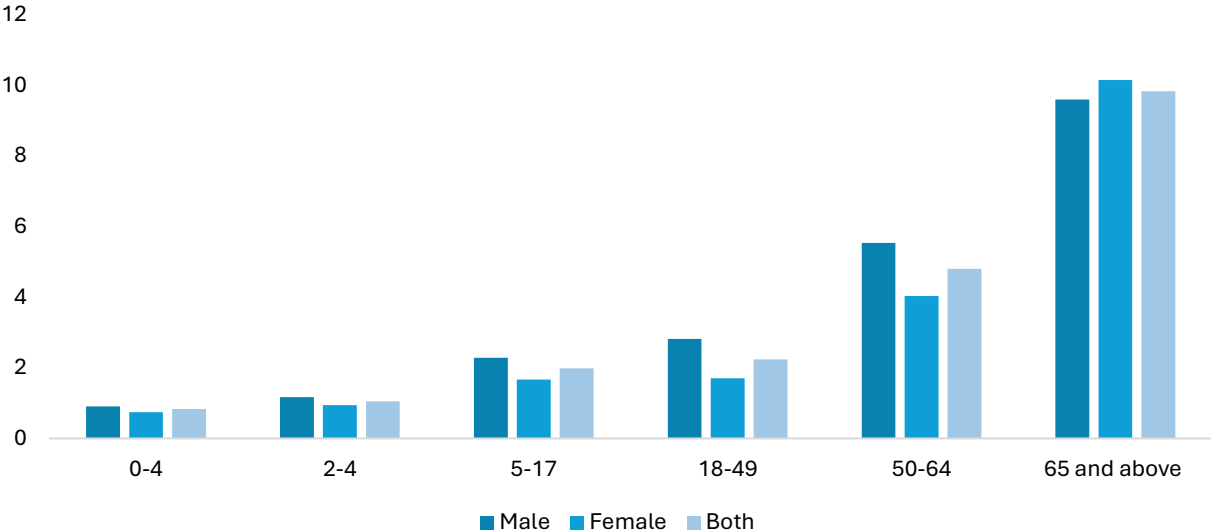
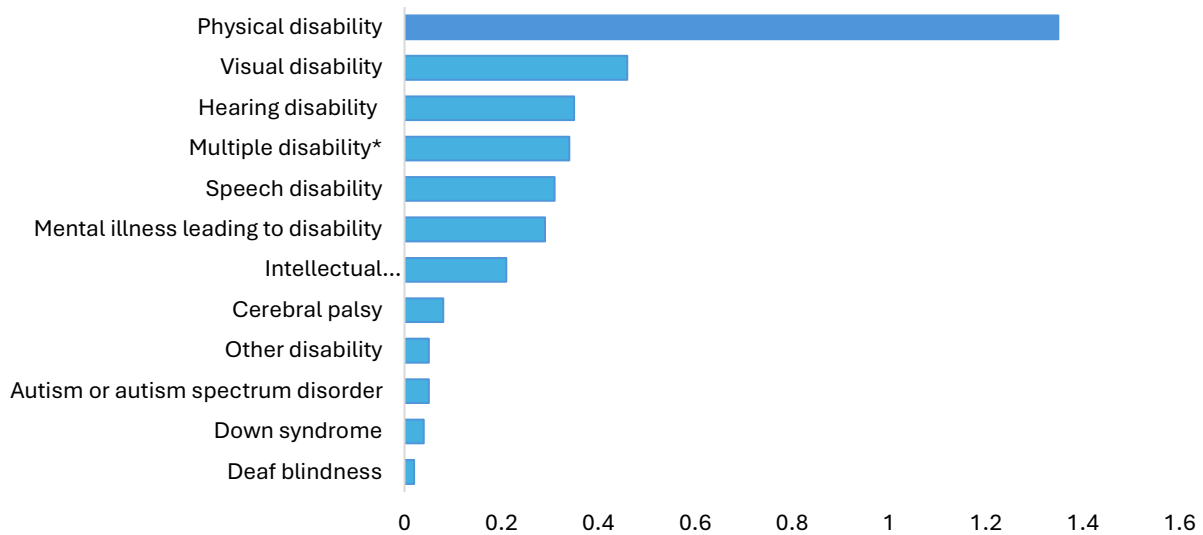


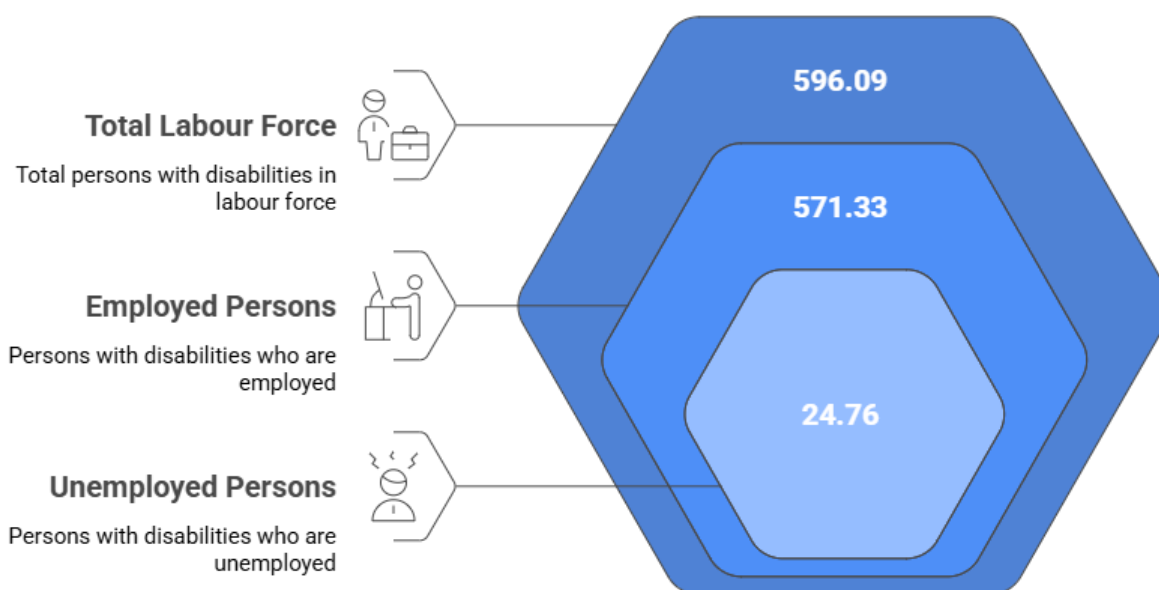
Figure 4: Disability prevalence by type of disability



Source: NSPD 2021.

Labour market participation among persons with disabilities in Bangladesh remains both limited in scale and strongly gendered. Recent Labour Force Survey data 2024 provide a more detailed picture of how persons with disabilities are engaging in the labour market. An estimated 596.09 thousand persons with disabilities are part of the labour force, of whom 420.37 thousand are men (around 70.5%) and 175.72 thousand are women (29.5%). Among those in the labour force, 571.33 thousand are employed, corresponding to an employment share of about 95.8 per cent, with 402.37 thousand employed men and 168.96 thousand employed women, meaning that men account for roughly 70.4 per cent of all employed persons with disabilities and women for 29.6 per cent. The remaining 24.76 thousand persons with disabilities in the labour force are unemployed, implying an unemployment rate of around 4.2 per cent among economically active persons with disabilities. The concerning fact is that many more may be excluded from employment altogether by remaining outside the labour force because of discouragement, care responsibilities or lack of accessible opportunities.

Figure 5: Labour force, employment and unemployment among persons with disabilities (in thousands)



Source: Labour Force Survey 2024.

4.3 Coverage of Social Protection Schemes for Persons with Disabilities

Bangladesh has made visible progress when it comes to poverty reduction, with moderate poverty declining from 49 per cent in 2000 to 18.2 per cent in 2022, and extreme poverty from 34.3 per cent to 5.6 per cent (HIES, 2022). A simulation analysis was conducted to see how disability allowance is impacting this poverty rate, the analysis revealed that in the absence of the transfers the poverty rate overall increase slightly; with 18.33 per cent moderate poverty and 5.72 per cent extreme poverty. Conversely, if all PwDs were covered under the allowance, poverty rate could fall from 18.22 per cent to 17.50 per cent and extreme poverty from 5.65 per cent to 5.21 per cent (Table 1).

Table 1: Impact of disability allowance on poverty and vulnerability

Status	Poverty rate	Poverty rate (Pre disability allowance)	Poverty rate (After 850 taka incentive for PwDs)
Extreme poverty	5.65	5.72	5.21
Moderate poverty	18.22	18.33	17.5
Vulnerability	33.9	33.93	32.98

Source: Author's estimation using HIES 2022 data.

However, aggregate poverty statistics alone do not fully capture how disability shapes living standards at household level. A research study estimated disability-related expenditure and its effect on poverty in Bangladesh, which revealed that about 23 per cent of households with persons with disabilities are counted as poor. But unfortunately, to reach the same standard of living as everyone else, these households have to spend about 13 per cent more, due to the extra costs like medicine, transport, assistive devices, special schooling, extra caregiving time, etc. This, in turn, pushes many more of these households below the poverty line. After adjusting for this additional disability-related cost, the poverty rate for these households rises to 34 per cent, which is an increase by almost 50 per cent (Alfonzetti & Carraro, 2025). These findings underline that disability-related social protection needs to be designed and financed with these extra costs in account, otherwise its poverty-reducing impact will remain limited.

In expanding social protection for persons with disabilities (PwDs), Bangladesh has made noticeable progress. The Ministry of Social Welfare, particularly through the Department of Social Services, has been central to this expansion, overseeing the scale-up of disability-focused schemes and the strengthening of administrative systems. A major reform in this area is the consolidation of two long-standing interventions into the unified Disability Allowances and Education Stipend Programme in FY2025. The consolidation brought together the Allowance for Financially Insolvent Persons with Disabilities and the Stipend Programme for Students with Disabilities, creating a single framework for providing income support and education-related assistance. All beneficiaries are required to be registered in the Disability Information System (DIS), managed by DSS and for the education stipend, the beneficiary must obtain certification of enrolment from the head of an educational institution. The initiative is implemented in accordance with the Integrated Manual for the Implementation of Disability Allowances and Education Stipend Programme, formulated in 2025.

In FY2025–26, the programme targets 3.53 million beneficiaries (35.31 lac) with a total allocation of BDT 3,845.04 crore (Figures 6 & 7), making it one of the largest pro poor social protection schemes in Bangladesh. When combined with other disability-related support listed in social protection budget report FY2025-26, the total budget allocation for PwDs stands at BDT 4,077.18 crore, which represents only about 3.5 per cent of the overall social protection budget. These programmes together aim to reach 52.68 lac (around 5.2 million) beneficiaries (Table 2), which means that only about 55 per cent of the estimated 9.4 million persons with disabilities in Bangladesh receive some form of social protection benefit, leaving more than 4 million outside coverage. Additionally, incomplete integration with mainstream social protection schemes such as old age allowance or widow allowance, further limits comprehensive coverage. Inclusion is also constrained by low awareness and persistent stigma, including beliefs that disability is a punishment for parental wrongdoing or a curse (Cabinet Division & General Economics Division, Planning Commission, 2024).

Figure 6: Spending on Disability Allowances and Education Stipend Programme (in billion BDT)

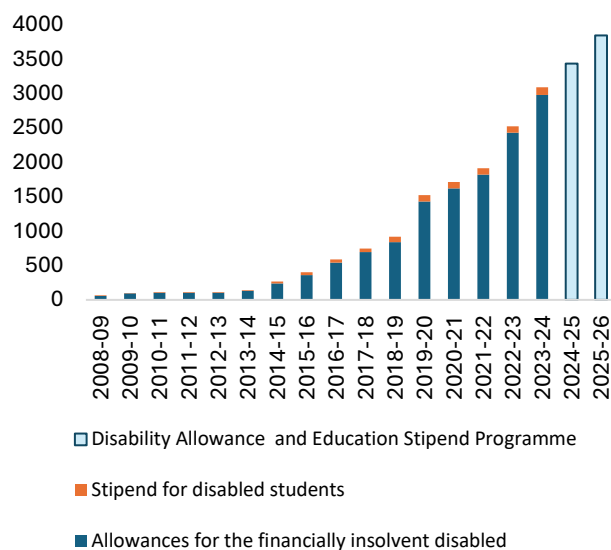
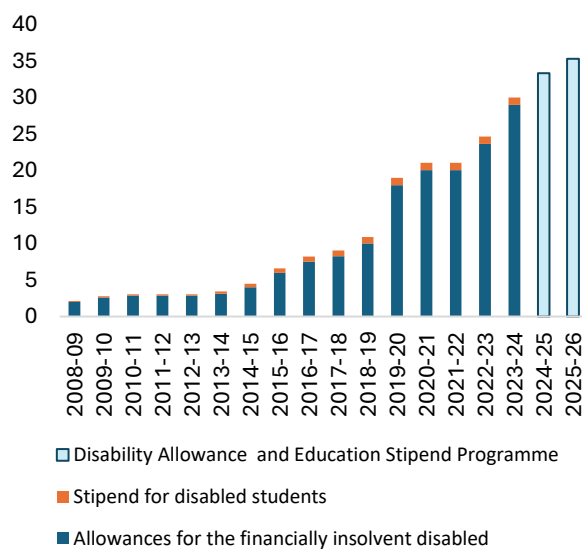


Figure 7: Coverage of the Disability Allowances and Education Stipend Programme (in lac)



Source: Author's presentation using data from Ministry of Social Welfare.

Table 2: Coverage and budget of social protection programmes for persons with disabilities in FY2024-25 and FY2025-26

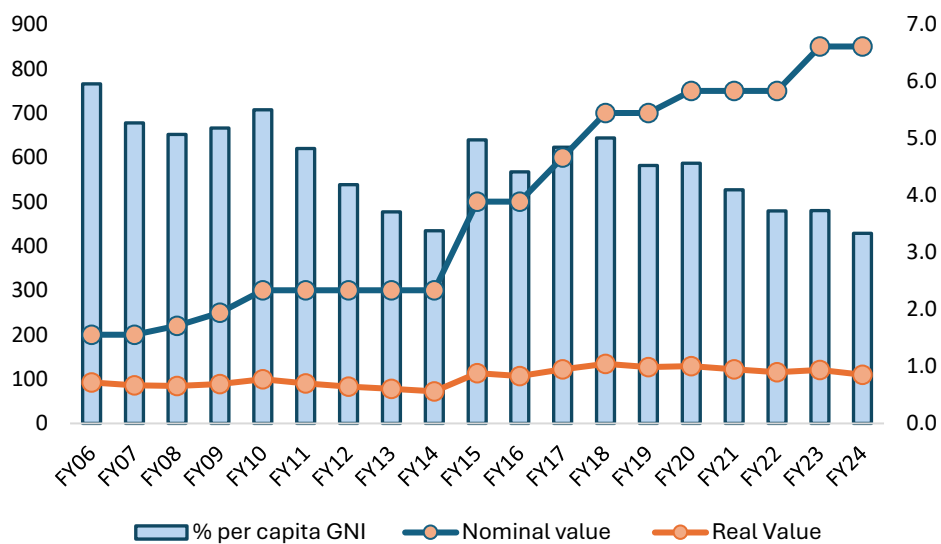
Name of the Programme	Function (Category)	Beneficiaries revised 2024-25	Beneficiaries 2025-26	Budget 2024-25 revised	Budget 2025-26
Disability Allowance and Education Stipend Programme	Social Assistance	33.34	35.31	3435.48	3845.04
Trust for the Protection of the Persons with Neuro Developmental Disabilities	Social Care Service	3.15	3.15	39.60	39.51
Physically Challenged Welfare Trust	Social Care Service	0.09	0.09	22.00	22.00
Service and Support Centre for Persons with Disabilities	Social Care Service	12.00	14.00	80.32	83.44
National Foundation for the Development of Persons with Disabilities	Social Care Service	0.12	0.12	44.73	47.19
Cochlear Implant Activity	Social Care Service	0.01	0.01	40.00	40.00
Total		48.71	52.68	3662.13	4077.18
Percentage of total social security budget				3.6%	3.5%

Source: Social protection Budget Report FY2025-26.

The current transfer values remain inadequate to meet beneficiary need. In FY2024, when the transfer value under disability allowance was BDT 850, its real value fell to only BDT 110, equivalent

to about 3.3 per cent of per capita GNI (Figure 8). The current benefit structure offers a monthly allowance of BDT 900 for eligible PwD, alongside education stipends for primary to higher level, ranging from BDT900-1300. Payments are made monthly through the G2P system, with transfer fees borne by the government so that beneficiaries receive the full benefit. However, the BDT 900 allowance amounts to only around 3.1 per cent of per capita income.²⁸ Therefore, despite the expansion of social protection coverage in recent years, the impact of social protection schemes on poverty reduction remains limited and realising the NSSS vision of universal and equitable protection for all PwDs will require continued reforms in targeting, benefit adequacy, and institutional coordination.

Figure 8: Nominal and real disability allowance and share of per capita GNI



Source: Author’s presentation and estimation using data from MoSW and BBS.

4.4 NSSS Objectives and Targets for PwDs

Recognising persons with disabilities (PwDs) as one of the most vulnerable groups NSSS emphasised the need for a dedicated and life-cycle-based social protection. Therefore, a comprehensive structure with three core schemes was proposed, such as

- A Child Disability Benefit for children up to 18 years of age
- A Disability Benefit for adults aged 19–59 with severe disabilities
- A transition to the Old Age Allowance at 60 years.

The aim was to consolidate and reform existing disability programmes into a unified and inclusive system that ensures sustained income support, rehabilitation, and social participation for PwDs. The NSSS further highlighted the Government’s plan to develop clear disability identification and eligibility mechanisms, extend benefits to all certified individuals with severe disabilities, and align

²⁸ Currently, the disability monthly allowance stands at BDT 900, which is equivalent to just 3.1% of per capita income. As of the 2025–26, the per capita income is \$2,820, and the exchange rate was considered \$1 = BDT 122, for this calculation.

transfer amounts with the Old Age Allowance, potentially a higher benefit amount depending on the severity of disability and medical costs. The Strategy also underscored the importance of integrating education, skills development, and vocational training, as well as ensuring access to affordable healthcare and assistive services, to promote empowerment and social inclusion. Collectively, these measures highlighted the NSSS’s long-term vision of moving beyond welfare to a rights-based and inclusive social protection framework for persons with disabilities.

The Action Plan Phase II outlined several objectives to realise NSSS visions for PwDs, along with detailed activities and performance indicators. According to the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with the Department of Social Services (DSS), progress has been recorded against these objectives (Table 3). For instance, the Action Plan mentioned preparing a specific guideline for disability identification; however, persons with disabilities are already identified through a legally defined process; therefore, additional guideline as mentioned in action plan, is not necessary. Moreover, the coverage for the disability benefit programme has been made universal, meaning no income, household, or individual eligibility criteria are required anymore.

Table 3: Implementation status of NSSS Action Plan Phase II for PwDs

Sl.	Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicators	Timeframe	Responsible Ministry	Status/progress so far
1.	Scale-up disability benefit for children and working-age (PwDs)	Prepare guidelines for disability identification.	Circular issued.	July 2022	MoSW	Guideline is in place, but the identification process is run under an already established law.
		Set income criteria on an individual basis.	Circular revised.	December 2022	MoSW	The coverage has been made universal; therefore, the income criteria for households or individuals have been resolved.
		Increase coverage by actual identification.	All identified PwDs are covered.	Continuous	MoSW	All identified and eligible persons with disabilities have been covered.
		Strengthen monitoring of schemes for disabled people.	Monitoring framework developed.	Continuous	MoSW	Done.

Source: The action plan is taken from the NSSS Action Plan Phase II, and the progress information is drawn from key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with officials from the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Action plan also set objective to improve programmes for disabled people (table 4), there are several organisations currently operating under DSS in order to fulfil the objectives. According to the KII with concerned stakeholder, currently, 92 specialised institutions operate across the country, including 76 hostels for the visually impaired children each having a capacity to provide services to 10 people. In addition, the Employment and Rehabilitation Centre for the Physically Handicapped (ERCPH) manages three specialised entities within it, such as 1 braille press, 1 ERCPH

itself and 1 Artificial Limb Production Centre (Table 5). These institutions collectively provide rehabilitation, vocational training, and social reintegration support for persons with disabilities. For the training and rehabilitation of women deprived of protection, six organisations are operating across six divisions; however, due to a lack of beneficiaries, two of these have been repurposed to function as neurodevelopment institutes for children. Moreover, six training institutions are operating to train and rehabilitate persons with disabilities, and six types of schools cater to various disability groups, all included within the 94 institutions previously mentioned.

Table 4: Implementation status of NSSS Action Plan Phase II for PwDs

Sl.	Objectives	Activities	Performance Indicators	Timeframe	Responsible Ministry	Status/progress so far
2.	Improve programmes for disabled children & people	1. Update manual for effective operation. 2. Maintain quality of services. 3. Increase coverage.	1. Manual prepared. 2. Programme continued. 3. Coverage increased annually.	Every year	MoSW	A total of 92 institutions are currently operating to support disabled children in different ways.
3.	Improve programme for Socially Disabled Women	1. Update manual for effective operation. 2. Maintain quality of services. 3. Increase coverage.	1. Manual prepared. 2. Programme continued. 3. Coverage increased annually.	Every year	MoSW	For the training and rehabilitation of women deprived of protection (<i>Surokkha Bonchito Meyeder proshikkhon o punorbashon</i>), six organizations are operating across six divisions.
4.	Improve Training & Rehabilitation programme for Children, Women & Disabled Persons	1. Update Training Course Module for effective operation. 2. Maintain quality of services. 3. Increase coverage.	1. Training Course Module prepared. 2. Programme continued. 3. Coverage increased annually.	Every year	MoSW	Six training institutions are functioning to train and rehabilitate persons with disabilities.
5.	Improve Education programmes for Disabled Children	1. Update manual for effective operation. 2. Maintain quality of services. 3. Increase coverage.	1. Manual prepared. 2. Programme continued. 3. Coverage increased annually.	Every year	MoSW	Different kinds of schools are operating to serve various types of disabilities.

Source: The action plan is taken from the NSSS Action Plan Phase II, and the progress information is drawn from key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with officials from the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Table 5: Number of specialised institutions serving persons with disabilities under DSS

Sl.	Name of Institution / Centre	Number of Institutions
1.	Hostels for Blind Children	76
2.	School for Blind Children	1
3.	Schools for Deaf and Dumb Children	4
4.	Physically Handicapped Training and Rehabilitation Centres	4
5.	Training Centres for Orphan and Disabled	6
6.	Employment and Rehabilitation Centre for the Physically Handicapped (ERCPH)*	1
	Total	92
Name of Institution / Centre under ERCPH		
i)	Braille Press (under ERCPH)	1
ii)	ERCPH Main Centre	1
iii)	Artificial Limb Production Centre (under ERCPH)	1
	Total	3

Source: KII conducted with DSS.

4.5 Towards a More Inclusive Disability Benefit: Way forward

The evidence presented in this chapter indicates that even though Bangladesh has laid down an increasingly sophisticated set of programmes and institutions for persons with disabilities, a number of gaps still limit the extent to which these provisions translate into secure livelihoods and meaningful participation for PwDs. The NSSS vision of a life cycle based, rights oriented and inclusive system for persons with disabilities is therefore only partially realised. This section outlines possible directions for making disability benefits more inclusive and for gradually reducing both exclusion and inclusion errors.

- **Establishing a consistent and reliable disability data system**

Data on disability prevalence, definitions and characteristics remain fragmented across surveys and administrative sources, which complicates planning and makes it difficult to gauge the scale and distribution of unmet need. The way forward should involve agreeing a harmonised, function-based disability definition and question set across core surveys and administrative systems, designating one primary source for headline prevalence estimates, and progressively aligning the Disability Information System, the National Household Database and the emerging Single Registry, so that policy makers and implementing agencies can rely on a single, interoperable data backbone for both statistics and programme management. Regular technical review would also need to be ensured so that prevalence estimates do not systematically fall below what would reasonably be expected in light of global evidence and country experience.

- **Addressing stigma and encouraging self-identification**

Evidence from consultations and qualitative studies indicates that social stigma, lack of awareness and, in many cases, feelings of shame within families continue to discourage persons with disabilities from self-identifying, seeking certification or applying for benefits, which reinforces underestimation of disability in data and limits programme reach. Going forward, disability inclusive social protection would need to be accompanied by sustained community level communication and awareness efforts, including behaviour change campaigns, school and media engagement and training for frontline officials, with organisations of persons with disabilities

playing a central role in designing and implementing these activities. So that families and communities better understand disability as a rights issue rather than a source of blame or stigma and are more willing to support registration and access to services.

- **Making disability benefits accessible and universal in practice**

On paper, the disability scheme is universal; however, in practice, universality is constrained by complex enrolment procedures along with low benefit levels continue to discourage many potential applicants, which suggests that universality has not yet been fully realised. The first step would be to simplify the application process and explore options for automatic or facilitated enrolment for individuals already identified in other government databases. Additionally, the role of organisations and other community-based actors in helping individuals navigate the system should be formally recognised and supported.

- **Implementing age-sensitive benefit transitions for older persons with disabilities**

Given that disability prevalence rises with age, particularly among those aged 65 and above, there should be specific provision for them. The NSSS envisaged a transition from disability allowance to old age allowance with a higher benefit, but this has not yet been implemented. Operationalising a clear, age-based transition rule within programme guidelines and information systems, so that older persons with disabilities move seamlessly from one scheme to the other without an additional application process. Moreover, the benefit level needs to be adjusted so that it reflect both age-related risks and disability related costs, which would support older persons with disabilities to live with greater dignity.

- **Linking disability support, skills and employment**

Available labour market data indicate that many persons with disabilities, especially women, remain outside employment. To address this, training provided under disability support should be directly connected to specific employment opportunities, for example by providing training based on local labour demand. At the same time, closer collaboration with employers and local service providers is required so that training content, schedules, workplace adjustments and follow-up support are designed with actual job placements in mind, including wage employment and small business development for persons with disabilities.

- **Improving benefit adequacy**

Social protection support while seem to progress with approaches like the programme consolidation, the expansion of disability related institutions and services, yet coverage and benefit adequacy remain constrained. At current transfer level, the disability allowance cannot realistically offset disability-related costs, such as medical expenses or other care services. Even the impact on poverty reduction is modest, both coverage and benefit size would need to be adjusted if social protection is to play a more decisive role in preventing destitution among persons with disabilities. Recognising the challenge, the way forward would be to set out a medium-term path for improving benefit adequacy, for example through regular indexation to inflation and a gradual adjustment of transfer levels informed by evidence on expenditure needed to maintain a basic standard of living, with scope for differentiation by severity or type of disability.

- **Disability benefits across the life cycle**

NSSS envisaged disability as a cross-cutting risk, but disability considerations remain weakly embedded in mainstream social protection schemes, limiting life-cycle protection beyond the dedicated disability benefit. Barriers in the physical environment, limited disability sensitive health and education services, and weak links between disability schemes and broader employment generation and skills programmes all contribute to a pattern in which many persons with disabilities remain dependent on family support or informal care rather than being able to move towards greater economic independence. Therefore, disability inclusion needs to be more systematically mainstreamed across the broader NSSS architecture and sectoral programmes. This implies that schemes such as the Old Age Allowance, Widow Allowance, employment generation and skills development initiatives would incorporate disability related eligibility criteria, and clear operational guidance for local officials on how to identify persons with disabilities and make reasonable accommodations need to be ensured. For children and adolescents, stronger links between the disability allowance, inclusive education measures and community-based rehabilitation could reduce the high dropout rates and support transitions into further education, training or work. While for working-age adults, accessible training, targets in employment programmes and tailored entrepreneurship and credit support would be required to complement income support, together with more predictable access to health care, assistive devices and social care so that disability schemes contribute more meaningfully to basic needs, living standards and poverty reduction.

4.6 Conclusion

In summary, the chapter shows that Bangladesh has moved from a very limited and fragmented set of interventions for persons with disabilities towards a more comprehensive and structured system. At the same time, the analysis of prevalence, poverty, labour market outcomes and programme coverage underscores that persons with disabilities continue to face significant barriers, and that the current design and implementation of disability related social protection only partially mitigates these disadvantages. The way forward therefore requires that disability inclusive social protection be seen not only as a matter of providing income support to a subset of identified individuals, but as a broader effort to ensure that all persons with disabilities are visible in data, adequately supported through cash and services across the life cycle, and able to participate in education, work and community life on an equal basis with others. If the steps are pursued in the next phase of NSSS implementation, the disability pillar can move further away from a predominantly welfare oriented approach towards a more coherent, rights based system that supports empowerment as well as protection, and in doing so brings Bangladesh closer to its constitutional commitments and to the promise of leaving no one behind within its social protection system.

Chapter 5: The NSSS Gender Policy and Implementation Progress

5.1 Introduction

Addressing women's rights and advancement is embedded in Bangladesh's Constitution, laws, and national policy framework. Article 28 of the Constitution guarantees equal rights for women and men in all spheres of state and public life, while also mandating special provisions to advance women. In line with these constitutional obligations, the NSSS Strategy, Action Plans and NSSS Gender Policy emphasise that concerted government action is required to narrow persistent gender gaps. The public uprising in July 2024 has also renewed demands for social fairness for women, reinforcing expectations that legislative and policy measures align more closely with constitutional commitments. In this context, effective resource use and equitable allocation across sectors remain central to women's development.

This chapter reviews the extent to which Bangladesh's social protection system, under the NSSS, has responded to gender-based risks, vulnerabilities, and inequalities. It summarises the key commitments set out in the NSSS Gender Policy, including gender mainstreaming, rights-based and transformative approaches, lifecycle-responsive interventions, and strengthened institutional coordination, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. It then considers how these commitments have been reflected in programme portfolios, budget allocations, and implementation arrangements across ministries, with attention to coverage patterns, the inclusion of working-age women, maternity and care-related support, protection from violence, and measures aimed at women facing compounded vulnerabilities.

The chapter also examines progress and implementation constraints, highlighting where support has expanded or become more visible for women, alongside persistent gaps related to coverage adequacy, programme design, delivery systems, and the availability of gender-disaggregated data. Rather than treating outcomes as isolated programme effects, the analysis considers how social protection interacts with labour market structures, care burdens, and social norms, and how these interactions shape both immediate protection and longer-term economic security for women. Overall, the chapter provides an integrated assessment of gender and social protection under the NSSS, identifying areas of alignment between policy intent and practice, where gaps remain, and what these imply for strengthening gender responsiveness in the next phase of social security reform.

5.2 Gender Gap in Bangladesh

Gender inequality remains a significant issue in Bangladesh, affecting various aspects of life for women and girls, including education, employment, and health. Reducing these inequalities can lead to improved health outcomes for women and children, higher educational attainment, increased female labour force participation, accelerated economic growth, and the development of a fairer and more stable society. Bangladesh has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The government has undertaken substantial efforts to

establish a framework for gender mainstreaming, as reflected in its gender-responsive policies and budgetary allocations. This commitment is recognized in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2024, which ranks Bangladesh moderately on the global index. As shown in Table 5.1, Bangladesh achieved a score of 0.689; the highest in South Asia placing 99th globally out of 146 countries. The country has closed 68.9 per cent of its overall gender gap, although this marks a decline from 72.2 per cent in 2023.

In 2024, the country’s Educational Attainment subindex score was 0.940 (94.0%), reflecting an increase of 0.4 percentage points from the previous year. Despite improvements in certain parity scores, Bangladesh continues to experience notable gender gaps. The Health and Survival subindex remains stable at 96.2 per cent, whereas Economic Participation and Opportunity and Political Empowerment have both declined since 2023. Bangladesh recorded its lowest score (31.1%) in Economic Participation and Opportunity, a sharp drop from 43.8 per cent in 2023 and the country’s lowest performance in this sub-index since 2014. This decline is primarily attributed to income disparities between men and women and a reduction in women’s representation in leadership positions. Although Bangladesh continues to make progress in Political Empowerment, it still faces considerable challenges in improving outcomes in economic participation, health, and educational attainment across the board.

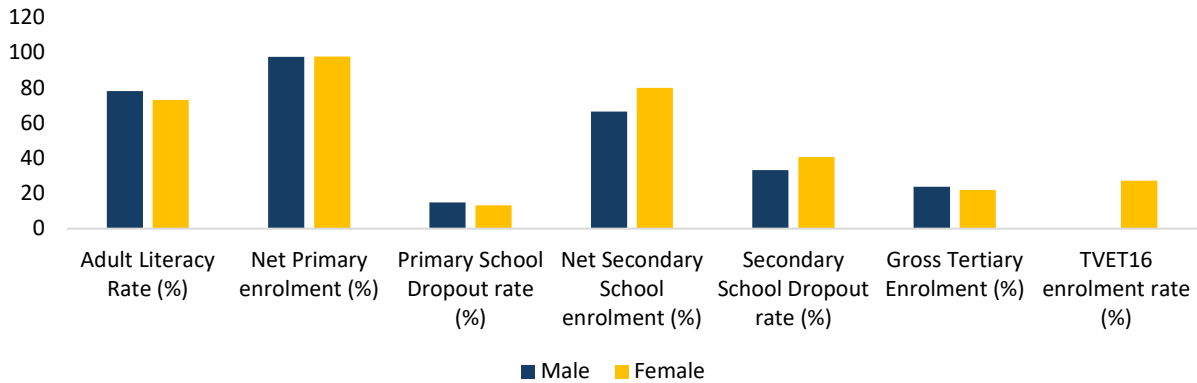
Table 5.1: Gender index of Bangladesh score and rank

Gender Index of Bangladesh	SCORE		Latest Rank
	2023	2024	
Sub Index			
Global Gender Gap Index	0.722	0.689	99th
Economic participation and opportunity	0.438	0.312	146th
Educational attainment	0.936	0.94	125th
Health and survival	0.962	0.962	129th
Political Empowerment	0.552	0.543	99th

Source: Global Gender Gap 2024.

Females outperform males in net primary enrolment, net secondary enrolment, and primary school dropout rates (in which a lower rate is better). Bangladesh is very close to achieving the SDG 2030 target for net primary enrolment, and it appears this target will be met on time. While girls’ enrolment at the primary and secondary levels has been relatively strong in recent years, the situation is notably different at higher levels of education. A persistent gender gap remains in adult literacy, secondary school dropout rates, gross tertiary enrolment, and enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Moreover, the country continues to lag in areas such as adult literacy, secondary school retention, and both tertiary and TVET enrolment when compared to national targets.

Figure 5.1: Gender Gap In Education

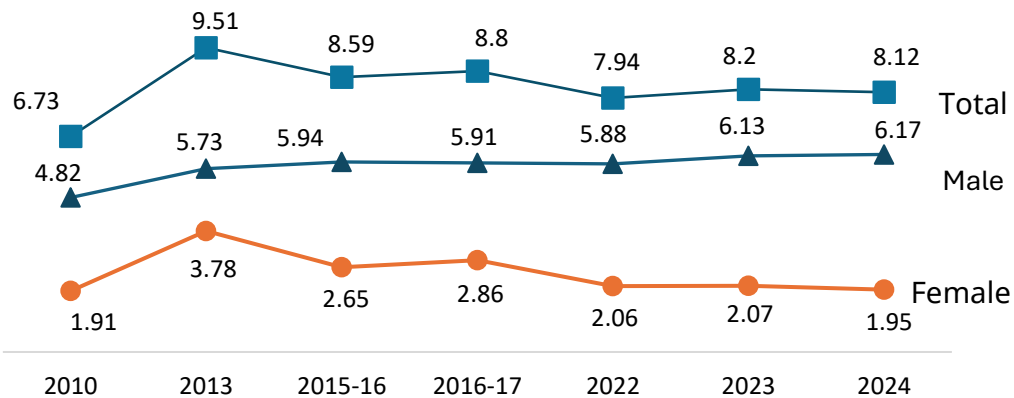


Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2024.

Defeminisation of women in the manufacturing and shifting geography

Women’s employment in manufacturing has long been treated as a key channel for shifting women into paid, non-farm work, particularly through export-oriented manufacturing; however, in recent time this channel has weakened. Recent labour force data point to a sustained defeminisation of manufacturing employment in Bangladesh rather than a cyclical fluctuation. Total manufacturing employment peaked in the mid-2010s and later stabilised at a lower level, but the underlying trend diverged sharply by sex: male employment rose from 4.82 million (2010) to over 6.1 million (2024), while female employment increased to more than 3.75 million (2013) before declining to 1.95 million (2024), reducing women’s share from around 40 percent (2013) to about 24 percent (2024). This is concerning because manufacturing, especially export-oriented manufacturing, had provided one of the few large-scale entry points into relatively regular wage work for women, so the decline signals not only job loss but also a narrowing of pathways into more stable employment.

Figure 5.2: Gender wise employment in the manufacturing sector (million)

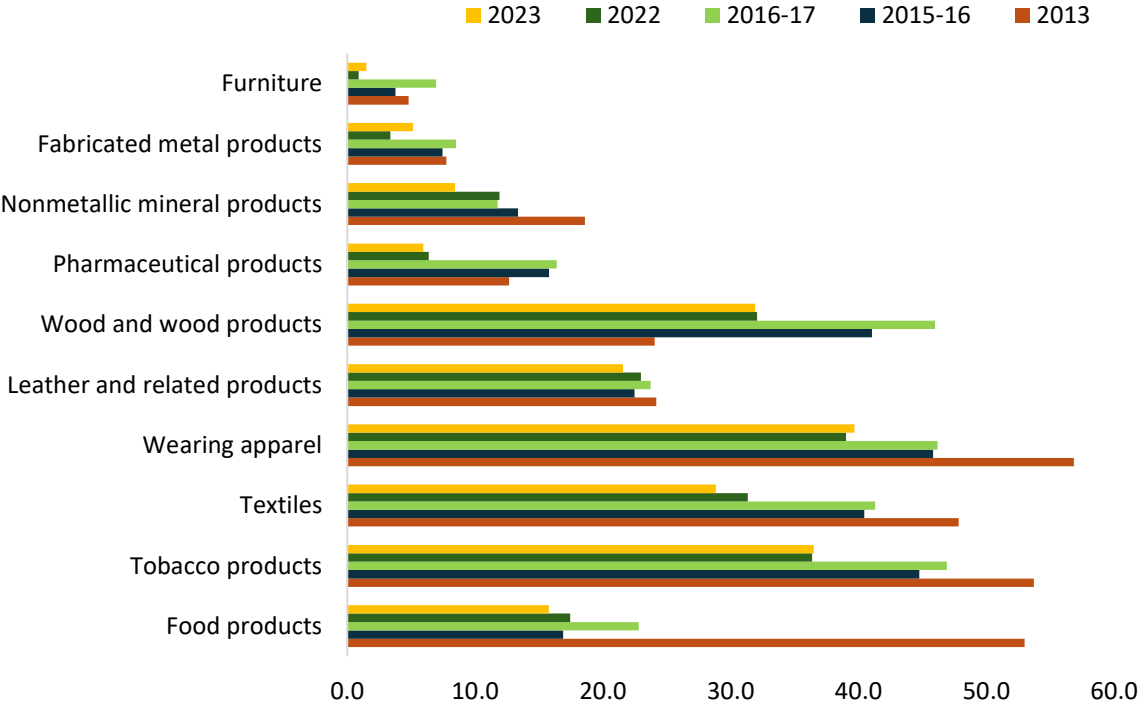


Source: Bangladesh Labour Force Surveys, BBS.

The decline is also evident in industrial subsectors like apparel, textiles, food products, and tobacco; for instance, female employment shares have fallen most sharply in wearing apparel, where the share declined from nearly 80 per cent at its peak to around 39 per cent in 2022, (Figure 5.3). In more capital-intensive or skill-segmented subsectors such as fabricated metal products, non-metallic mineral products, and pharmaceuticals, female shares remain low, indicating limited scope for displaced women to be absorbed within manufacturing as production structures shift.

The direction of change is consistent with broader production dynamics, where higher capital intensity, technological upgrading, and mechanisation have disproportionately displaced women concentrated in repetitive, low-skilled tasks that are more exposed to automation and work reorganisation. Limited alternative channels into productive employment have reinforced a pattern in which employment expands without commensurate gains in job quality, earnings security, or social protection access (Razzaque, 2025).

Figure 5.3: Female share in employment in major manufacturing sectors (%)



Source: Bangladesh Labour Force Surveys, BBS.

A wider reallocation of women’s work across space and sectors was also observed, the White Paper Committee (2024) reported that while urban female employment fell by about 0.2 million between 2013 and 2024, rural female employment increased by nearly 7.9 million, implying that almost all net job creation for women during this period occurred in rural areas. This pattern, when read alongside the defeminisation of manufacturing and limited industrial diversification, suggests that many women, particularly younger cohorts, have been channelled into temporary or informal

service work, subsistence agriculture, or overseas migration rather than into stable, productivity-enhancing employment pathways. As a result, these forms of engagement operate less as engines of structural transformation and more as short-term outlets for demographic and labour market pressures, which is consistent with broader concerns raised about the fragility of employment generation and the continuing underutilisation of Bangladesh's labour potential (Task Force Committee, 2025; White Paper Committee, 2024).

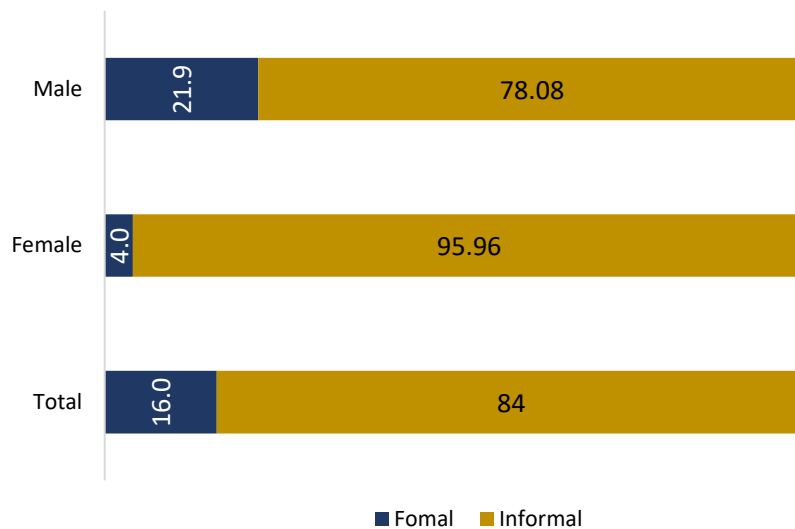
Women's informality in the labour force and why the problem is severe

The vulnerability of women arises due to factors such as poverty, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, and societal and gender-based discrimination. Additionally, adolescent girls and young women often face challenges entering the workforce due to childcare responsibilities, which further limits their economic stability and social support. Working-age women, especially in the informal sector, are more vulnerable due to a lack of job security, low wages, absence of benefits, poor working conditions, limited legal protection, and increased economic and social vulnerability.

According to Labour Force Survey 2024 data informality remains the dominant reality for working women in Bangladesh, with only 4.04 per cent of employed women in formal work and leaving nearly all women (95.96%) in informal employment, compared with 21.92 per cent of employed men in formal work and 78.08 per cent in informal work (Figure 5.4). The distribution by sex makes the constraint sharper because women are overwhelmingly concentrated in informal jobs where written contracts, regulated working hours, maternity protection, and employer-provided benefits are largely absent. This pattern also weakens women's ability to build contribution histories over time, so vulnerabilities faced during working age often translate into higher insecurity later in life, including during maternity and old age. Although social protection for working-age women is recognised as a priority area under the NSSS, effective protection for women in informal work remains largely absent, since most existing protection channels are designed around formal employment and therefore do not reach informal women workers in a systematic way, leaving their coverage options limited.

The statistics indicate that social security programmes for the working-age population must focus on securing the well-being of those employed in the informal sector, especially by tailoring initiatives for women such as enhancing government childcare support, health insurance, cash transfers, maternity benefits, skill development programs, legal assistance, microfinance access, and workplace safety regulations.

Figure 5.4 Proportion of population aged 15 and more according to gender and formality



Source: Bangladesh Labor Force Survey-2024.

5.3 Gender-inclusive social protection support

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), in line with national priorities on poverty reduction, gender equality, and the prevention of violence against women and children, continues to play a central role in implementing gender-focused social protection programmes under the NSSS. In FY2025–26, MoWCA allocated a total budget of BDT 4,332.99 crore across six social protection programmes, reduced from previous year's nine programmes. Of these six interventions, only two programmes directly target working-age women (Table 5.2). Several programmes implemented in earlier years, including the Tottho Apa: Empowering Women Through ICT towards Digital Bangladesh project, the Joyeeta Foundation programme, and the Investment Component for Vulnerable Group Development (ICVGD) programme, have either been paused or concluded following completion of their planned implementation periods.

Among the current MoWCA schemes, the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) programme received the largest allocation at BDT 2,334.13 crore, covering 10.40 lac beneficiaries. The Mother and Child Benefit (MCB) programme, received the second-largest allocation of BDT 1,849.24 crore, supporting 17.71 lac beneficiaries. In addition to MoWCA, several other ministries contribute to gender-inclusive social protection. In FY2025–26, the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Finance Division (FD), Health Services Division (HSD), and the Rural Development and Co-operatives Division are collectively implementing targeted programmes for women, with a combined allocation of BDT 2,919.85 crore (Table 5.3).

Table 5.2: Social protection schemes for women under MoWCA

Name of the program	Life cycle stage	Function intervention	Beneficiaries 2025-26 (lac)	Budget 2025-26 (crore Tk.)
Mother and Child Benefit Program (MCBP)	Pregnancy & Early Childhood	Cash	17.71	1849.24
Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) Program	Working age	Economic inclusion	10.40	2334.13
Distressed Women and Children Welfare Fund	Household (poverty)	Entrepreneurship support	0.17	5.00
Promotion of Women Entrepreneurs for Economic Empowerment in Grassroot Level	Working age	Entrepreneurship support		71.86
Enhancing Adaptive Capacities of Coastal Communities, especially Women, to Cope with Climate Change Induced Salinity	Household- Shock	No Specific Intervention	-	32.56
Supporting Implementation of Mother and Child Benefit Programme	Pregnancy & Early Childhood	No Specific Intervention	-	40.20

Source: Based on Social Protection Budget Report 2025-26, Ministry of Finance.

Table 5.3: Social protection schemes for women under different ministries

Name of the program	Life cycle stage	Function intervention	Implementing ministry/ division	Beneficiaries 2025-26 (lac)	Budget 2025-26 (crore Tk.)
Allowance for Widow and Deserted Women	Unclassified	Cash	Ministry of Social Welfare	29.00	2277.83
Rural Mother Centre (RMC) Programme: Revolving small loan	Working Age	Entrepreneurship support		0.10	25.00

Special Assistance Fund for Women Development	Working Age	Entrepreneurship support	Finance Division	-	25.00
Maternal and Neonatal Child Health (MNCH) and Health System Improvement Project	Pregnancy & Early Childhood	No Specific Intervention	Health Services Division	-	437.90
Leaving No One Behind: Improving Skills and Economic Opportunities for the Women & Youth in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh	Working Age	Entrepreneurship support	Ministry of Youth and Sports	-	48.22
Integrated Rural Employment Support Project for the Poor Women (IRESPPW)	Working Age	Economic Inclusion	Rural Development and Co-operatives Division	-	105.90

Source: Based on Social Protection Budget Report 2025-26, Ministry of Finance.

Coverage of social protection support

To promote economic self-reliance, a total of 33,850 women have received various forms of training for self-employment, while about Tk. 61 crore 68 lac has been disbursed as microcredit to support women in launching income-generating activities. In parallel, the Ministry has taken important steps to ensure the safety and well-being of working women by providing safe accommodation to 6,899 women in Karmajibi Mahila Hostels across the country. The Ministry of Social Welfare has undertaken significant initiatives to strengthen the social safety net programme and promote women's empowerment across Bangladesh. A major achievement includes the provision of old age allowances to 60.01 lac individuals, and disability allowances to 29 lakh persons with disabilities. To ensure gender inclusiveness, the Ministry has made it mandatory that 100 percent of the beneficiaries of widow allowances be women, and at least 50 percent of the recipients of old age and disability allowances be female.

The data presented in the tables indicates that the Old Age Allowance program has reached 50 percent of its female target beneficiaries. In comparison, other social protection initiatives continue to lag behind, with coverage hovering at significantly lower levels. This suggests that there is

considerable scope for enhancing outreach and effectiveness across these programs. Beyond the provision of financial assistance, the Ministry has strategically prioritized the socio-economic advancement of women through structured vocational training programs. These initiatives are implemented via a network of 80 skill development centres operating under the Upazila Coordination and Development (UCD) offices, which serve as decentralized hubs for capacity building. In the FY 2023–24, a total of 21,496 individuals participated in these training programs, with women accounting for 9,028 of the trainees, representing 42 per cent of the total cohort.

Table 5.4: Women Advancement related KPIs of the Ministry/Division and Achievements

No	KPI	Unit	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
1	Old Age Allowance (Base Line 1,10,96,400 persons)	%	44.2	48.62	54.08
2	Widow Allowance (Base Line 51,32,093 persons)		39.9	48.2	54.07

Table 5.5: Statistics of Beneficiaries

Programme	Total	Male	Female	Female Percentage
Old Age Allowance	6001000	2909088	3091912	51.5
Widow and Husband abandoned Allowance	2775000	0	2775000	100
Allowance for the Disabled	2900000	1786318	1113682	38.4
Stipends for the Handicapped	100000	46711	31395	31.4
Burnt and Disabled Rehabilitation Fund	199840	129896	69944	35
Improvement of living standards of Hijra, Bede, and other backward communities	114309	59530	Women-42,150; Hijra-12,629	36.9
Total	12090149	4931543	7124083	58.9

5.4 Policy intent and strategic emphases

The NSSS Gender Policy treats social security as more than a safety net, framing it as a core instrument for poverty reduction, human development, and achieving multiple SDG targets, while also recognising that women form a large share of those who remain poor, vulnerable, and excluded from existing systems. It builds its case through a situational analysis that links women’s deprivation to gendered constraints in access to productive resources, the division of labour and unpaid care responsibilities, limited control over assets and income, and disproportionate exposure to violence and shocks, including climate-related risks, alongside labour market realities where women are more likely to be concentrated in informal and low-protection work with weak social security coverage. This framing is important because it clarifies why a gender lens is not only about targeting women, but also about addressing the structural channels through which women “fall through the net” even when social security systems expand.

The main thematic objectives of the NSSS Gender Policy, focuses on lifting women and girls out of poverty and empowering them, these include (i) enhancing the effectiveness of programs that promote gender equality; (ii) reducing the gender gap by integrating a gender perspective at all stages, from design to performance evaluation; (iii) encouraging policymakers, program designers, and evaluators to apply a gender perspective in delivery and implementation; and (iv) addressing the gender-specific needs of individuals and productive members of society to mitigate the lifecycle risks and vulnerabilities of women.

The policy also clarifies what “gender-responsive social security” should prioritise in practice, aligning with the NSSS thematic cluster: food security and nutrition; human development for women and girls; livelihood and transfers designed around gender constraints; labour market participation with attention to decent work conditions; productive financial inclusion; social empowerment and norm change; reaching urban women; expanding social insurance beyond narrow formal-sector channels; and resilience to shocks and disasters. This set of priorities is useful because it provides a benchmark for assessing whether current programme portfolios are primarily protective or whether they are also preventive, promotive, and, where intended, transformative.

Table 5.6: Priorities of the NSSS gender policy

Priority	Description
Food security and nutrition	Dealing with issues such as hunger, malnutrition, morbidity by using food security schemes, such as VGF, VGD, ICVGD, open market sales, food cards and disaster relief supports
Human development support	Reducing vulnerability, eliminating poverty, and achieving human development of women and girls through immunisation, gender-responsive education, affordable healthcare, skill development and enterprise support schemes
Access to livelihood activities, resources, income and transfer	Facilitating livelihood opportunities via skill enhancement, training, and cash transfer with a special focus on graduation programmes and self-employment opportunities to pull households out of poverty
Active labour market participation	Ensuring vocational training, internship, equal wage, paid maternity leave, childcare and pension opportunities for women as part of mainstream agenda while labour-intensive public work and workfare programmes will address poor and vulnerable women
Financial inclusion	Empowering women to achieve control over productive resources through G2P, affordable financial services (micro-credit, education loan, saving accounts) and simplification of other banking services
Social empowerment	Giving women agency and voice against violence and transforming gender roles by engaging women with boys and men to facilitate women leadership and collaboration with stakeholders for further empowerment
Addressing the needs of urban women	Ensuring labour market supports, housing and shelter, child care, healthcare, sanitation, transportation, street lighting, justice against violence and abuses for urban women through social protection
Social insurance system	Addressing life cycle risks of women through a participatory social insurance system where individuals can invest in own social security
Resilience and emergency preparedness	Enhancing the preparedness of women against natural disasters and promoting resilient livelihood opportunities, risk management, rehabilitation and anticipatory intervention for women at the grassroots level

Source: NSSS review team’s presentation using information from the NSSS Gender Policy.

At the core of the policy is a lifecycle-based approach to social security, which aligns closely with the NSSS lifecycle architecture. This approach recognises that women face distinct and cumulative risks during childhood, working age, maternity, and old age, as well as heightened exposure to cross-cutting vulnerabilities such as disability, violence, climate shocks, and displacement. Social security interventions are therefore expected to move beyond fragmented safety nets and provide a minimum set of guarantees at each stage of life, while also addressing the structural factors that constrain women's ability to convert support into sustained well-being and economic security. The policy places strong emphasis on expanding non-contributory transfers, labour-intensive public works, livelihood and skills programmes, financial inclusion initiatives, and affordable care services, alongside gradual exploration of social insurance options that can extend protection beyond the formal sector. Importantly, the policy also highlights the need to reduce unpaid care burdens through childcare and eldercare services, recognising care as a binding constraint on women's economic participation rather than a private household issue. Recognising maternity and child-bearing as a critical risk period the policy therefore prioritises maternity allowances, health vouchers, midwifery services, and the exploration of maternity insurance mechanisms, while also calling for stronger enforcement to prevent employment discrimination linked to pregnancy. These measures are framed not only as health interventions, but as investments in women's long-term economic security and human capital formation. In relation to old age and disability, the Gender Policy recognises that women are more likely to enter later life with limited savings, weak contribution histories, and higher care needs, reflecting cumulative disadvantages experienced during working age. The expansion of old age allowances, disability benefits, and accessible healthcare is therefore framed as essential to preventing poverty in old age, particularly for widows, single women, women with disabilities, and those from marginalised or hard-to-reach communities.

Beyond lifecycle risks, the policy places strong emphasis on violence, social norms, and empowerment, recognising that economic transfers alone are insufficient if women remain exposed to violence, restricted mobility, and limited voice in household and community decision-making. Social security programmes are therefore expected to integrate protection from gender-based violence, access to justice, grievance redress, awareness-raising, and engagement with men and boys to challenge discriminatory norms. The NSSS Gender Policy provides a coherent and ambitious framework for integrating gender into social security, with clear articulation of priorities, commitments, and implementation principles. As Bangladesh moves into the next phase of NSSS implementation, the relevance of this policy remains strong, but its effectiveness will depend on the extent to which social security instruments are adapted to labour market realities, care constraints, and emerging risks, while being supported by robust data systems and sustained institutional coordination.

Table 5.7: Policy commitments in NSSS Gender Policy

Commitment and Objectives	Action points	Key Ministries/ Agencies
<p>Childhood support</p> <p><i>- Providing children from all background an opportunity to grow as a complete human being</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For (0-4): Birth registration; immunisation and nutrition campaign. • For school going age: School stipend, girls' stipend; school feeding programme; child marriage and child pregnancy; protection against violence and abuses, availability of female teachers; sanitation & hygiene facilities at school; technical and vocational training; sex-education and life skills for adolescents. • Special programmes: Shelter and education for orphans; outreach programmes for sanitation, nutrition, water supply, vaccination in secluded areas; protection from violence, gender-based violence and abuses; ensuring childcare support for abandoned through legal system. 	<p>Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MPME), Ministry of Education (MoE)</p>
<p>Support for working age</p> <p><i>- Enabling women to access labour market for decent work, income and congenial work environment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill enhancement: Training for livelihood; Financial literacy; Entrepreneurial skills. • Employment generation: Labour-intensive cash transfer programmes, workfare schemes; Income generating activities at Upazila level. • Supportive benefits: Insurance against unemployment, sickness, maternity and accidents; Housing, shelter, hostel, dormitory services; Low-cost child and elderly care services. • Financial inclusion and empowerment: Micro-credit and banking services; minimum wage for informal sector; labour rights for women; gender-sensitive workplace. • Legal support: Mechanism to provide legal support; grievance and complaints redressal for harassment at workplace. 	<p>Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE); Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives (MoLGRDC); Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA); Ministry of Industry (MoI); Ministry of Finance (MoF); Finance Division (FD); Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS); MPME, MoE, MoSW, MoWCA</p>
<p>Child bearing and maternity</p> <p><i>- Supporting women in their vulnerable phase for a healthier future generation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal healthcare: Maternal health voucher; immunisation and nutrition support for pregnant women; child and maternal health management; neo-natal, child and adolescent health; midwifery services. • Maternity benefit schemes: Maternity allowance for poor; Urban lactating mother support; Maternity insurance; Job security after maternal leave in private sectors. 	<p>MoWCA, MoSW, MoHFW</p>
<p>Old age and elderly care</p> <p><i>- Providing care, livelihood and support for elderly women</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pension schemes: Increasing coverage and benefit in hard to reach areas; continuation of current support packages in the formal sector; Low or non-contributory pension schemes with the collaboration of private sectors; Private voluntary pension schemes. • Senior-citizen care: Old age allowances, geriatric healthcare support. 	<p>MoWCA, MoSW, FD, MoHFW</p>
<p>Affordable healthcare</p> <p><i>- Ensuring affordable and accessible</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic healthcare: Increase coverage for health and nutrition programmes; Expansion of sectoral programmes (water, sanitation, hygiene, etc.); emphasising special vulnerabilities like cancer (cervical/breast). 	<p>MoHFW, MoWCA, Ministry of Disaster Management and</p>

Commitment and Objectives	Action points	Key Ministries/ Agencies
healthcare for women; addressing gender-specific health risks in lifecycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Support: For victims of natural disasters, violence and abuses; Expansion of one-stop-crisis centre (OCC) at upazila level. • Reproductive healthcare: Family-planning support at remote areas, Empowering women in family planning decisions; Awareness programmes on reproductive health. 	Relief (MoDMR)
Protection from violence and transforming social norms - Changing social norm of women's subordination and gender specific roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness building: Against women's subordination, child marriage, gender-based violence and abuses; transformation of deep-seated gender roles; participation of women in non-traditional activities; legal education programmes teaching rights and legal aids. • Victim support: Legal support, shelter, rehabilitation, reintegration in the society for the survivors and victims of gender-based violence or abuses. • Legal support and leadership: Advocacy for women's property, inheritance, marriage registration, labour rights; representation in livelihood, social security and other poverty reduction leadership positions. 	MoWCA, MoSW, MoHA, MoLGRDC, Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs (MoLJPA), Ministry of Information (MoInf), Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA),
Minority, marginalized & disabled women - Ensuring opportunities for disabled, minority, marginalized and socially excluded women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing disabilities: Disability benefits; Social assistance programmes, opportunities for participation in workforce; train mothers of disable children about special care; Assistive devices and care centres; insurance and other supports. • Minority and marginalised women: Expansion of basic social services for marginalized groups; encourage greater social inclusion; cultivate leadership roles; employment for ultra-poor in northern districts; housing facilities city corporation cleaners; improving livelihood of transgender communities; mainstreaming women from marginalised occupations. 	MoWCA, MoSW, MoCA, MoLGRDC, MoHA, Ministry of Housing & Public Works (MHPW)
Climate change vulnerability - Protecting women and girls from adverse effects of climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptation activities: Climate change adaptation in livelihood; adaptive agriculture training for women; training on production and marketing of goods in climatic shock-prone areas. • Disaster management: Early warning system; engage women in preparation and planning; food, sanitation, hygiene and nutrition for women during disasters; security of women in disaster shelters; specific facilities for women in shelters; gender responsive community-based programmes • Resilience enhancement: Post-disaster assistance and recovery activities; climate victim rehabilitation (Gucchogram) projects etc. 	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), MoDMR, MHPW, MoLGRDC

Source: NSSS review team's presentation using information from the NSSS Gender Policy.

5.5 Progress and challenges

Under the Department of Women Affairs, 11 distinct committees have been established, each with its focus, ranging from Preventing Violence against Women and Children to Preventing Sexual Harassment and Trafficking. These committees serve as Gender-based Violence (GbV) actors across the country. Victims (women and children) lodge their complaints to the committee; upon receiving complaints, the committees analyse each case and tailor responses to the specific circumstances

presented. Apart from government efforts, NGOs/INGOs are also contributing to raising awareness and establishing clear definitions for each type of violence, recognizing that response mechanisms vary accordingly. Over time, the landscape of GbV has evolved. While incidents of acid attacks have declined, cases of sexual harassment in public spaces and workplaces have surged. Despite advancements in social consciousness, these persistent issues continue to impede the progress of women.²⁹

The NSSS recognizes that the factors inhibiting women's empowerment often depend on the dynamics within individual families, the neighbourhood, and, to some extent, relevant cultural and religious values. Consequently, addressing women's empowerment and gender equity within the vast social protection mechanism poses significant challenges for policymakers. Implementing the gender agenda in social security faces three primary challenges: (i) resource and coverage constraints, (ii) discriminatory social norms, and (iii) design and operational issues (Table 5.8).

First, resource and coverage constraints remain pronounced. While budget allocations for women-focused programmes have increased in nominal terms, coverage remains limited relative to the scale of need, particularly for working-age women. Programme portfolios continue to be weighted towards maternity, early childhood, and categorical allowances, while protection for women in informal employment remains fragmented and narrow in scope. Urban settings present additional pressure, where large eligible populations, mobility constraints, and high living costs strain existing programme designs. Gaps in universal access to affordable healthcare further reduce the effectiveness of cash-based support, particularly for women facing illness, pregnancy-related costs, or disability.

Second, discriminatory social norms and household dynamics continue to shape women's ability to access and benefit from social protection. Constraints related to mobility, time poverty, unpaid care responsibilities, and limited decision-making power within households reduce effective participation, even when formal eligibility exists. For many women, the time, effort, and compliance costs associated with programme participation act as deterrents, while adverse shocks such as widowhood, abandonment, domestic violence, climate stress, and displacement generate complex needs that standard programme designs are not always equipped to address. These dynamics help explain why increased coverage does not automatically translate into empowerment or labour market re-entry.

Third, design and operational gaps limit the transformative potential of the system. Many programmes continue to adopt an instrumentalist approach, framing women primarily as mothers, caregivers, or passive recipients, rather than as economic actors with evolving lifecycle trajectories. Weak linkages between cash transfers, skills development, financial inclusion, and control over productive resources reduce the scope for graduation and sustained economic security. In

²⁹ To gain an in-depth understanding of the gender-inclusive initiatives in Bangladesh, several non-governmental and government organisations were visited like: CARE Bangladesh, Department of Women Affairs, National Trauma Counselling Centre (NTCC), One-stop Crisis Centre, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).

addition, the absence of consistent gender-sensitive indicators within programme monitoring systems constrains the ability to track empowerment outcomes beyond beneficiary counts, while limited availability of sex-disaggregated administrative data weakens accountability and learning across ministries.

Table 5.8: Challenges in addressing gender issues in social security

Resource and coverage	Discriminatory social norms	Design and operational gaps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting error and eligibility criteria. • Huge demand and eligible demography in urban settings. • Coverage gap in universal healthcare. • Unfavourable process of transfer. • Accessibility and affordability for women can be lower. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low participation in decision making due to constrained mobility and gender-segregated household responsibilities. • Low education and low labour force participation are the limiting factors. • Investment required (work, time) in social security schemes prevents the participation of women. • Adverse Shocks (widowhood, abandonment, old age, climate change, domestic & external violence) create additional needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of gender equality, empowerment, graduation planning and transformative potential in program designs. • Inadequate linkage between cash transfer, financial inclusion and control of productive resources. • Instrumentalist approach (i.e., targeting as mother, caregiver) limits personal growth. • Absence of gender-sensitive index prevents meaningful monitoring and evaluation of empowerment results.

Source: Adapted from the NSSS gender policy report.

Overall, these challenges are increasingly visible against the backdrop of structural changes in the labour market. The defeminisation of manufacturing, rising informality, and rural absorption of female labour documented earlier in the chapter underscore the growing mismatch between women’s employment realities and the design of social security instruments that remain implicitly oriented towards formal employment pathways. While the NSSS Gender Policy provides a coherent and forward-looking framework, its effectiveness in the next phase will depend on whether social protection instruments are adapted to these labour market shifts, whether working-age informal women become a central rather than residual focus, and whether delivery systems are strengthened to address care constraints, violence, and long-term economic security in an integrated manner.

5.6 Conclusion

Looking ahead, strengthening gender responsiveness within the NSSS will require a deliberate shift from primarily protective and categorical support towards a more integrated approach that addresses women’s evolving risks across the lifecycle, particularly for working-age women. Priority should be given to expanding effective coverage for informal women workers through combinations of non-contributory transfers, affordable health protection, maternity and care-related support, and livelihood-oriented interventions that are explicitly designed around women’s time constraints, mobility, and exposure to shocks. At the same time, stronger linkages are needed between cash assistance, skills development, financial inclusion, and control over productive

resources to enhance graduation prospects and longer-term economic security. Addressing unpaid care burdens through childcare and eldercare services, strengthening protection from gender-based violence within social protection delivery, and improving coordination across ministries and programmes will be critical to translating policy intent into sustained outcomes. Finally, investments in sex-disaggregated administrative data, gender-sensitive indicators, and routine monitoring of empowerment-related results are essential to improve accountability and learning, particularly in a context of labour market transformation, rising informality, and shifting spatial patterns of women's employment.

Chapter 6: Review of Institutional Arrangement Reforms under NSSS and Action Plan II (2021–26)

6.1 Introduction

In addition to programmatic reforms, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2015 attached special priority to institutional reforms to effectively implement social protection programmes. Before the NSSS, the social protection institutional set-up consisted of many small programmes managed by different ministries and departments, often with overlapping objectives, limited coordination and uneven delivery mechanisms. This contributed to programme fragmentation, duplication of efforts, weak linkage between spending and outcomes, and high leakage with corruption and malpractices in selection process and benefit disbursement arising from administrative inefficiencies and poor governance. Poor coordination, absence of monitoring and evaluation and a limited culture of accountability in the management significantly subdued the efficacy of intended welfare transfers..

The NSSS explicitly acknowledged these institutional deficiencies and attached special priority to institutional reforms to enable the effective implementation of social protection programmes. The strategy set out a medium-term reform agenda aimed at simplifying governance arrangements, streamlining administrative structures, strengthening selection process, and modernising service delivery through integrated and digital platforms. It underscored the need to enhance operational efficiency, promote coherence in programme design, and improve inter-ministerial coordination, while establishing a structured monitoring and evaluation architecture to enable systematic, results-oriented assessment at both programme and system levels. The NSSS outlined six major areas for institutional reforms for ensuring a streamlined and efficient programme delivery:

- i) Introducing a central monitoring committee-led cluster coordination approach for implementing ministries
- ii) Establishing a Single Registry Management Information System (MIS)
- iii) Strengthening government-to-person (G2P) payment systems
- iv) Strengthening the processes for selecting social security programme recipients
- v) Establishing a complaints and grievance redress mechanism
- vi) Establishing a results-based monitoring and evaluation system

Based on the NSSS, the first action plan (2016–2021) concentrated on building the basic foundations for these reforms. Core measures included the introduction of a cluster-based coordination mechanism under the Cabinet Division, early steps towards a Management Information System (MIS) for programme databases, gradually roll-out of digital Government-to-Person (G2P) payment channels for major cash-based programmes, database preparation for enabling proxy-means test (PMT)-based beneficiary selection, the establishment of a grievance redress platform and monitoring and evaluation framework. The mid-term review of the NSSS found that progress across these areas was uneven. Some reforms moved forward, especially

where there were clear administrative leadership and technical support, while others remained at preparatory or early implementation stages because of limited capacity, unclear operational guidelines and slower-than-expected progress on digital integration.

The second phase of the NSSS Action Plan (2021–2026) was framed to deepen these earlier reforms and move towards more functional social protection governance. The emphasis shifted from conceptual design to operational maturity, with stronger focus on digital transformation, consolidation of systems and more predictable inter-ministerial coordination. Each of the six reform areas was translated into a set of time-bound activities with indicators, lead and co-responsible agencies, and an integrated monitoring arrangement managed by the Cabinet Division. This period also coincided with broader reforms in public financial management and digital governance. The Social Protection Budget Management Unit (SPBMU) in the Finance Division started to work more closely with line ministries to connect beneficiary databases to budgetary disbursement systems through iBAS++, allowing closer tracking of payment flows.

Within this context, the present chapter reviews how far the institutional reforms planned for Phase II have progressed. It examines the extent to which line ministries and divisions have met the objectives and targets sets in the NSSS and its action plan.³⁰ Based on a structured scoring framework, the chapter reviews more than 100 identifiable and quantifiable performance indicators for institutional reforms. In doing so, it identified key gaps, challenges, and constraints that continue to hinder effective implementation of institutional reforms.

6.2 Implementation of the CMC-Led Cluster Coordination Mechanism

Bangladesh's social security system is implemented through a large number of programmes administered by multiple ministries and departments. The existence of more than a hundred programmes across over thirty implementing agencies has historically created coordination challenges, particularly because many schemes are small in scale and operate in parallel. To address these issues, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) proposed the consolidation of fragmented programmes and the introduction of a coordination mechanism based on thematic clusters. This section reviews the institutional arrangements developed under the CMC-led cluster-based approach and the mandates of the main governance bodies.

Under the NSSS, the Cabinet Division was assigned the central coordinating role for implementation. The earlier Central Monitoring Committee was reconstituted as the Central Management Committee (CMC) on social security programmes, with an expanded mandate. Alongside this, a hierarchical governance structure was created to connect cabinet-level decision-making with sectoral coordination and field-level implementation. The overall governance hierarchy of this structure is presented in Figure 6.1.

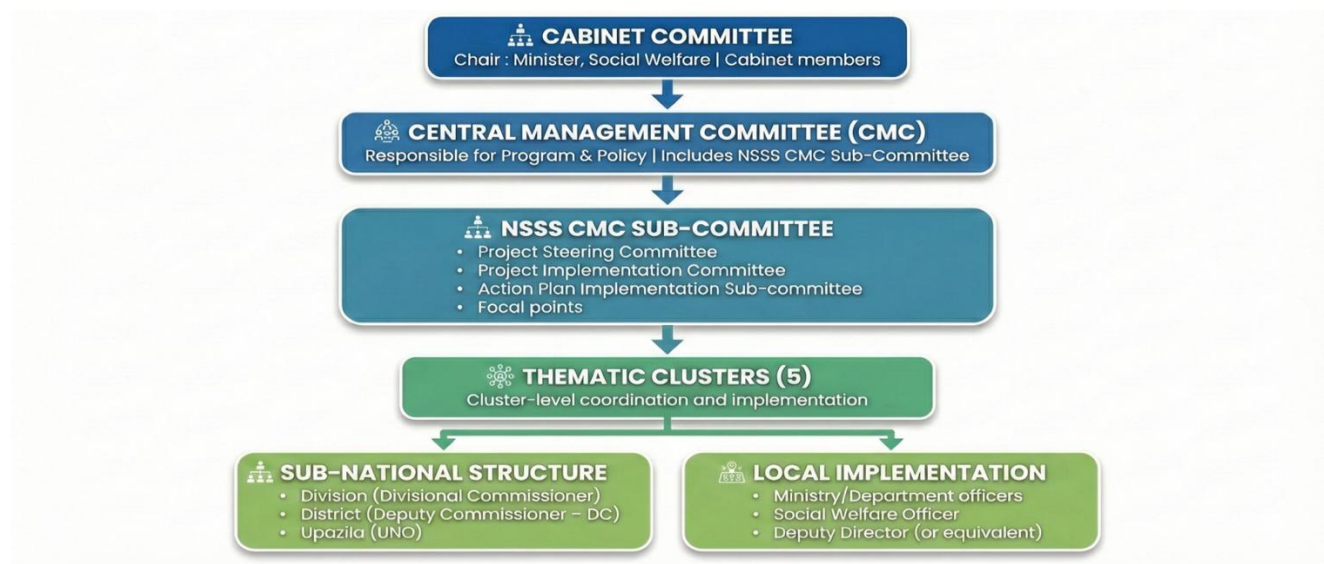
³⁰ The analysis draws on information submitted by line ministries, records from the Cabinet Division and cross-cutting bodies such as GED, the Finance Division and the Local Government Division. Supplementary evidence is taken from the NSSS Action Plan II Progress Report (2024) and key informant interviews with relevant officials.

At the apex of this structure is the Cabinet Committee on Social Security Programmes, which provides executive oversight and high-level policy direction. The committee is chaired by the Minister of Finance and includes relevant cabinet members. Its mandate is to review the progress of major social security programmes, assess performance of key allowance schemes, and determine budgetary priorities for subsequent years. It also reviews beneficiary policies and major programme adjustments. The committee is expected to meet at least once every six months, and its decisions guide the work of the CMC and related bodies.

The Central Management Committee (CMC) functions as the principal national coordination and technical management body. It is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary and comprises secretaries from the main ministries and divisions involved in social security. The CMC is responsible for overall programme and policy coordination, approval and monitoring of the NSSS action plan, and resolution of inter-ministerial issues. It reviews work plans, monitors physical and financial progress, and provides guidance on cross-cutting reforms such as integrated information systems, digital government-to-person payment mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and grievance redress systems. The committee meets at least twice a year, or more frequently if required, and reports major policy issues to the Cabinet Committee.

Supporting the CMC is the NSSS CMC Sub-Committee, which operates as the main national-level operational and monitoring body for the reform agenda. This sub-committee is chaired by the Additional Secretary (Coordination and Reforms) of the Cabinet Division and brings together focal points from relevant ministries and agencies. Its mandate is to prepare and monitor the NSSS action plan, coordinate implementation across clusters, and track progress against reform milestones. It reviews implementation status, identifies bottlenecks, and prepares periodic progress reports for the CMC. The sub-committee also supervises specialised operational groups, including the action plan implementation sub-committee. It typically meets once every two months.

Figure 6.1: NSSS Governance Hierarchy



At the sectoral level, the NSSS introduced five thematic clusters by grouping ministries according to the types of programmes they implement. These clusters cover social allowances, food security and disaster assistance, social insurance, labour and livelihood interventions, and human development and social empowerment. Each cluster is led by a designated coordinating ministry and includes relevant line ministries as members. Table 6.1 provides a mapping of the line ministries across the thematic clusters. The clusters are responsible for coordinating reforms within their thematic areas, harmonising programmes, preparing integrated action plans, and monitoring progress. They are also expected to work with the Finance Division to secure budgetary allocations and identify regulatory or administrative changes required for programme consolidation. Clusters generally meet periodically based on reform requirements and reporting cycles to the CMC and its sub-committee.

The cluster-based coordination mechanism is supported by several cross-cutting ministries and divisions. These include the Finance Division, the General Economics Division, the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division, the Statistics and Informatics Division, and the Local Government Division. Their roles involve financial oversight, policy planning, monitoring and evaluation, data management, and local government coordination. These entities provide technical and institutional support across clusters to ensure consistency with NSSS objectives.

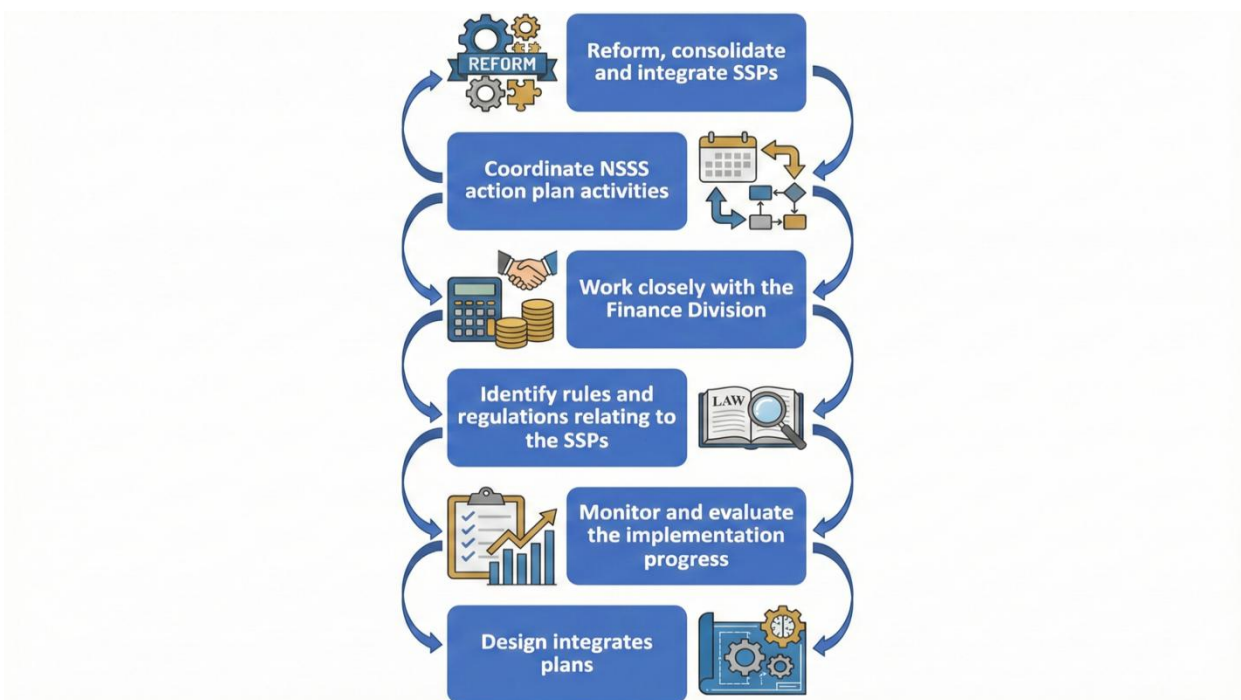
Beneath the cluster level, a subnational governance structure was established to ensure coordination and monitoring at the field level. At the divisional level, the Divisional Management Committee, chaired by the Divisional Commissioner, reviews district-level progress and submits consolidated reports to the central authorities. Its mandate is to oversee implementation across districts and ensure compliance with NSSS directives. It meets at least once every two months.

At the district level, the District Management Committee, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner, coordinates programme implementation across departments, upazilas, and municipalities. It reviews progress, maintains beneficiary databases, ensures alignment with NSSS lifecycle priorities, and reports to the divisional committee. The district committee typically meets at least once a month and functions as the main coordination and reporting platform at the district level. At the upazila level, the Upazila Management Committee, chaired by the Upazila Nirbahi Officer, oversees programme implementation on the ground. It coordinates among line departments, municipalities, and union parishads, maintains beneficiary records, facilitates digital payments, and addresses local vulnerabilities such as disasters or demographic pressures. The upazila committee reports to the district authorities and meets at least once every two months. At the frontline, programme delivery is carried out by ministry and department officers, such as social welfare officers and other field-level officials. These officers are responsible for beneficiary identification, service delivery, and reporting to the upazila and district committees, thereby completing the vertical chain of implementation.

Table 6.1: A mapping of the ministries in the thematic clusters

Name of the line ministry	Social Allowance	Food security and disaster assistance	Social insurance	Labour/livelihood intervention	Human Development and Social Empowerment
Ministry of Social Welfare	█	√	√	√	√
Ministry of Food		█			
FID			█		
Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief		√		█	
MPME					█
Ministry of Women and Children Affairs	√	√		√	√
Ministry of Cultural Affairs	√				
Ministry of Liberation War Affairs	√				
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	√	√	√		√
Local Government Division	√			√	
Ministry of Labour and Employment	√		√	√	√
Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs	√				
Ministry of Agriculture		√		√	
Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock		√		√	
Finance Division		√		√	
Ministry of Commerce		√			
Rural Development and Cooperatives Division				√	
Prime Minister's Office					√
Ministry of Land					√
Ministry of Education					√
Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment					√
Ministry of Industry					√
Information and Communication Technology Division					√

Figure 6.2: Terms of Reference for the thematic cluster



Source: Prepared based on the action plan

The Central Management Committee serves as the principal forum for strategic coordination and technical decision-making on social security reforms. Its effectiveness depends both on the regularity of convening and on the capacity to follow through on decisions across multiple ministerial portfolios. This section examines the meeting cadence, the substance of decisions taken, and the extent to which follow-through can be documented in the period from 2021 to early 2025.

The CMC convened seven times between 2021 and early 2025, maintaining a meeting frequency that broadly aligns with the expectation of at least two meetings per year. A gap occurred in 2022 while Action Plan II was being finalised and disseminated, but the overall pattern indicates sustained engagement at the strategic coordination level. The meeting sequence shows progression through key system-wide priorities, including approval and dissemination of Action Plan II, establishment of MIS integration pathways, strengthening of beneficiary verification mechanisms, and policy approval for a Dynamic Social Registry (DSR).

Table 6.2: Summary of CMC meetings and recorded follow-up, 2021–202

CMC meeting no.	Date	Main agenda highlights	Noted follow-up at later meetings
14th	4 Feb 2021	Progress on Action Plan I; preparation of Action Plan II draft; quarterly cluster meetings; MIS architecture; Social Insurance coordination moved to Finance Division	Drafts prepared through workshops; Action Plan II compiled and circulated
15th	27 Jun	Presentation of consolidated draft Action Plan II; co-	Draft sent to all ministries for review;

	2021	option of additional secretaries to CMC	feedback channels confirmed
16th	23 Dec 2021	Approval of Action Plan II; instructions on executive summary and COVID-19 content; printing and launch	Printing completed; dissemination organised with 39 ministries in Oct 2022
17th	5 Apr 2023	Single Registry MIS and NHD discussion; dashboard and CODI; cluster activity review; plan for conference	Workshop on Single Registry held; dashboard prototype progressed
18th	21 Dec 2023	Workshop report on Single Registry; committee proposal; CODI and annual progress report endorsed; Adaptive SP guideline and sub-committee	Committee for Single Registry endorsed; ASP guideline and sub-committee approved
19th	14 Nov 2024	Policy approval for DSR; steering and implementation units; GO-NGO coordination committee; cluster meeting cadence	DSR to start in eight upazilas; cluster convening urged; GO-NGO ToR set
20th	12 Feb 2025	Leakage concept and controls; NID requirement; double-dipping checks; deadlines for list updates; cluster revitalisation	Time-bound verification and suspension rules adopted; Single Registry checks instructed

Source: Author's compilation using the CMC meeting minutes

Decision tracking across these meetings reveals several areas where follow-through can be documented. Action Plan II was finalised through a series of ministerial consultations and technical workshops, approved with specific instructions for updating the executive summary to reflect COVID-19 measures, and subsequently printed and disseminated to 39 ministries and divisions. The CMC repeatedly affirmed the importance of regular cluster meetings, instructing that quarterly meetings be held and that cluster minutes be routinely shared with the Cabinet Division.

Progress on digital registry systems followed a more iterative pathway. The Single Registry MIS was discussed at multiple CMC meetings, leading to the organisation of technical workshops, an inter-ministerial consultation, and the endorsement of a technical committee tasked with preparing a roadmap for registry integration. The Finance Division's Social Protection Beneficiary Management Unit (SPBMU) platform continued to serve as the primary interim tool for allowance disbursement and government-to-person (G2P) payments. Building on this foundation, the CMC granted policy approval for the DSR in late 2024, establishing steering and implementation units and approving an initial roll-out in eight upazilas.

Beneficiary verification and leakage control received increasing emphasis in later CMC meetings. Instructions were issued for mandatory use of National Identity (NID) numbers, implementation of double-dipping checks through the Single Registry, and time-bound updating of beneficiary lists. These measures reflect a shift towards more rigorous controls on targeting accuracy and programme integrity, consistent with broader government priorities on digital verification and subsidy rationalisation.

The CMC also formalised two coordination arrangements that extend beyond central ministries. A GO-NGO coordination committee was established with terms of reference to facilitate collaboration between government agencies and non-governmental organisations in social protection delivery. An Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) guideline was endorsed, accompanied by the creation of a dedicated sub-committee to support preparedness and response planning in the context of climate-related and other shocks.

Overall, the meeting record demonstrates that the CMC has functioned as the central forum for strategic coordination, with decision follow-through traceable across multiple sittings for key agenda items. At the same time, several priorities that depend on external databases, regulatory alignment, or inter-agency coordination, such as full operationalisation of the Single Registry using national household data, have progressed more slowly and remain under phased implementation. The next section examines how this central coordination has translated into operational activity at the cluster level.

6.2.1 Thematic Cluster Activity and Cross-Cutting Linkages

While the CMC provides strategic direction at the centre, the five thematic clusters are designed to serve as the operational bridge between national policy priorities and programme-level implementation. The effectiveness of this arrangement depends on regular cluster convening, sustained engagement from focal ministries, and functional linkages with cross-cutting technical divisions. This section assesses cluster meeting patterns, the role of cross-cutting support entities, and the field-level coordination mechanisms that underpin implementation.

Meeting frequency across the five clusters has been variable. In the six months preceding the November 2024 CMC meeting, the Labour and Livelihood cluster convened twice, three clusters (Social Assistance, Food Security and Disaster Management, and Human Development and Social Empowerment) met once each, and the Social Insurance cluster did not meet. The CMC reiterated the expectation for quarterly meetings and requested regular submission of cluster minutes to sustain accountability and coordination continuity.

Cross-cutting technical divisions have maintained active engagement around specific agenda items. The Finance Division's SPBMU has served as the operational backbone for cash allowance disbursement and has been central to efforts to build a Single Registry and, subsequently, the DSR. The Statistics and Informatics Division (SID) reported that the National Household Database (NHD) project has not been able to provide an operational registry suitable for use at scale. Constraints cited include the project-based structure of the NHD, the age of underlying survey data, and the absence of a permanent update mechanism. As a result, earlier plans to use the NHD as the main foundation for Single Registry integration have not advanced, and alternative pathways based on administrative data are now being explored.

Table 6.3. Reported frequency of thematic cluster meetings

Cluster	Coordinating ministry/division	Meetings held	Follow-up notes
Social Assistance	Ministry of Social Welfare	1	Regular monitoring referenced in CMC minutes
Social Insurance	Finance Division	0	CMC reiterated instruction to hold regular meetings
Food Security and Disaster Management	Ministry of Food	1	Routine coordination referenced
Labour and Livelihood	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief	2	Request to co-opt Ministry of Water Resources endorsed

Human Development and Social Empowerment	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education	1	Regular meetings cited to accelerate activities
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Note: The frequency figures are derived from the 19th CMC meeting minutes (14 November 2024), which covered the six-month window preceding the meeting. The 20th CMC meeting (12 February 2025) reaffirmed the same information, noting the need to revitalise the cluster mechanism but without updating the counts.

The General Economics Division (GED) has continued to support the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) architecture, including development of a dashboard prototype and use of the Consolidation of Development Initiatives (CODI) tool. Ministries were invited to provide feedback on the dashboard before finalisation. The Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) maintains its focus on programmes financed under the development budget, while schemes funded exclusively from the revenue budget remain outside its formal mandate. This division of responsibility continues to limit the coverage of systematic evaluation activities across the social security portfolio.

Field-level coordination has been supported through a combination of directives, training, and participatory verification mechanisms. Orientation workshops for focal officers have been held periodically to maintain institutional knowledge during staff transfers. Beneficiary list verification has been channelled through Union and Upazila committees, with some locations reportedly using public courtyard-style meetings to enhance transparency in beneficiary selection and list updating. These field structures are also being used to pilot components of the emerging M&E dashboard and to provide feedback on practical implementation issues.

Table 6.4: Cluster activity snapshot and field linkages

Dimension	Observation	Evidence
Meeting regularity	Meetings held with variable frequency; one cluster reported two meetings in six months, three clusters one meeting, one cluster none	19th CMC minute.
Minute-sharing	Instruction to submit cluster minutes regularly to Cabinet Division continues	14th CMC decision sustained in later reviews.
Cross-cutting links	Finance Division leading SPB MU use; NHD track reported as non-operational for registry purposes, with work shifting towards DSR and administrative data sources; GED advancing dashboard and CODI	17th and 18th CMC minutes.
Field structures	Verification through Union and Upazila committees and public meetings encouraged; NID mandatory with dated cut-off	20th CMC minute.
Training and orientation	Workshops for focal officers and sub-committee sessions around Action Plan II, Single Registry, and dissemination events	15th, 16th, 17th, 18th minutes.

Overall, the coordination arrangements have remained functional and have supported key system-wide initiatives, including operationalisation of Action Plan II, formation of technical committees for digital registries, and introduction of time-bound NID-based verification processes. However, uneven cluster meeting frequency and limited data interoperability between systems have required

repeated administrative guidance. With DSR policy now approved, steering and implementation units established, and NID-based verification standardised, the coordination framework appears to be entering a more execution-focused phase. Whether this translates into sustained programme consolidation depends on the cluster mechanism's capacity to drive implementation, which is examined in the following section.

6.2.2 Implementation Progress Against Action Plan II

Action Plan II sets out a detailed reform agenda organised by thematic cluster, with timelines, responsible agencies, and expected outputs for each activity. Reviewing implementation against this plan provides insight into the practical capacity of the coordination mechanism to drive consolidation and harmonisation. The overall picture that emerges is one of selective progress: reforms that could be executed within a single ministry's administrative remit have advanced, while cross-ministry consolidation efforts requiring reallocation of responsibilities, budgets, or delivery systems have moved more slowly.

The following subsections review implementation progress for each of the five clusters, focusing on what has been achieved, what remains incomplete, and the factors that appear to explain differential progress.

Social Allowance Cluster. Progress has been most visible where reforms could be delivered through programme restructuring within existing implementation channels. The Mother and Child Benefit Programme has been scaled up to nationwide coverage, and earlier maternity-related schemes have been renamed under a consolidated programme identity, reflecting efforts to harmonise support across locations and delivery settings. The cluster reports achieving universal coverage in disability-related support, supported by the consolidation of two disability benefit programmes into a single allowance and education stipend structure.

However, reforms requiring inter-ministerial coordination have advanced less. The Vulnerable Women Benefit was introduced through rebranding of the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme, but the intended consolidation with other programmes did not occur. Transition coordination mechanisms across related schemes remain largely unreported in the implementation record.

Food Security and Disaster Assistance Cluster. This cluster shows a similar pattern. Core operational functions related to disaster response, food supply, and consistency between Open Market Sales (OMS), relief programmes, stock management, and fair price policies are described as continuing. Review meetings are reported as taking place. Nevertheless, the planned consolidation of food security-type programmes has not been achieved, and the annual transition planning activities intended to support consolidation and rationalisation have not been prepared or updated.

Cross-cluster deliberation on shifting the Vulnerable Women Benefit towards cash-based transfers did not translate into implementation. The related expansion proposal was not approved, leaving the programme's transfer modality unchanged.

Social Insurance Cluster. Institutional progress has been made on preparatory and regulatory elements, though implementation remains at an early stage. A feasibility study for the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS) was undertaken, providing an evidence base for future design and piloting decisions. The establishment of the National Pension Authority represents a significant milestone in the institutional architecture for pensions.

These achievements have not yet translated into a functioning NSIS pilot or a clearly sequenced implementation pathway within the period covered by Action Plan II. Cluster consultations are described as mostly irregular, which has likely contributed to slow progress in moving from planning to operational delivery.

Labour and Livelihood Intervention Cluster. This cluster reports partial progress on reforms requiring multi-agency consolidation and regulatory follow-through. A list of workfare programmes has been prepared and submitted to the Cabinet Division, but consolidation across organisations has not taken place. The Day Care Act 2021 has been enacted, and related rules have been drafted and are under revision, indicating movement on childcare policy commitments. However, operational coverage and enforcement requirements extend well beyond legislation.

Several implementation indicators in this cluster remain broadly stated, and annual transition planning has not been completed, suggesting that the shift from agenda-setting to measurable consolidation and delivery outcomes remains incomplete.

Human Development and Social Empowerment Cluster. Harmonisation has been most evident in education-related programmes. Stipend programmes previously implemented through multiple projects were brought under a single structure, supporting clearer presentation of beneficiary transitions and improved programme coherence. Other cluster functions, such as oversight of child development-related interventions and inclusion objectives, are described as continuing, but the implementation record provides limited evidence of cross-programme consolidation beyond the stipend harmonisation example.

Across clusters, a clear pattern emerges: progress has been strongest where reforms could be managed within ministerial silos, and weakest where coordination requires sustained inter-ministerial negotiation over mandates, budgets, and delivery mechanisms. The next section examines the operational constraints and coordination gaps that help explain this pattern

Table 6.5: Performance of the thematic cluster in NSSF reform

Name of the cluster	NSSF provisioned major activities	Activities	Performance Indicators; Timeframe	Current Status
Social Allowance	Introduce and scale up of Mother-Child Benefit Programme	Scale-up consolidated Mother and Child Benefit programme	The programme implemented in phases; July 2021 - June 2025	MoWCA introduced and scaled up Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP), currently providing benefit for 36 months. MA (Maternity Allowance) and Lactating Mother Allowance (LMA) programme were renamed as Mother and Child Benefit Programme in FY 2022-23. Mother and Child Benefit Programme started to be implemented for the whole country including all Union, Municipalities, City Corporations and garments factories from FY 2022-23.
	Introduce Vulnerable Women's Benefit programme	Coordinate between MoWCA and MoSW to consolidate and improve the programme for vulnerable women. MoWCA rebrand VGD and ICVGD as VWB programme	Plan of MoWCA reviewed and submitted detailed implementation plan of VWB to CMC; From July 2022	MoWCA rebranded the VGD programme as the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) Programme in July 2022. The consolidation with other programmes did not happen.
	Scale-up Old Age Allowance	Support in expanding coverage of Old Age Allowance	The number of beneficiaries increased; July 2023	Currently 262 upazillas are covered. The coverage has expanded over the years.
	Scale-up programmes for people with disabilities	Continue the universal coverage of programmes for PWD.	Programme continued; Continuous	Coverage has been made universal.
		Coordinate with Old Age Allowance and VWB programme for a smooth transition	Coordinated with other relevant programmes; 2023	
	The transition of beneficiaries to other programmes	Plan transition with several beneficiaries and cost	Plan prepared and updated; Yearly	Since several schemes were merged under the NSSF reform agenda, programme transitions have involved shifting beneficiaries into unified structures. For instance, four separate livelihood support schemes for tea garden workers, Bede communities, Hijra/transgender groups, and other disadvantaged groups were consolidated into the single "Underprivileged People's Livelihood Development Programme". A similar transition took place for disability support, where two disability benefit programmes were consolidated into the "Disability Allowance and Education Stipend Programme".
		Coordinate transition with relevant ministries	Coordination is done regularly; Continuous	
Regular consultation with members	Organize quarterly meeting	Quarterly meetings organized; Continuous	Meetings held but mostly irregular.	

	Organize seminars/workshops	Organize workshops / inter-cluster consultation meetings	Annual Seminars or consultations organized; Continuous	4 workshops arranged for capacity building.
Food Security and Disaster Assistance	Consolidation of food security type programmes	Coordinate with the implementing ministries to consolidate the food security type programmes	Programmes consolidated; July 2023	The consolidation of food security type programmes did not happen.
	Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) programme	Coordinate with Social Allowance Cluster to decide whether to change it into a cash-based programme	Cross cluster consultations held with social allowance cluster and decision took about food transfer; December 2022	Since, VWB Urban expansion was not approved the cash based transfer was not undertaken.
		Consolidate the programme into a VWB programme		VGD program has been transformed into VWB program. But no consolidation happened.
	Food supply in food shortage areas	Ensure food supply in disaster and drought-affected areas, or areas where money supply cannot ensure availability of food	Food supply continued in relevant areas; Continuous	Supply food grain for disaster-relief programmes are being continued.
	Food stock policy and fair price policy	Monitor the consistency of OMS and relief programmes with food stock policy and fair price policy of the Government	Food stock policy and fair price policy are consistent with food security programmes; Continuous	Review meetings held regularly.
	Coordination of disaster response types of programmes	Share information on disaster response programmes in regular meetings	Included as an agenda item in cluster meetings; Continuous	
	The transition of beneficiaries to another programme	Plan transition with several beneficiaries and costs	Plan prepared and updated; Yearly	The plan has not been prepared or updated.
		Coordinate transition with relevant ministries	Coordination is done regularly; Continuous	
	Regular consultation with members	Organize quarterly meetings	Quarterly meetings organized; Continuous	Meetings held but mostly irregular.
	Organize seminars/workshops	Organize workshops / inter-cluster consultation meetings	Annual seminars or consultations organized	4 workshops arranged for capacity building.
Insurance cluster	National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS)	Review the study on the NSIS framework to determine its viability. Recommend suitable option of NSIS and support implementation.	A framework of NSIS is designed for pilots; July 2022	A feasibility study was undertaken.
	Private pension	Support and coordinate the process of establishing the Pension Regulatory Authority.	Private pension authority established; July 2023	National Pension Authority established.
	Government Service Pension	Continue the programme	The programme continued; Continuous	Government pension are being continued.
	Regular consultation with members	Organize quarterly meetings	Quarterly meetings organized; Continuous	Meetings held but mostly irregular.
	Organize	Organize workshops / inter-cluster	Annual seminars or consultations	3 workshops arranged for capacity building.

	seminars/workshops	consultation meetings	organized	
Labour & Livelihood Intervention Cluster	Achieve consolidated workfare programmes	Strengthen and consolidate all workfare programmes.	Programmes consolidated; July 2022	List prepared and submitted to Cabinet Division. Consolidation for all organization did not take place.
	Provision of childcare across all formal & informal employment	Ensure childcare facilities in all government offices, private enterprises and informal labour-intensive areas	Childcare Act enacted, Rules framed and childcare facilities available in organizations with more than 40 employees; From July 2021 to June 2025	The Day Care Act 2021 has been enacted. Day care rules 2022 has been drafted and are under revision for finalization
	Facilitation in the labour market	Coordinate with relevant ministries and other thematic clusters for ensuring that beneficiaries get more access to labour markets.	More beneficiaries are engaged in the labour market; Continuous	.
	Training programme for the young population	Coordinate with ministries for facilitating trainees in getting jobs.	More trainees have access to the labour market; Continuous	Currently, 8 TTCs and one Bangladesh Institute of Marine Technology (BIMT) are operational to facilitate trainees.
	Update and implement effective legislation to ensure labour rights	Update legal provisions and ensure strict implementation.	Implementation of labour rights is regularly monitored; Continuous	.
	The transition of beneficiaries to other programmes	Plan transition with some beneficiaries and costs	Plan prepared and updated; Yearly	The plan has not been prepared or updated
		Coordinate transition with relevant ministries	Coordination done regularly; Continuous	
	Regular consultation with members	Organize quarterly meetings.	Quarterly meetings organized; Continuous	Meetings held but mostly irregular.
Organize seminars/workshops	Organize workshops / inter-cluster consultation meetings	Annual seminars or consultations organized; Continuous	4 workshops arranged for capacity building.	
Human Development & Social Empowerment	School Stipend Programme	Monitor the progress in scaling up the number of beneficiaries	The number of beneficiaries increased; July 2022	Coverage expanded.
	Child Development	Coordinate and monitor the progress of programmes related to child development like orphan's and school meals programmes, immunization, child healthcare, nutrition, water and sanitation, etc.	Child development programmes consolidated; Continuous	Programs are continuous
	Social empowerment	Oversee and coordinate with other clusters and relevant ministries to ensure social justice and equity	Social justice and inclusion efforts of each programme are monitored; Continuous	.
	The transition of beneficiaries to different programmes	Plan transition with quantifying the number of beneficiaries and costs	Plan prepared and updated; Yearly	The Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED) previously delivered secondary and higher secondary stipends through four separate programmes: the

				Secondary Education Stipend Project (SESP), the Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP), the Secondary Education Sector Investment Program (SESIP), and the Higher Secondary Stipend Project (HSSP). In 2020, these were brought under a single, harmonised structure and are now presented under the Secondary Education Stipend Programme. So, beneficiary transition within these programmes happened.
		Coordinate transition with relevant ministries	Coordination is done regularly; Continuous	
	Regular consultation with members	Organize quarterly meetings	Quarterly meetings organized; Continuous	Meetings held but mostly irregular.
	Organize seminars/workshops	Organize workshops / inter-cluster consultation meetings	Annual seminars or consultations organized; Continuous	4 workshops arranged for capacity building.

6.2.4 Operational Constraints and Coordination Gaps

While the coordination architecture is well-designed on paper, its practical operation reveals persistent constraints that limit the capacity to drive systematic consolidation. These constraints operate at multiple levels: the irregularity of cluster meetings, weak accountability mechanisms, frequent turnover of focal persons, and limited Cabinet-level engagement on system-wide steering.

A cross-cutting challenge that emerges from the implementation record is the irregularity of cluster convening and the resulting limits on sustained follow-through. Implementation reports repeatedly record quarterly meetings as expected but 'mostly irregular' across clusters, despite multiple capacity-building workshops being organised. This mirrors findings from the Midterm Review that sustaining routine meetings proved difficult in practice, undermining the mechanism's ability to resolve programme overlaps and drive consolidation on a continuous basis.

The governance mapping conducted for this review indicates that while the CMC has supported preparation of Action Plan II, promoted NID-based verification, and advanced discussions on duplication and adaptive social protection, ministries reported that a more vigilant and frequent coordinating role is required to accelerate implementation. The Cabinet-level oversight body does not meet as frequently as envisaged, and its oversight tends to focus on a limited set of programmes, constraining system-wide steering capacity.

At the cluster level, weak accountability mechanisms and frequent turnover of focal persons are identified as continuing constraints, alongside underperformance in the Social Insurance cluster specifically. These issues collectively reduce institutional memory and continuity in implementation, particularly for reforms that require sustained multi-agency coordination rather than one-off policy decisions.

The limited operationalisation of the National Household Database for registry purposes illustrates the practical consequences of these coordination gaps. Despite years of discussion and technical preparation, the absence of a functioning update mechanism and the reliance on ageing survey data have prevented the NHD from serving as the planned foundation for beneficiary targeting and programme integration. This has necessitated a shift towards the DSR approach based on administrative data, effectively restarting the registry development pathway.

These operational constraints point to a fundamental tension in the coordination model: the architecture assumes that regular convening, clear focal point responsibility, and sustained Cabinet-level engagement will be sufficient to drive cross-ministry consolidation. In practice, however, ministries retain strong incentives to protect their programme portfolios, budgets, and administrative jurisdictions. Without stronger enforcement mechanisms or clear accountability for consolidation outcomes, the cluster mechanism functions more as a forum for information exchange than as an instrument for driving structural reform.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the CMC-led cluster coordination mechanism has successfully established a functioning governance architecture and has enabled some harmonisation and preparatory reforms, especially where changes could be executed within a

single ministry's programme portfolio. The mechanism has proven effective as a forum for information-sharing, strategic dialogue, and incremental adjustments to programme design and delivery procedures.

However, progress on the core NSSS objective of programme consolidation remains limited in areas where reforms require inter-ministerial agreement on mandates, budgets, delivery systems, and transition planning. The cluster mechanism has not yet demonstrated the capacity to drive systematic consolidation across ministerial boundaries or to enforce compliance with agreed transition pathways and harmonisation timelines.

Strengthening regular convening, clarifying focal point responsibilities, institutionalising handover and reporting processes, and enhancing Cabinet-level oversight would therefore remain critical to converting the cluster mechanism from a coordination forum into a more effective instrument for programme consolidation and integrated delivery. These adjustments are essential if the coordination architecture is to fulfil the original intent of the NSSS: not merely to coordinate parallel programmes, but to achieve their progressive consolidation into a more coherent, efficient, and rights-based social security system.

Table 6.3: A mapping of the role of different ministries/bodies under the CMC-led cluster coordination approach

Name of the line ministry/department /Committee	NSSS-provisioned role in implementation arrangements	Selected achievements/identified challenges
Advisory council/cabinet committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Providing executive oversight of social security programmes. -Setting high-level policy direction for the sector. - Reviewing the progress and performance of major programmes and allowance schemes. - Determining budgetary priorities for subsequent years. 	<p>Achievement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Regularly allocating budgets and decides benefit rate. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supposed to meet twice a year, but meeting only once a year. -Evaluating only a few programmes, mostly those from the development budgets rather than the tax-funded budget -The MIS is yet to be fully operational for all programmes -During the interviews, some ministries reported that a more vigilant role from the CMC is required to quicken the NSSS implementation. Given that the CMC meeting takes place only twice in a year, playing such a role could be difficult for the CMC.
Central Management Committee on Social Security Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approving action/implementation plans. - Ensuring inter-ministerial coordination, troubleshooting and crisis mitigation. - Reviewing performance of implementing social security programmes - Approving new programme designs - Working as the central repository of MIS programme databases of implementing ministries 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated preparation and consolidation of NSSS Action Plan Phase II across ministries - Reviewed social security budget allocations and fiscal projections - Promoted NID-based beneficiary verification - Discussed and initiated measures to reduce duplication and double dipping - Advanced discussions on adaptive and shock-responsive social protection

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reporting to the Cabinet Division on the progress of the NSSS on a regular basis 	
Cluster lead ministries/departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinating with other ministries in the cluster - Carrying out MIS and monitoring cluster progresses - Review reports of the cluster <p>Submitting reports to the CMC of the Cabinet Division</p>	<p>Achievements:</p> <p>The CMC (as the coordinating layer above clusters) supported cluster formation and monitoring as part of the governance approach.</p> <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accountability under the cluster-led coordination approach was reported as weak; strengthening focal persons and responsibilities within clusters was identified as necessary. - The social insurance cluster was described as underperforming. - Frequent turnover of focal persons contributes to weak institutional memory.
Public administration (Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioner, and Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinating social security programmes at the field level 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More than 500 field officers have been trained for NSSS service delivery. - A brief overview of the NSSS has been incorporated in the curricula of the Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infrastructural adequacy (to be adapted to the MIS or GRS systems) is not homogenous for all regions. More in-depth capacity building training is required
General Economics Division (GED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting the results-based M&E of social security programmes; - Producing annual overall M&E reports; - Drafting SS policies for the Cabinet division - Coordinating social security plans and policy with five-year plans and other national strategies - 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The policies are regularly monitored and coordinated with five-yearly plans and other national strategies. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The results-based M&E has not been operationalised. Annual M&E reports have not been prepared (the first one is under process).
Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring and evaluation of implementation of projects/programmes 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The IMED regularly monitors social security programmes under development budget. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Security Programmes under the revenue budget are not monitored by the IMED. The Allocation of Business for the IMED needs amending by the Cabinet Division to allow them monitor and evaluate the SSPs from the revenue budget.
Statistics and Informatics Division (SID)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing, maintaining and updating the beneficiary database 	<p>Achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The data collection for the NHD has already been completed. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The National Household Database (NHD) is yet to be operationalised. - Frequent panel surveys on a regular basis are required to be undertaken. There is no plan yet to update the database on a regular basis. <p>The MIS is not operationalised yet</p>
Finance division of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approving and disbursing publicly 	<p>Achievements:</p>

Ministry of Finance	financed social security budget - Tracking financial delivery	- Several programmes have been transformed into the G2P module and hence tracking of financial delivery is possible. Challenges: Digitising the beneficiary list by the implementing line ministries is taking considerably longer time. Capacity adequacy of all the line ministries is not uniform in this regard.
Local Government Division (LGD)	- Assisting in the identification process of beneficiaries with the help of Local government institutions (LGIs) following a community participation approach; - Providing support in resolving grievances and disputes related to the implementation of the NSSS - Assisting in the implementation of M&E efforts 1. Assisting the ministries in delivering programmes	Achievements: - The second-generation GRS software is already in place; - The LGIs provide logistics and other required support in delivering the SSPs Challenges: - The online-based GRS is still not widely known to an overwhelming majority of the intended target groups. Having relatively less education attainment and, to a larger extent, being technologically handicapped, the poor and marginalised group remains largely left-out of this online-based GRS system.

Table 6.4: CMC-led coordination status

Activities/indicator or	Performance indicator	Time frame	Implementing Ministry/Division	Status
Organize regular meetings of the Central Management Committee (CMC)	At least two meetings organized per year	Continuous	Cabinet Division	The Central Monitoring Committee (CMC) held regular meetings following the adoption of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS). During the implementation of Action Plan Phase I, the CMC convened 15 meetings. In comparison, five meetings were held during Phase II. The frequency of meetings during Phase II was affected by several external factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the national election, and political instability during July–August 2024.
Follow up on implementation of CMC decisions	Progress reviewed regularly through CMC and Focal Point meetings	Continuous	Cabinet Division	Implementation progress was regularly reviewed through CMC and focal point meetings. However, as noted above, the regularity of CMC meetings declined during Phase II, and focal point meetings were also held less consistently during this period.
Integrate Social Protection reform plan into Annual Performance Agreement (APA)	SP reforms plan integrated into APA	Dec-22	Cabinet Division	Social protection reform actions were incorporated into the Annual Performance Agreement (APA) framework. However, the APA is no longer operational, having been replaced in August 2025 by the Government Performance Monitoring System (GPMS). The GPMS has been designed to be more pragmatic and dynamic, with a stronger emphasis on long-term results.
Oversee implementation of reform action plans through 2nd Mid-Term Review (MTR)	2nd MTR commissioned	Dec-23	Cabinet Division	A mid-term review (MTR) of the NSSS reform was commissioned and conducted by an independent think tank, focusing on implementation progress during Action Plan Phase I. A second MTR was not undertaken. However, the Cabinet Division has commissioned a final review of the NSSS, which is currently being carried out by an independent research organization.
Capacity building of thematic clusters	At least 2 training programmes	Continuous	Cabinet Division	During the implementation of Action Plan Phase II, more than 20 capacity-building training programmes were conducted. While these initiatives contributed to strengthening

	conducted each year			institutional capacity, greater alignment of training activities with the reform priorities outlined in the NSSS would have further enhanced their effectiveness. In addition, structured orientation and capacity-building programmes for newly appointed NSSS focal points on strategic reform areas were limited.
Strengthen and operationalize field-level management committees (DivMC, DMC, UMC)	Training programmes organized in at least 10 districts annually	Continuous	Cabinet Division	Training programmes were implemented across all districts to strengthen the technical capacity of field-level management committees, including Divisional, District, and Upazila Management Committees (DivMC, DMC, and UMC). Several training sessions were also organised for Union Parishad Chairmen, Secretaries, and members, focusing on key aspects of social protection, particularly targeting and beneficiary selection processes.
Organize dialogues and conferences with DPs and NGOs	At least one national dialogue/conference organized each year	Continuous	Cabinet Division	Two national conferences on social protection and one national workshop were organised during the implementation of NSSS Action Plan Phase II. These events brought together policymakers, practitioners, experts, and field-level officials to discuss social protection priorities and emerging challenges.
Broaden social security contents in training curricula (BPATC, BCS Admin Academy, BIAM)	Additional sessions on social security included	Dec-22	Ministry of Public Administration (MoPA)	Additional sessions on social security were scheduled for inclusion in training curricula.
Develop coordination mechanisms and monitoring guidelines for Workplace Childcare Services	Monitoring guidelines available	Jan-24	Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) undertook several initiatives to strengthen coordination mechanisms for workplace childcare services. The Day Care Act was enacted in 2021, and the Day Care Rules (2022) have been drafted and are currently under revision for finalisation.
Publish reports highlighting government achievements in social security	Annual Report and Flow of External Resources including NSSS funding published	Continuous	Economic Relations Division (ERD)	The Economic Relations Division (ERD) regularly publishes annual reports on external resource flows for all externally financed development projects, including those supporting social protection reforms. Since FY2023–24, the Finance Division has also been publishing the Social Protection Budget Report, which provides updates on social protection programmes, management information systems (MIS), government-to-person (G2P) payments, and social protection financing.
Coordinate with Development Partners for fund mobilisation in social security programmes	External assistance mobilised for NSSS-related projects	Continuous	Economic Relations Division (ERD)	Development partner engagement in social protection has expanded since the COVID-19 period. Several partners, including the World Bank, ADB, IMF, EU, and the Government of Germany, have provided budget support and policy-based lending with a focus on social protection reforms. In addition, a range of development partners and international organisations—such as FCDO, DFAT, UNICEF, WFP, ILO, and GIZ—have extended technical assistance and external resources to support ongoing reforms.

6.3 Single Registry MIS and Programme MIS Digitisation

This section assesses progress in digitising programme-level Management Information Systems (MISs) and integrating them within the Government's Single Registry architecture. The reforms aim to improve targeting accuracy, reduce duplication and leakage, and strengthen transparency and accountability in government-to-person (G2P) social protection payments. The assessment examines progress across three dimensions: (i) establishment and routine use of digital MISs within line ministries; (ii) interoperability between programme MISs, the Single Registry architecture anchored in the Finance Division, and iBAS++ for cash disbursement; and (iii) preparatory measures consistent with a future Dynamic Social Registry (DSR) approach. Progress is assessed against predefined milestones using the SWRF framework.

Four guiding questions shape the analysis: Do ministries operate functional and regularly updated programme MISs? Are these systems connected to G2P payment processes through SPBMU and iBAS++? Are unique identifiers such as National ID (NID) or birth registration numbers consistently used for enrolment and duplication control? Are registry management practices moving beyond static beneficiary lists toward systematic updating through administrative data? Evidence is drawn from the Action Plan II indicator matrix, official ministry reporting, and Finance Division system documentation.

The Single Registry functions as a central information layer positioned above programme-level MISs rather than as a stand-alone targeting database. Anchored in the Finance Division through the Social Protection Budget Management Unit (SPBMU), it connects scheme-level MISs with iBAS++ for cash-based programmes. The system validates beneficiary records using NID and birth registration numbers as primary identifiers, then transmits verified payrolls to SPBMU and iBAS++ for payment execution and reconciliation.

A public-facing Social Security Portal, Suhrid (সুহ্রিদ), serves as a single point of entry for citizens and policymakers. The portal provides access to beneficiary management, electronic G2P payment processing, grievance redress, and monitoring dashboards. The Single Registry exposes APIs that enable programme MISs to conduct duplication checks, verify mobile numbers against NID and mobile financial service (MFS) accounts, and monitor payment status.

The registry is designed to store information on current cash and non-cash beneficiaries as well as potential beneficiaries, enabling future expansion. This consolidated data environment supports analytical reporting by programme, life-cycle group, gender, and geography through ministry dashboards. While reporting functions continue to evolve, the core validation, payment processing, and transaction monitoring architecture is operational for a growing number of programmes.

Implementation varies significantly across ministries, reflecting differences in programme scale, institutional capacity, and reform sequencing. The registry currently covers approximately 27.7 million beneficiaries of cash-based programmes, with coverage ratios ranging from around 2 per cent to nearly 30 per cent across districts. This variation highlights the value of registry-level analytics for reviewing spatial balance.

Earlier efforts by the Statistics and Informatics Division to pilot a Single Registry MIS using the National Household Database in 2022 demonstrated proof of concept but did not produce a scalable operational backbone. Limitations related to the project-based structure, data age, and absence of a permanent update mechanism led to a strategic shift toward an NID-based administrative data model—a preparatory step aligned with future DSR implementation.

Table 6.6 provides a system-wide snapshot: in FY2025–26, out of 30 cash-based social protection programmes, MIS is operational for 22 schemes. Among these, 19 are integrated with SPBMU-MIS, while three link directly to iBAS++. Four ministries (MoSW, MoWCA, MoLWA, and MoDMR) operate their own programme-specific MIS, while the Finance Division manages platforms for five departments or ministries, resulting in 12 MIS platforms across nine ministries.

Front-running ministries have achieved near end-to-end digitisation with established SPBMU and iBAS++ interoperability. The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) has fully digitised its major allowance programmes following consolidation from eleven programmes to six, with legacy data migration, a unified MIS structure, and an embedded Grievance Redress System. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) has fully linked the Mother and Child Benefit Programme and Vulnerable Women's Benefit to G2P payment channels, with web-based and mobile applications supporting enrolment. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) operates an online Payment Management System linked directly to iBAS++, managing disbursement to mobile financial service accounts.

Ministries with partial progress have made tangible advances but remain incomplete or not fully interoperable. An MIS for the Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP) has been developed and is expected to become operational in the next cycle. The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) has completed software testing for its MIS, with operational use targeted for end-2025. The Medical Education and Family Welfare Division has completed a harmonisation plan across DGHS, DGME, and DGNM, though implementation is pending. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA) is developing an online MIS while already processing beneficiary payments through iBAS++.

Fragmented digitisation is evident in some ministries. The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA) operates two separate MISs for different beneficiary categories, limiting unified reporting despite effective G2P payments. A broader set of ministries have Action Plan II commitments to develop online-based MISs using NID as the primary identifier. For many, development is ongoing but status remains uneven across the full social protection portfolio. At the system level, the General Economics Division has prepared a Single Registry MIS master plan, the ICT Division maintains the BNDA service bus for identity verification, and the Posts and Telecommunications Division supports digital infrastructure for G2P operations.

Table 6.5: Implementation status of the Single Registry MIS

Activities/indicator	Performance indicator	Time frame	Implementing Ministry/Division	Status
Develop software for Financial MIS and run pilot test	Financial MIS developed and pilot tested	Done	Finance Division	IBAS++ software has been developed and tested, and the ADP-RADP Management System 2.0 (AMS 2.0) has recently been operationalised. The Finance Division developed and piloted the Social Protection Budget Management Unit Management Information System (SPBMU-MIS) to support the administration and monitoring of social protection programmes.
Roll out Financial MIS nationwide integrating with Single Registry MIS	MIS rolled out nationwide	Done	Finance Division	Following a successful pilot phase, the Single Registry MIS has been rolled out nationwide.
Prepare master plan for Single Registry MIS in coordination with Cabinet Division	Master plan prepared	Dec-22	General Economics Division (GED)	A Single Registry Roadmap was prepared with technical support from the SSPS Programme, with active participation from key implementing ministries and divisions.
Create online-based MIS for major programmes	MIS digitized for major programmes	Jul-23	All line ministries	In FY2025–26, out of 30 cash-based social protection programmes, MIS is operational for 22 schemes. Of these, 19 schemes are integrated with the SPBMU-MIS, while three are linked to IBAS++. Currently, four ministries—MoSW, MoWCA, MoLWA, and MoDMR—operate their own programme-specific MIS. In addition, the Finance Division has developed and manages MIS platforms for five departments or ministries. As a result, a total of 12 MIS platforms are currently in use across nine ministries.
Continue improving MIS-based online self-enrollment and selection procedures by integrating database with NID verification, SPBMU, MoH&FW for pregnancy information, local government and Civil Registration and Vital Statistic (CRVS) for birth registration. Capacity building - regularly undertake.	Inter Departmental arrangement established	Jul-24	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) has successfully integrated the Maternity Cash Benefit Programme (MCBP) and Vulnerable Women’s Benefit (VWB) MIS with the National ID (NID) database of the Election Commission, enabling online self-enrolment and improved beneficiary selection. The MCBP MIS has also piloted interoperability with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for pregnancy verification and with the Office of the Registrar General of Birth and Death Registration (ORGBDR) under the Local Government Division for birth registration data.
Operationalise and strengthen MIS unit in DWA for effective management of beneficiary information	Human and technical resources in place	Dec-23	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Department of Women Affairs (DWA) MIS unit has received sustained technical support from WFP and UNICEF, including the deployment of MIS officers and university-based IT interns on a pilot basis. At the same time, MoWCA has initiated plans to gradually develop and deploy its own in-house technical capacity, reducing reliance on development partner support over time.
Make the MIS accessible by relevant departments	Inter-departmental arrangement established	Jul-24	Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE)	A memorandum of understanding has been signed among the Central Fund, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), and the Employment Injury Scheme to enable the use of the Labour Inspection Management Application (LIMA) for data sharing

				and operational coordination.
Link MIS with cash disbursement	MIS linked with SPBMU MIS	Dec-23	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME)	Overall, 22 of the 30 cash-based social protection programmes are now linked to digital cash disbursement systems. Among these, three programmes are integrated with IBAS++, while 19 programmes are connected to the SPBMU-MIS, strengthening the linkage between programme administration and payment execution.

6.4 Strengthening Government-to-Person (G2P) Payment Systems

The digitisation of social security transfers through Government-to-Person (G2P) channels has been a central reform under the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS). The G2P model was designed to transition delivery from manual, discretionary handling to an automated, rule-based architecture. This shift aims to standardise the primary functions of social protection delivery: the flow of funds, the verification of beneficiaries through biometric data, and the integration of marginalised households into the formal financial system.

Under NSSS Action Plan Phase II, the Finance Division maintains primary responsibility for the G2P architecture and iBAS++ integration. Key implementation timelines required the Ministry of Social Welfare to complete its roll-out by 2022, while the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is scheduled for full digitisation by 2025. Other sector ministries, including Agriculture and Fisheries, are assigned roll-out targets between 2023 and 2025. Technical support is centralised through the ICT Division and the a2i programme, with Bangladesh Bank overseeing final settlements to ensure local-level transaction reliability.

The progression from Action Plan Phase I to Phase II indicates significant expansion in the scope of this infrastructure. During Phase I, the focus was on establishing technical links between the Finance Division's Social Protection Budget Management Unit (SPBMU) and the iBAS++ system, successfully demonstrating that funds could be transferred directly from the national treasury to verified accounts. Under Action Plan Phase II, this has evolved into a multi-layered framework where the National Identity (NID) database provides person-level verification, the SPBMU manages payroll, and the Single Registry layer monitors for overlapping benefits. This evolution has transitioned the system from a payment tool to a data-cleansing mechanism that improves the integrity of the social protection portfolio.

The implementation of these strategic commitments has seen varied progress across line ministries, as detailed in Table XX. Key Informant Interviews (KII) with ministry officials suggest that while technical readiness is high, the speed of adoption is often dictated by the capacity of local offices to manage digital payrolls.

The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) have reached high levels of G2P coverage. For MoSW, the transition is reported as complete, with all major cash transfer programmes now processed through iBAS++. MoWCA has integrated the

Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) with the Single Registry and utilised API integration with mobile financial service (MFS) providers to manage transaction failures.

The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) maintains its established G2P-based stipend delivery system, representing a mature example of payment-focused digitisation at scale. In the disaster management portfolio, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) has worked toward infrastructure consolidation. The operationalisation of a dedicated MIS for the Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP) and its subsequent link to the SPBMU represents a notable achievement in line with Phase II targets.

The Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED) and the Technical and Madrasa Education Division (TMED) remain in the transition phase between piloting and full roll-out. Current progress reflects the complexities involved in verifying student-parent linkages and coordinating with various educational institutions. The Financial Institutions Division (FID) has facilitated the digitisation of PKSF-to-Partner Organisation (PO) transactions via the BEFTN system, with the final stage of shifting PO-to-member transactions to MFS channels scheduled for 2025.

The transition to G2P has modified the governance of social protection in Bangladesh by standardising disbursement and tracking processes. By requiring beneficiaries to utilise transaction accounts, the system has increased the number of individuals with access to formal financial services. Insights from KIIs indicate that the use of unique identifiers, such as NID or Birth Registration, has enabled the government to identify and remove ineligible entries from payrolls, resulting in substantial fiscal implications. Additionally, the feedback loops within G2P dashboards provide the Finance Division with visibility into disbursement status across different programmes, supporting the shift from manual oversight to automated management.

Despite the expansion of the digital framework, findings from KIIs reveal that several operational challenges persist. Communication gaps remain significant, with delays in SMS notifications preventing beneficiaries from receiving timely information about their payment status, often compounded by slow grievance resolution processes. Data suggests that approximately 800,000 elderly and vulnerable beneficiaries continue to rely on intermediaries to manage their mobile accounts, which introduces risks of unauthorised access.

Security and data privacy remain areas for further development, particularly regarding individual password protection and the resolution of issues related to NID-linked mobile SIM registration. KIIs point to phone number mismatches as a frequent cause of payment disruption when beneficiaries change numbers without updating their records. The planned expansion of the Vulnerable Women's Benefit (VWB) into urban areas via G2P is currently affected by pending administrative approvals for the broader programme. This highlights that the effectiveness of G2P is inextricably tied to the administrative and legislative progress of the underlying social security schemes.

From an institutional reform perspective, the G2P agenda has progressed furthest in areas where core architecture and high-volume programmes intersect, and more slowly where MIS foundations or connectivity remain weak. The Finance Division and FID have largely completed their upstream

tasks, and MoSW, MoWCA (for MCBP), and MoPME have embedded G2P into routine operations. In contrast, several sectoral ministries are still running pilots or relying on semi-digital arrangements, such as batch uploads from spreadsheets or mixed cash and digital disbursement in locations with weaker infrastructure.

Table 6.6: Implementation statu of G2P payments systems

Activities/indicator	Performance indicator	Time frame	Implementing Ministry/Division	Status
Comprehensive review of payment systems	Review completed	Done	Finance Division	The review of the payment system was completed
Design digital payment architecture	Digital payment architecture designed	Done	Finance Division	A comprehensive digital payment architecture was designed to support the transition from manual to electronic disbursement of social protection benefits.
Pilot G2P for two core cash transfer programmes	Two programmes piloted	Done	Finance Division	Pilot G2P programmes were implemented during the First Action Plan period (2016–2021), generating practical lessons that informed subsequent scale-up efforts.
Roll out G2P for all cash transfer programmes	G2P for all cash programmes	Jun-22	Finance Division	Out of 30 cash-based social protection programmes, 22 are currently operating under the G2P system, reflecting substantial progress in digitising benefit payments. The G2P payment system, operated through the Finance Division’s Single Registry System for Social Protection, currently delivers payments directly to the accounts of more than 35 million beneficiaries. Each beneficiary is verified using their National ID (NID) and registered mobile phone number, which helps prevent duplication, fraud, and erroneous claims while strengthening the integrity of the payment system.
Maintain G2P system	System maintained	Continuous	Finance Division	The G2P system is actively maintained and regularly updated to ensure operational continuity, system security, and compatibility with evolving programme requirements.
Pilot G2P modalities	Pilot completed	Dec-23	All line ministries	The TMED, MoLWA, and MoCA successfully completed pilot G2P modalities and subsequently rolled out G2P for their respective cash-based programmes. Other responsible ministries and divisions did not pilot G2P modalities, largely because many of them do not administer cash-based programmes, making this action less relevant in those cases.
Roll out G2P for major programmes	G2P rolled out for major programmes	Jul-23	All line ministries	Currently, nine ministries and departments (excluding the Finance Division) operate 22 cash-based programmes through the G2P system. Several other responsible ministries, divisions, and departments do not manage cash-based programmes, and therefore G2P implementation is not applicable to them.
Coordination at national and sub-national levels with	The rate of bounce back reduced.	Dec-22	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs	The DWA facilitated consultations with Mobile Financial Service Providers (MFSPs) to support MIS integration with the

financial service providers and the Bangladesh Bank to reduce the rate of bounce back. Sensitize beneficiaries on financial inclusion procedures.	Several awareness materials were developed and disseminated.		(MoWCA)	Maternity Cash Benefit Programme (MCBP), with the objective of reducing payment bounce-back rates. API integration with MFS providers is currently underway.
Develop and introduce Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to regularize timely disbursement of beneficiary payment.	A clearly defined standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is available to ensure monthly disbursement.	Dec-22	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	DWA has developed and introduced a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) under the Detailed Implementation Plan to standardise processes and ensure the timely disbursement of beneficiary payments.

6.5 Improving Beneficiary Selection and Targeting

Targeting refers to the set of administrative and community procedures used to identify who should receive welfare support and prevent support reaching those who do not meet eligibility requirements (Wheeler et al., 2014). Even when programmes specify clear criteria, achieving high targeting performance is difficult, especially in systems where coverage is not universal (Kidd, 2013). Where resources are limited and programmes must prioritise some households over others, improving accuracy often brings higher costs including administration, repeated collection of updated information, and the incentives needed to make selection systems work in practice (Coady et al., 2004).

In principle, identifying the poor appears straightforward. In practice, it is complex because poverty is multi-dimensional, household circumstances change frequently, and reliable income data are rarely available without detailed registers or regularly updated datasets. Selection systems are further weakened when they rely on outdated databases or infrequent surveys (Kidd et al., 2018). Weak monitoring also increases the risk of moral hazard and rent seeking by both administrators and participants, which can widen mistargeting (Galasso and Ravallion, 2000). Evidence from the Asia-Pacific region suggests that even comparatively well-performing targeted schemes can still produce exclusion errors exceeding 40 per cent (Kidd et al., 2018).

Bangladesh faces persistent targeting errors across social protection programmes. As discussed in Chapter 2, an illustrative example is the old age benefit programme, where a substantial share of recipients do not meet the minimum age criterion, indicating major inclusion errors. Similar problems appear across schemes intended for poor and vulnerable groups, where both ineligible beneficiaries may be included and eligible households may be excluded. Given the government's ambition to expand social security with particular emphasis on poor and marginalised populations, reducing targeting errors remains central to credibility, equity, and value for money.

In response to these challenges, the NSSS proposed reforms combining procedural improvements with investments in data systems. First, it recommended establishing a cross-governmental

advisory board to review existing beneficiary selection processes and a detailed diagnostic study led by the General Economics Division (GED) to map major programmes, document selection procedures, and develop recommendations for higher-quality selection methods. Second, the NSSS recommended developing selection manuals for all social security programmes with support from relevant ministries, disseminating these manuals by December 2017, and publishing beneficiary lists online continuously to strengthen transparency and accountability.

Third, recognising continuing concerns about fallible targeting mechanisms, the NSSS emphasised establishing a National Household Database (NHD) to support household ranking through Proxy Means Test (PMT) scores. The Statistics and Informatics Division (SID) was assigned responsibility for conducting a nationwide census to develop the NHD, intended as Bangladesh's first comprehensive social registry drawing on a census of roughly 35 million households and producing PMT scores to strengthen and standardise beneficiary selection across programmes. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) was expected to complete this database by 2017, later revised to July 2018 in Action Plan I, with line ministries then using PMT scores to cross-validate eligibility, including through integration with Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS).

Although the census was completed in 2017, the database could not be released for operational use due to significant inconsistencies and data quality concerns. The project, which began in 2013 with intended completion by 2017, underwent multiple revisions and cost escalations but did not deliver an operationally usable output. IMED ultimately declared the output unusable, citing major inconsistencies and implementation flaws. This experience highlighted that expanding data-driven targeting is not only a technical challenge but also a test of institutional capacity, quality assurance, and accountability across the full data lifecycle.

The planned use of a single national socio-economic database for beneficiary selection has not materialised. In response, ministries have relied more heavily on NID-based systems, programme MISs, and administrative data, with targeting improvements moving forward within these constraints rather than through a single nationwide registry of household welfare.

Strengthening beneficiary selection has been a core focus of the institutional reform agenda under Action Plan II, reflecting the NSSS objective of reducing inclusion and exclusion errors and improving transparency in beneficiary enrolment. The reform package required line ministries to update selection manuals, introduce verifiable criteria such as PMT indicators where appropriate, publish beneficiary lists where feasible, and prepare for linkage with national identity and socio-economic datasets.

Most ministries have completed the basic task of updating their selection procedures. The Ministry of Social Welfare has issued revised manuals clarifying eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, and verification steps for core allowances. Similar circulars have been issued by the Ministry of Food, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Industries, Ministry of Textiles and Jute, and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. These updates provide clearer guidance to

field-level officials and move the system closer to more standardised targeting rules, though operational practice still varies by ministry and programme.

The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs completed the "Order for Distribution of Freedom Fighters' Honorarium 2020," which now serves as the principal reference for selection and benefit rules in that portfolio. The Planning Division also updated its selection procedures.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs undertook a more extensive revision process. Implementation directives for the Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) and Vulnerable Women's Benefit (VWB) were reviewed and approved, with the selection process revision conducted in collaboration with BBS and UNWFP. These revisions included a new cycle enrolment system for VWB, aligned targeting rules with programme MIS design, and clarified how applications should be received, screened, and approved. A campaign strategy and communication materials were prepared and disseminated, with development partner support, to explain eligibility criteria and application procedures to potential beneficiaries.

A more technical step has been the move toward verifiable indicators that can be applied consistently in programme MISs. MoWCA has developed PMT-style indicators, differentiated for rural and urban contexts, for use in MCBP and VWB. These were prepared with inputs from BBS and UNWFP and are now embedded in the digital enrolment process. The self-enrolment process introduced for both programmes allows beneficiaries to register themselves, with the system applying PMT scoring automatically to inform selection decisions. The VWB MIS has been made interoperable with the Widow Allowance MIS to reduce duplicate enrolment across overlapping schemes.

MoSW has introduced PMT-based scoring in its selection process over the past three years, with applicants assessed through defined parameters that automatically generate a PMT score, which then informs beneficiary selection. However, older beneficiary cohorts are not captured within the PMT-based selection approach. A critical constraint is that due to budget limitations, not all eligible applicants can be included, and the budget is allocated based on PMT score ranking. To address cases where PMT scores may not accurately reflect actual conditions, a committee mechanism reviews information for further verification where needed.

Other ministries have mainly retained categorical and geographic targeting. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief updated its selection manual and uses BBS poverty and vulnerability mapping to allocate resources to districts, after which upazila offices implement selection under the revised guidelines. The Financial Institutions Division has identified relevant indicators and cut-off points for its interventions, but PMT approaches have not been generalised across all social protection programmes.

An important methodological development is the differentiation of targeting approaches for rural and urban contexts. MoWCA's PMT-style indicators are explicitly differentiated for these settings, recognising that poverty manifestations, household structures, and expenditure patterns vary significantly. This urban-rural differentiation represents a more sophisticated approach than

uniform national targeting criteria, though it remains concentrated in specific programmes and has not been adopted system-wide. The broader challenge of urban social protection expansion requires not only adapted targeting tools but also modifications to delivery mechanisms and outreach approaches.

For Old Age Allowance specifically, the age threshold has been reviewed and updated following Action Plan I, and the implementation manual has been updated accordingly. Coverage expanded to 262 upazilas against a target of 250, reflecting progress toward geographic rollout, though universal upazila coverage was not yet achieved by the end of Phase II. While benefit values have increased periodically, adjustments are not systematically linked to inflation, representing a persistent gap in adequacy maintenance. An additional operational concern relates to review processes: a Finance Division-led review committee was established, but DSS noted the committee did not include ministry representation, which has implications for ownership and responsiveness in implementation adjustments.

Publication of beneficiary lists is progressing gradually and is closely tied to MIS availability. MoDMR reports that updated lists are published online for programmes where operationally feasible. In other cases, lists are displayed at local offices or Union Parishad premises rather than maintained on a central portal. As programme MISs expand and become more stable, the scope for online publication is increasing, but it is not yet system-wide.

In programmes with more advanced MISs, such as those under MoSW and MoWCA, digital lists and dashboards are used for internal monitoring and, in some cases, for partial public disclosure. However, publication standards and formats differ across ministries, and there is no common protocol for what should be publicly accessible, at which level of disaggregation, and how frequently updates should be posted.

Identity verification through NID has become the dominant practice in new and digitised schemes. Programmes under MoSW, MoWCA, MoPME, and MoDMR increasingly use NID as the primary key for beneficiary records, both for enrolment and subsequent G2P payments. Birth registration numbers are used for children where applicable. This shift has helped reduce duplicate records within programmes and has made it easier to link beneficiary information to payment systems and grievance platforms.

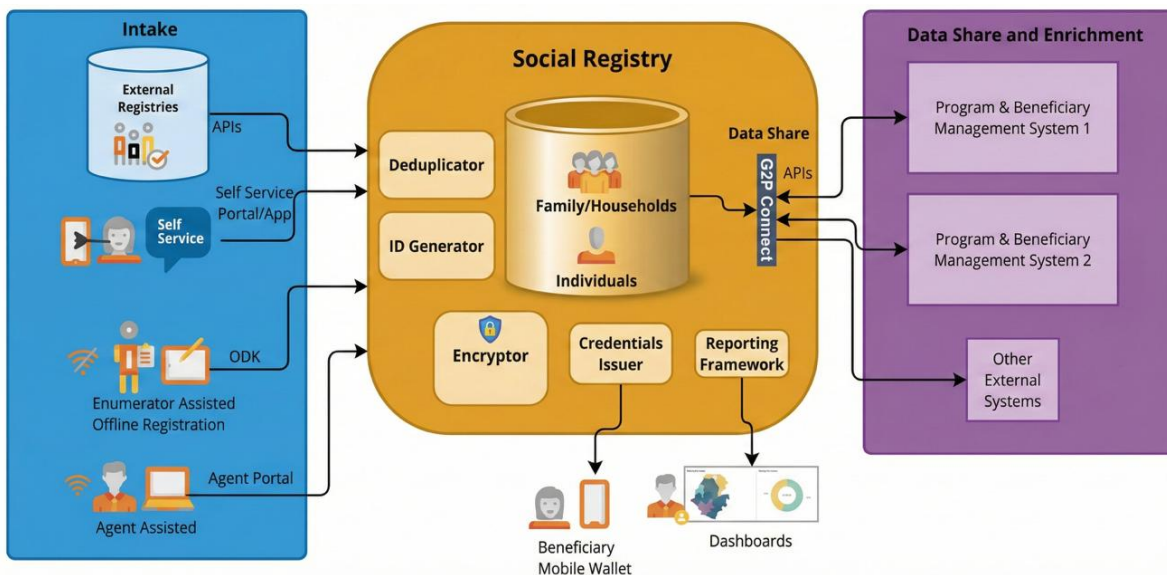
For disability programmes, identification guidelines have been prepared and linked to the relevant legal framework, with individual income criteria set for eligibility. Disability information is recorded in the disability information system database, and coverage for identified persons with disabilities has been made universal in that all identified PwDs are included in the programme. Ministries have continued to draw on BBS poverty maps, programme-level surveys, and administrative records to guide targeting decisions. This arrangement allows incremental improvements but falls short of the unified, data-driven targeting architecture originally envisaged under the NSSS.

Even where registry systems support deduplication, payment management, and administration for existing beneficiaries, a static approach has structural limitations. Census-style data collection

creates long gaps between updates, meaning households that fall into poverty between survey cycles can remain invisible, while households whose circumstances improve may continue to be listed as eligible. This produces a persistent visibility gap that undermines both inclusion and fairness, particularly in contexts where shocks, migration, and livelihood changes can rapidly alter household vulnerability.

To address these limitations, the NSSS recognised the need for a more flexible and proactive intake mechanism that can respond to shifting socio-economic conditions. The Dynamic Social Registry (DSR) represents the next step in this transformation. Unlike static databases, a DSR is designed for on-demand registration and frequent updates, allowing households to apply for support or revise their information as life events and shocks occur. In this model, the DSR functions as the dynamic intake and assessment interface, complementing any underlying registry architecture used for payments, deduplication, and programme administration.

Figure: 6.3: System architecture for DSR



Source: World Bank

The DSR is overseen by the Central Management Committee (CMC) on Social Security, with the Cabinet Division acting as the lead coordinating body. A high-level Steering Committee, chaired by the Secretary (Coordination and Reforms) of the Cabinet Division, provides strategic guidance. Operational management is anchored in the Finance Division through the Social Protection Budget Management Unit (SPBMU), working in coordination with implementing units in the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA).

Implementation is being supported through the World Bank-financed SSPIRIT project, with an investment of USD 200 million. Rollout is planned in phases, beginning with a pilot in eight upazilas and initially focusing on four flagship programmes: Old Age Allowance, Allowance for Widows and

Husband-Deserted Women, Allowance for Persons with Disabilities, and the Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP).

The defining feature is on-demand intake. Potential beneficiaries can apply through a central digital portal or mobile applications, either independently or with support from community-level agents and social workers. The system is designed to update records in real time and verify information through interoperability with national databases such as the National Identity (NID) and Birth Registration Number (BRN) systems.

Targeting within the DSR is intended to be more data-enriched than traditional manual approaches. Following self-declaration, the system can cross-reference external data sources, including registries linked to identification, demographic records, and other administrative datasets, to validate key attributes and reduce misreporting. A PMT or Household Means Test (HMT) can then be applied to generate a socio-economic score supporting programme prioritisation. Field-level verification by social workers, followed by approval through local-level committee processes, is intended to provide an additional integrity check so that automated scoring does not replace accountability at the frontline.

The DSR is also positioned as an enabling tool for adaptive social protection. By maintaining information not only on current beneficiaries but also on potential applicants, the system can support vertical expansion, where benefit levels are increased for those already enrolled, and horizontal expansion, where newly affected households are rapidly added after a crisis. In principle, this allows faster scale-up during events such as floods or cyclones by leveraging pre-verified socio-economic profiles rather than starting new assessments from scratch.

The DSR also introduces governance and implementation risks that must be managed. Digital exclusion is a major concern, particularly in remote areas with weak connectivity and low digital literacy, where the most vulnerable may struggle to self-register. This requires dependable offline access points, assisted registration, and adequately resourced frontline staffing. Data protection and privacy are equally critical, as the registry will handle sensitive socio-economic and identity-linked information at scale. Sustained political commitment, investment in the digital backbone, and capacity building for both central and local actors will be essential if the DSR is to improve targeting outcomes rather than reproduce earlier weaknesses in a new technological form.

Table 6.7: Implementation status of strengthening beneficiary selection

Activities/indicator	Performance indicator	Time frame	Implementing Ministry/Division	Status
Update manual for selection procedures and disseminate to people	Circular issued	Dec-22	All relevant line ministries	Implementation manuals for several major social protection programmes—including the Widow Allowance Programme, Livelihood Improvement Programme for Marginalised People, Disability Benefit Programme, Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP), Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB), and the Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP)—have been updated. The Old Age Allowance implementation manual was revised by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), but it is yet to receive approval from the Cabinet Division. In addition, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) has updated the EGPP implementation manual by incorporating climate-adaptive actions. For several other social protection schemes, beneficiary selection manuals have not been updated.
Publish updated list of beneficiaries online	Updated list available online	Jun-24	All relevant line ministries	Beneficiary lists are not publicly available online. However, the lists can be accessed by relevant ministries through programme-level MIS platforms that are integrated with the SPBMU-MIS.
Create Bangladesh Household Database with Geographic Information System (GIS) and socioeconomic condition of people	Database created	Dec-22	Statistics and Informatics Division (SID)	<p>The Statistics and Informatics Division (SID) conducted a census covering approximately 35 million households with the objective of developing a National Household Database (NHD). Due to significant data quality issues and the lack of integration with the National ID (NID) system, the database could not be completed or released.</p> <p>In the absence of an operational NHD, the Finance Division, MoSW, and MoWCA initiated the development of a Dynamic Social Registry for four social protection programmes, relying on self-reported applicant data collected through online applications.</p>
Follow poverty database of BBS (when available)	Instructions given	Jun-22	All relevant line ministries	SID could not release the household database. Because the household database was not made available, some ministries—particularly MoSW—have developed customised beneficiary selection systems. Under this approach, applications are submitted online and require households to provide socio-economic information across 41 indicators. These self-reported data are used to generate a poverty score, similar to a Proxy Means Test (PMT), which then informs beneficiary selection. This approach is expected to be expanded through the ongoing development of the Dynamic Social Registry.

Review, update, and disseminate VWB and Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) implementation guidelines	MCBP and VWB implementation guidelines available	Dec-22	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) reviewed and approved the MCBP implementation directive and the VWB targeting guidelines in 2024, and also approved the new beneficiary enrolment system for the VWB programme cycle. The VWB MIS has achieved interoperability with the Widow Allowance MIS, contributing to improved targeting accuracy. MoWCA also drafted a communication and campaign strategy for MCBP and VWB, and developed, printed, and disseminated outreach materials with technical assistance from WFP. To strengthen evidence-based targeting for the 2023–2024 VWB cycle, MoWCA—supported by WFP—upgraded web-based cloud infrastructure and refined system design in line with updated guidelines. A mobile application for the VWB programme was also developed to enable both online and offline service delivery, particularly for vulnerable populations in remote areas.
MCBP and VWB MIS Integration with BBS database (NHD) when prepared	BBS database integrated and used for beneficiary selection	Continuous	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The SID-led NHD initiative has been discontinued, and the household database is not currently used for beneficiary selection in social protection programmes.
Develop verifiable indicators following Proxy Means Test (PMT) to reduce inclusion/exclusion errors	Clearly defined indicators (rural and urban contexts) prepared	Jan-22	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	MoWCA has developed well-defined PMT indicators for the MCBP and VWB programmes, with technical support from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and WFP, to identify eligible beneficiaries in both rural and urban contexts.

6.6 Strengthening the Grievance Redress System (GRS)

The Grievance Redress System is a central element of the social protection governance reforms, as it provides a direct channel for citizens and beneficiaries to report problems related to targeting, payment, or service delivery and to receive a response within an agreed timeframe. Under Action Plan II, ministries were expected to establish or strengthen GRS arrangements aligned with the Cabinet Division's central platform, extend complaint recording to field level, build awareness among potential users, and progressively integrate GRS with programme Management Information Systems (MIS).

The assessment for 2021–2025 shows that the basic institutional structure is now in place, with a functioning national GRS, specific sectoral adaptations in key ministries, and instructions issued for complaint recording at upazila and union level. At the same time, the depth of use, level of integration with programme MISs, and scale of public outreach vary considerably between portfolios. Table 6.8 presents the detailed implementation status of key GRS strengthening activities across ministries and divisions, revealing both progress and remaining challenges in operationalising this critical accountability mechanism.

The Cabinet Division's second-generation GRS platform remains the core system through which citizens can submit complaints to any ministry or agency. This enhanced platform represents a significant advancement from earlier systems, offering improved functionality and system performance. Complaints can be lodged online or through written submissions at local offices, and each case receives a unique tracking ID and is automatically routed to the designated grievance redress officer with a prescribed response deadline. The Cabinet Division has continued to roll out this system through sensitisation workshops organised annually in four to five districts, ensuring that field-level officials understand how to operate the platform and guide citizens through the complaint submission process. This central system provides the baseline architecture on which sectoral arrangements are being built.

Within this framework, the Ministry of Social Welfare has moved furthest in adapting the GRS to programme needs. Starting in FY2025–26, the ministry operationalised a single, comprehensive online GRS that is accessible from any administrative level and is embedded as a separate window within its main MIS portal. This integration represents a crucial advancement, as it allows beneficiaries to move directly from their programme profile to the complaint window, with all information captured in a single MIS environment. The system distinguishes between two user types—general citizens and programme beneficiaries. At the initial complaint submission stage, the system asks non-beneficiaries whether they have already been informed about the programme by field officials, which helps identify awareness gaps and potential targeting issues.

The internal workflow is structured and time-bound. The system employs a tiered escalation process structured by complaint type, such as payment not received or harassment-related issues. Complaints routed to the ministry level must be resolved within three days by the responsible officer. If this deadline is missed, the system issues automatic reminders, followed by escalation alerts to supervisory authorities to ensure accountability. Complaints that cannot be resolved at the first tier are escalated to a second tier, and more complex cases can be forwarded to a higher tier for decision. From the user perspective, the system promotes transparency by providing a tracking ID and clearly communicating expected resolution timelines, which improves accountability and provides a predictable channel for follow-up. The system is actively used, particularly following benefit disbursement cycles when beneficiaries are most likely to encounter issues.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has introduced a central GRS arrangement for its social protection programmes and is developing a comprehensive grievance redress mechanism that will connect programme-level grievances to field structures through a dedicated hotline number aligned with the national GRS framework. The Department of Women Affairs regularly receives and resolves complaints through this central platform. MoWCA has drafted awareness materials and information, education and communication (IEC) products on grievance procedures and is preparing to pilot them in selected locations with support from the World Food Programme. These materials are designed to ensure that beneficiaries understand their rights and the procedures for seeking redress when problems arise. The grievance redress arrangements are being aligned with national systems to ensure consistency across the social protection portfolio.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief has focused on strengthening field-level capacity by assigning Project Implementation Officers at upazila level to record complaints and forward them through the system. At the field level, district and upazila officers organise meetings with non-governmental organisations on an ad hoc basis, where programme-related instructions, including grievance procedures, are shared informally. While this approach has facilitated some NGO engagement in supporting the GRS, it lacks the systematic structure and documentation that would ensure consistent implementation across all areas.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs reports that complaints are recorded regularly through an online platform, providing a structured mechanism for complaint intake and documentation. Awareness and capacity-building actions include workshops and training sessions involving ministry staff and designated focal persons from subordinate offices and agencies, to strengthen understanding and use of grievance channels. The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs addresses grievances through both formal and informal channels. Eligible individuals who do not receive benefits may submit complaints, which are reviewed administratively, and unresolved cases may proceed through legal channels where court directives are followed. For benefit-specific issues, applications and complaints are often submitted manually to senior officials, including the Secretary, and such cases are subsequently updated in the MIS to maintain records. An online grievance redress system is also functional within the ministry.

Other ministries continue to use the Cabinet Division's platform more directly, with grievance officers responding through the central interface rather than via programme-specific windows. The Financial Institutions Division submits regular progress reports related to grievance redress, maintaining documentation on the functioning of its Grievance Redress Committee and staff training activities. This approach ensures that even ministries without dedicated social protection programmes contribute to the broader accountability framework.

Action Plan II required ministries to make arrangements for recording complaints at field level, recognising that many citizens and beneficiaries would find it easier to approach local offices than to navigate online portals independently. As documented in Table 6.8, most ministries have issued instructions to ensure that local offices support grievance recording, though the practical depth of use depends on staff capacity, connectivity, and local familiarity with the system. MoSW has issued instructions to ensure that local offices support the use of its MIS-integrated GRS, and MoDMR has assigned Project Implementation Officers at upazila offices to record complaints and forward them through the system. Several sectoral ministries, including those responsible for agriculture, fisheries and livestock, and liberation war affairs, report issuing instructions for field-level complaint recording under their respective portfolios. It should be noted that this action is not relevant for many agencies that are not involved in social protection interventions; for example, the Ministry of Land does not administer any social protection programmes, and therefore field-level complaint recording in the context of social protection is not applicable.

The Local Government Division has instructed Union Digital Centres to receive and forward grievances to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer, which extends access to citizens who may not be familiar

with online portals but can approach the UDC for assistance. Although instructions on grievance handling were issued earlier, updated or regular instructions are not disseminated consistently, which can lead to gaps in awareness and implementation at the local level. In practice, this means that complaints can originate from multiple entry points—ministry offices, project offices, and UDCs—and still feed into the national GRS framework, providing multiple pathways for citizens to seek redress.

Public awareness measures have been implemented with varying intensity across ministries. MoSW undertook initiatives to socialise the online grievance system by organising public meetings prior to its operationalisation, with a view to explaining how the new system works and what information citizens would need to lodge a complaint. A key feature highlighted during outreach is the system's initial screening step: applicants who identify themselves as non-beneficiaries are asked whether they have already received information about the programme from field officials, which provides valuable feedback on the reach and effectiveness of programme communication efforts. MoWCA has drafted awareness materials and is preparing to pilot them in selected locations with development partner support, taking a structured approach to testing messaging and delivery mechanisms before scaling up. MoDMR reports that the central GRS has been mentioned in programme communication materials and that beneficiaries have been sensitised to its use, although this is not yet systematically documented across all schemes.

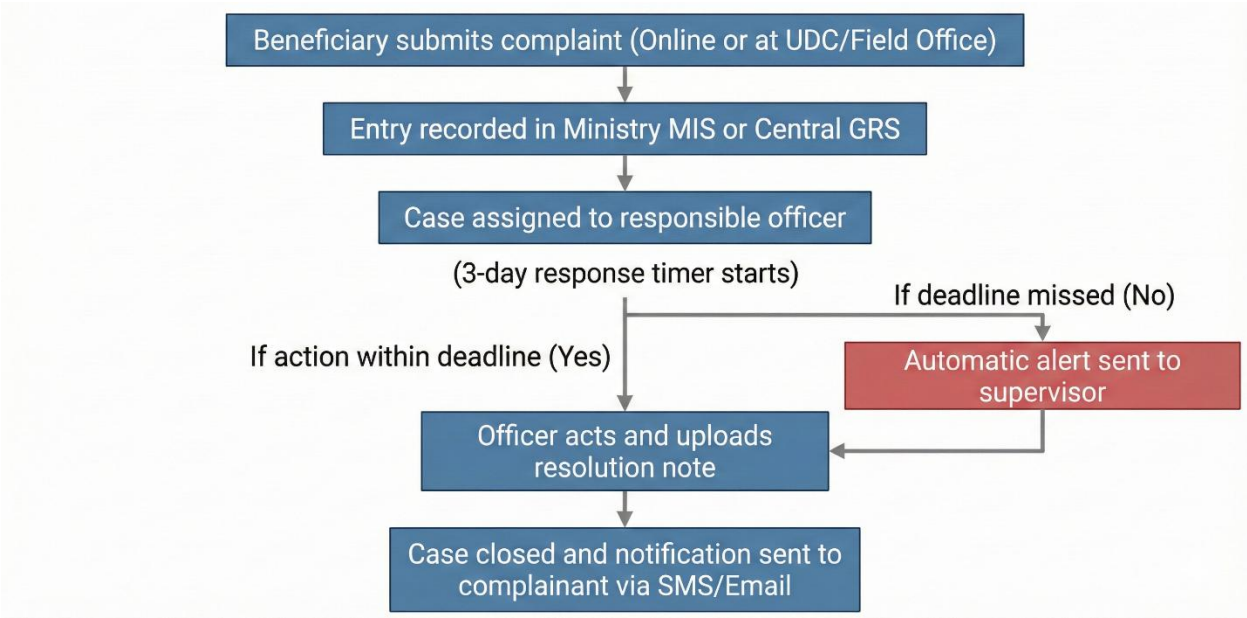
Other ministries, divisions, and departments organise public meetings on the central GRS at the upazila level on an irregular basis. As with other actions, this is not relevant for ministries and agencies that are not engaged in social protection service delivery. Key informant interviews indicate that while most ministries have formally enabled grievance intake at field level, effective utilisation varies depending on staff familiarity with the system, connectivity, and local awareness, suggesting that formal availability does not always translate into consistent use in practice. The scale and regularity of awareness activities differ and are not yet captured through a consolidated monitoring mechanism, making it difficult to assess overall reach or identify areas where additional efforts are needed. Overall, the institutional requirement to record complaints at field level has been recognised and translated into instructions in most portfolios, but the practical depth of use depends on staff capacity, connectivity, and local familiarity with the system.

Integration between GRS functions and programme MISs is advancing but remains concentrated in a few ministries. MoSW's integrated portal allows beneficiaries to move directly from their programme profile to the complaint window, with all information captured in a single MIS environment. This integration means that complaints can be linked directly to beneficiary records and payment histories, which supports analysis of recurring issues such as delayed transfers, duplicate enrolment, or missing instalments. This capability is crucial for identifying systemic problems rather than treating each complaint as an isolated incident. MoWCA is developing a comprehensive GRS arrangement that will connect programme-level grievances to field structures via a hotline and central system, building on the integration model pioneered by MoSW. In these

cases, the link between complaint data and programme records creates opportunities for evidence-based programme improvements.

In other ministries, the main link is still between field-level registers and the central Cabinet Division platform rather than between the GRS and programme MISs. MoDMR records complaints at upazila level and forwards them, but its programme monitoring remains largely manual, so systematic linking of complaint patterns to programme performance is still limited. Sectoral ministries in food, agriculture, fisheries, youth, and others report that they have arranged for complaint recording and some awareness activities, but they continue to rely heavily on the central GRS portal, with programme MISs either under development or not yet configured to exchange data with grievance logs.

Figure 6.4: Complaint registration and resolution workflow



Source: Authors' presentation.

The existing architecture, with a national GRS and a few fully integrated programme-level windows, represents a significant change compared to pre-NSSS arrangements, when grievances were usually handled informally or through ad hoc petitions. The structured approach now in place ensures that complaints are documented, tracked, and addressed within defined timeframes, creating a level of accountability that did not previously exist. However, the use of GRS information to adjust programme design, strengthen targeting procedures, or refine payment mechanisms is still at an early stage in most portfolios, and there is limited evidence of systematic feedback loops beyond individual case resolution. GRS transparency can serve as an accountability mechanism that mitigates political interference and local-level manipulation. As noted by analytical stakeholders, publicly revealing complaint data and grievance patterns introduces a layer of social accountability that helps identify systematic issues in targeting, payment delivery, or administrative quality. When complaint trends are visible, it becomes more difficult for local actors to manipulate programme

implementation without being held accountable. However, the use of GRS information for programme improvement remains limited, with systems focused primarily on resolving individual cases rather than analysing complaint patterns to adjust design or procedures systematically. Moving forward, the challenge is to shift from a case-resolution focus to a learning approach that uses GRS data to inform policy and operational decisions, thereby strengthening both accountability and programme effectiveness across the social protection system.

Table 6.8: Implementation status of the strengthening of the GRS

Activities/indicator	Performance indicator	Time frame	Implementing Ministry/Division	Status
Arrange for recording complaints at field level	Instruction issued	Continuous	All line ministries	The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), among others, has made significant progress in strengthening the grievance redress system. The ministry operationalised a single, comprehensive online Grievance Redress System (GRS) starting in FY2025–26. The system is accessible at all administrative levels and is designed to receive complaints from both general citizens and programme beneficiaries. It is integrated as a dedicated “window” within the main MIS portal and is actively used, particularly following benefit disbursement cycles. The internal workflow is structured and time-bound: grievances routed to the ministry level must be resolved within three days by the responsible officer. If this deadline is missed, automated reminders are issued, followed by escalation alerts to supervisory authorities to ensure accountability. More complex grievances can be escalated to a higher tier for resolution. From the user perspective, the system promotes transparency by providing a tracking ID and clearly communicating expected resolution timelines. Under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), Project Implementation Officers (PIOs) have been assigned at the upazila level to record complaints at the field level. This action is not relevant for many agencies that are not involved in social protection interventions; for example, the Ministry of Land does not administer any social protection programmes.
Create public awareness about the Central GRS of the Cabinet Division	Public meetings held in all Upazilas	Jul-23	All line ministries	The MoSW also undertook initiatives to socialise the online grievance system by organising public meetings prior to its operationalisation. A key feature highlighted during outreach is the system’s initial screening step: applicants who identify themselves as non-beneficiaries are asked whether they have already received information about the programme from field officials. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) has drafted awareness materials and is preparing to pilot them in selected locations with support from WFP. Other ministries, divisions, and departments organise public meetings on the central GRS at the upazila level on an irregular basis. As with other actions, this is not relevant for ministries and agencies that are

				not engaged in social protection service delivery.
Integrate Mother and Child Benefit Programme MIS with Cabinet-led GRS mechanism	GRS integrated into MCBP and VWB MIS	Continuous	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Department of Women Affairs (DWA) regularly receives and resolves complaints through its central GRS platform. In addition, MoWCA has initiated the design and introduction of a comprehensive grievance redress mechanism for social protection programmes, linking field-level offices through a single hotline number aligned with the national GRS framework.
Encourage NGOs in supporting GRS	General instructions issued	Jun-22	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR)	At the field level, district and upazila officers organise meetings with NGOs on an ad hoc basis, where programme-related instructions are shared informally.
Instruct Union Digital Centres (UDCs) to receive and forward grievances to UNO offices	UDCs sensitised	Mar-23	Local Government Division (LGD)	Although instructions on grievance handling were issued earlier, updated or regular instructions are not disseminated consistently.
Formation of Grievance Redress Committee and staff training	G&A Progress Report submitted	Jun-22	Financial Institutions Division (FID)	Progress reports related to grievance redress are submitted on a regular basis.
Roll out GRS for social security governance	Sensitisation workshops organised (4-5 districts/year)	Continuous	Cabinet Division	Sensitisation workshops are organised annually in four to five districts. In parallel, the Cabinet Division has introduced a second-generation version of the GRS software to further strengthen functionality and system performance.

6.7 Enhancing Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

The NSSS places significant emphasis on institutionalising results-based monitoring and evaluation as a foundation for evidence-driven social protection policy and programme management. A key objective articulated in the framework is to establish monitoring and evaluation systems that operate as integral components of the social security system, enabling policymakers and administrators to assess performance, identify operational gaps, and refine delivery mechanisms based on empirical evidence. The NSSS M&E Framework, structured around different results levels--from long-term vision to output-level indicators--provides the conceptual architecture for tracking progress. Implementation, however, depends on the capacity of line ministries to deploy functional monitoring information systems (MIS), conduct regular evaluations, and integrate findings into programme design and operational practice.

Action Plan II (2021-2026) operationalised these principles by setting specific targets for digitised monitoring dashboards, regular reporting to the Cabinet Division, and a gradual transition from input- and activity-based monitoring toward results-oriented assessment. Ministries were expected to develop digital MIS platforms, conduct internal and external evaluations on a structured cycle, produce research and learning products, and introduce diagnostic tools such as the Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI) to assess programme performance and system functioning. The Cabinet Division, in coordination with the General Economics Division (GED) and the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED), was designated to provide system-level

oversight, consolidate ministry reports, and review progress through the Central Management Committee on Social Security Programmes (CMC).

The implementation record for 2021-2025 reveals a mixed pattern of progress. While some ministries have made measurable advances in digitising monitoring platforms and commissioning analytical studies, others continue to rely on manual processes and have not yet established structured evaluation cycles. The uneven pace of reform reflects differences in ministerial capacity, resource allocation, and the complexity of transitioning legacy systems to digital infrastructure. Table 6.9 maps the current state of information availability across four key dimensions of M&E implementation, providing a structured overview of where progress has been achieved and where significant gaps remain.

Digitisation of monitoring systems represents the foundational layer of results-based M&E. As indicated in Table 6.9, dashboards now exist in several ministries, though their development status and operational use vary considerably. The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) reports regular use of its MIS dashboard to review programme discrepancies and beneficiary status, while the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) has maintained a functional online dashboard for stipend programmes since earlier in the reform cycle. Several other ministries--including the Ministry of Labour and Welfare Affairs (MoLWA), the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the Health Services Division (HSD), the Rural Development and Cooperatives Division (RDCD), the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), the Ministry of Industries (MoInd), and the Ministry of Textile and Jute (MoTJ)--are in the process of establishing dashboards, with target dates ranging from 2023 to 2025. In contrast, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) continues to monitor its programmes manually, with no digital monitoring mechanism yet in place. These disparities indicate that while digital platforms are expanding, they have not yet achieved full system-wide coverage, and routine review processes remain concentrated within ministries that have functional MIS infrastructure.

Programme evaluations and research activities, the second dimension identified in Table 6.9, show similarly varied progress. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) stands out for having commissioned and completed a series of studies on its major schemes, including assessments of Vulnerable Women's Benefit (VWB) self-registration, baseline and endline studies for the Income-Generating Vulnerable Group Development (ICVGD) programme, a knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) study for the Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP), a joint assessment on cognitive development outcomes, and ongoing work with the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on nutrition results. MoWCA has also initiated an impact evaluation for VWB, expected to be completed in 2027. In contrast, MoSW reports that it has not been able to conduct mid-term or end-term evaluations for its programmes due to the absence of a survey or research mechanism, and requires technical support to undertake such tasks. MoDMR similarly reports that no impact evaluations have been conducted, although project-level reviews are carried out to check progress against objectives. Other ministries indicate that evaluations are conducted periodically, though documentation on

methodology or regularity is limited. The NSSS M&E Framework envisages regular data collection from diverse sources--including administrative records, household surveys, and programme-specific studies--to populate indicators at different results levels. However, the limited evaluation activity across most ministries suggests that many programmes lack the empirical basis to assess effectiveness or identify areas for improvement.

System-level M&E oversight, the third dimension in Table 6.9, is structured around the Cabinet Division's coordination role and IMED's review functions. The Cabinet Division produces annual monitoring reports based on the M&E framework, which are submitted to the CMC and the relevant Parliamentary Standing Committee, along with information on actions taken in response to findings. GED completed a review of the national M&E system for social security in 2022, identifying areas requiring standardisation and clearer reporting lines. IMED provides oversight for development-budget projects and reports to the CMC, though because most social protection schemes fall under the revenue budget, routine IMED evaluations cover only a portion of the sector. The CODI assessment, facilitated by the Cabinet Division and supported by development partners, provides a system-wide reference point, although it functions more as a diagnostic tool than as a programme-level evaluation. The oversight functions are active, but as noted in Table 6.9, reporting remains inconsistent, and the absence of a central mechanism to ensure that ministries conduct evaluations on a fixed cycle means that research output remains programme-specific rather than system-wide. The emerging Single Registry and Delivery Status Register (DSR) processes are expected, over time, to strengthen the quality and frequency of monitoring data, though full integration is still at an early stage.

The fourth dimension captured in Table 6.9 concerns the use of evidence for programme improvement. The NSSS M&E Framework is premised on the principle that monitoring and evaluation systems should not only generate data but also inform decision-making and programme refinement. MoWCA demonstrates visible use of research findings, having revised programme guidelines, modernised the VWB enrolment system, and adjusted targeting approaches based on study results. Limited evidence of similar practice is apparent in other ministries, where the link between evaluation findings and operational adjustments remains weak or undocumented. This gap reflects broader challenges in institutionalising a feedback loop between M&E activities and programme management, a process that requires not only technical capacity but also organisational commitment to evidence-based decision-making.

The overall picture that emerges from Table 6.9 and the broader implementation record is one of foundational progress accompanied by substantial gaps. Digital dashboards are expanding but remain under development in many ministries, with MoDMR still fully manual. Extensive studies have been commissioned by MoWCA, but most ministries lack structured evaluation cycles. Oversight functions are active, though revenue-budget schemes remain outside IMED's scope and reporting is inconsistent. Evidence use is demonstrated in MoWCA but limited elsewhere. These patterns indicate that while the architecture of results-based M&E is taking shape, full operationalisation requires continued investment in digital infrastructure, technical capacity for

evaluation design and implementation, and organisational systems that embed the use of evidence in routine programme management. The transition toward results-based management remains ongoing, with foundational elements progressing but comprehensive system-wide functionality still at an early stage.

Table 6.9: A Mapping of information availability for M&E implementation

Activities/indicator	Performance indicator	Time frame	Implementing Ministry/Division	Status
Digitize monitoring of programmes; review dashboard regularly	Dashboard established; Progress monitoring digitised; Review dashboard regularly	Continuous	Relevant line ministries ³¹	Dashboards have been established for social protection programmes that operate with MIS platforms, and these MIS dashboards are reviewed on a regular basis to support programme monitoring and management.
Conduct mid-term and end-term evaluations of the programme	Programme evaluated regularly	Continuous	Relevant line ministries ³²	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) initiated an impact evaluation of the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) programme in 2025 with technical support from WFP. In addition, evaluations are routinely undertaken for project-based social protection interventions.
Conduct a couple of research/ studies under MCBP and VWB to assess programme and process outcomes.	Assessment and research report available and recommendation incorporated in programme design	Dec-23	Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA)	MoWCA has undertaken a wide range of learning and evaluation activities. These include a joint learning assessment of the VWB self-registration process conducted in 2022, with findings published; an assessment of the impact of the Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) on children’s cognitive development conducted jointly with WFP and published in 2024; completion of the ICVGD baseline study and submission of the report; completion of the ICVGD regional livelihood mapping study with report submission; a Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) study on MCBP conducted and disseminated in 2024 with support from the EU and UNICEF; and research undertaken jointly with WFP and IFPRI on leveraging social transfer programmes in Bangladesh to improve nutrition outcomes, with the final report expected in 2026. In addition, the ICVGD endline evaluation report was published and disseminated at the National Social Protection Conference in 2025, while the baseline survey

³¹ Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief (MoDMR), Ministry of Primary & Mass Education (MoPME), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Medical Education & Family Welfare Division (MEFWD), Health Services Division (HSD), Rural Development & Cooperatives Division (RD&CD), Ministry of Youth & Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Housing & Public Works (MoHPW), Ministry of Land (MoLand), Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), Ministry of Industries (MoInd), Ministry of Textiles & Jute (MoTJ), Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC).

³² Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA), Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief (MoDMR), Ministry of Primary & Mass Education (MoPME), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Ministry of Labour & Employment (MoLE), Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare & Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), Rural Development & Cooperatives Division (RD&CD).

				for the VWB impact study has been completed and the final report is under preparation.
Review the role of NGOs in programme implementation and allocate required human resources at union level and technical resources to fully operationalize MIS unit.	The role of NGO reviewed and defined in programmes implementation. Submitted human, technical, and financial resources proposals to FD and MoPA.	Dec-23	Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA)	Instead of relying on NGOs, MoWCA introduced a resource pool composed of government frontline workers to facilitate beneficiary training under the MCBP.
Use CODI for assessing programmes	CODI framework used for assessments	Jun 2023 & Jun 2025	Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief (MoDMR)	A CODI assessment was conducted under the SSPS programme with the involvement of the Cabinet Division, the Finance Division, and the General Economics Division (GED).
Develop coordination mechanisms and monitoring guidelines for Workplace Childcare Services	Monitoring guidelines available	Jan-24	Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) undertook several initiatives to strengthen coordination mechanisms for workplace childcare services. The Day Care Act was enacted in 2021, and the Day Care Rules (2022) have been drafted and are currently under revision for finalisation.
Review M&E reports of line ministries	M&E report reviewed	Continuous	Cabinet Division	Monitoring and evaluation reports are prepared and reviewed on a regular basis. The Cabinet Division routinely prepares progress reports on the implementation of the NSSS Action Plan; however, the progress report was not prepared in 2025.
Oversee implementation of reform action plans through 2nd Mid-Term Review (MTR)	2nd MTR commissioned	Dec-23	Cabinet Division	A mid-term review (MTR) of the NSSS reform was commissioned and conducted by an independent think tank, focusing on implementation progress during Action Plan Phase I. A second MTR was not undertaken. However, the Cabinet Division has commissioned a final review of the NSSS, which is currently being carried out by an independent research organization.
Review the existing M&E system of social security	Report prepared on prevailing M&E system	Jun-22	General Economics Division (GED)	The General Economics Division (GED) has reviewed the monitoring and evaluation system for social protection programmes.
Monitor implementation of ongoing projects and report to CMC	Component-wise physical & financial progress reported	2021-22 to 2025-26	Implementation Monitoring & Evaluation Division (IMED)	Project-based social protection programmes are monitored and evaluated by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED). However, IMED does not undertake evaluations of tax-financed social protection programmes.

6.8 Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI) Assessment

The Core Diagnostic Instrument was applied again in 2023 to take stock of how far Bangladesh's social protection system has moved since the early years of NSSS implementation, and in particular to see whether the second phase of reforms under the NSSS Action Plan 2021 to 2026 and related initiatives are reflected in system performance. The 2023 CODI results therefore serve as an

independent lens on the progress of Phase II reforms in areas such as governance, coordination, digitalisation of delivery systems, and the ability of programmes and budgeting processes to respond to new shocks and demographic change.

The analysis compares the 2023 CODI scores with the 2018 assessment, which was undertaken relatively early in the NSSS reform cycle and has been used in the Action Plan and the State of Social Protection report as a baseline. The comparison is carried out at the level of the ten CODI performance criteria, drawing on detailed indicator scores where relevant. The focus is on identifying broad shifts in:

- the strength of rules, roles, coordination mechanisms and institutional capacities
- the degree of coherence and integration across programmes and funding flows
- the extent of digitalisation of delivery systems and the implications for cost and coverage
- the responsiveness of budgeting, information systems and programme parameters to changing conditions.

Trends in CODI performance between 2018 and 2023

Between 2018 and 2023, Bangladesh's average CODI score increased from 2.44 to 3.4, with improvements recorded in every performance criterion. The most pronounced gains are found in Coherence and integration, Financial and fiscal sustainability, Governance and institutional capacity, Responsiveness, and Cost-effectiveness, which together reflect the main areas targeted by Phase II reforms. Incentive compatibility also improved from a particularly low base, although it remains the weakest dimension.

On governance and institutional capacity, the average score rose from 2.33 in 2018 to 3.4 in 2023. Indicators relating to the clarity of reporting roles and responsibilities in law and in implementation manuals now score between 3.7 and 4.0, indicating that the NSSS framework, the Budget Management Act and the Ministry Budget Framework have translated into more explicit guidance for line ministries and field administration. At the same time, staff implementation capacity remains relatively weaker, with a 2023 score of 2.9, which is consistent with persistent vacancies and limited monitoring and analytical capacity at sub-national level. This pattern suggests that Phase II reforms have so far strengthened the "rules of the game" and oversight structures faster than they have been able to address everyday capacity constraints.

Financial and fiscal sustainability has evolved from a relatively strong position to the highest scoring performance criterion. The average increased from 3.0 in 2018 to 3.8 in 2023, with domestic financing, alignment of budget allocations with policy priorities, and long-term commitments in policy and strategy all scoring between 3.7 and 4.0. The clear jump in budget alignment reflects the post-NSSS expansion of core lifecycle schemes such as the Old Age Allowance, disability allowances and school stipends, and the planned scale-up of the Mother and Child Benefit Programme. The

continued dominance of domestic financing and the integration of social protection into successive Five-Year Plans and the NSSS reinforce this picture, even though no explicit legal spending floor has yet been established.

The largest proportional improvement is recorded in coherence and integration, where the average score increased from 2.4 to 3.5. Progress is visible in the institutional framework for coordination, which now scores 3.8, and in the possibility of integrated analysis of social protection financing, supported by the Ministry of Finance's functional classification and the Social Protection Budget Management Unit. At the same time, indicators on programme complementarity and implementation integration remain lower at 3.1, pointing to the unfinished agenda on programme consolidation and the continued coexistence of multiple parallel MIS and delivery systems across ministries. The merger of selected schemes into the Mother and Child Benefit Programme, and the gradual concentration of budgets into roughly 30 large programmes that account for most non-development spending, show how Phase II has moved the system towards consolidation, but also highlight the scope that remains, particularly in food security and employment generation programmes.

Responsiveness has shifted from being one of the weakest criteria in 2018, with an average of 2.15, to a relatively strong position at 3.5 in 2023. The score for responsiveness of budget and implementation mechanisms rose markedly to 3.9, reflecting the use of reappropriation tools, the Disaster Management and Relief budgets and more flexible safety net operations during crises. The indicator on coverage of emergency response operations also remains high at 3.9, in line with the institutionalisation of disaster management through the Disaster Management Act, National Disaster Management Policy and the operational role of the Ministry and Department of Disaster Management. However, the availability and use of data and evaluations to systematically adjust programmes lags behind these operational capacities, with data and evaluation scoring 3.0 and information dissemination 3.1. This echoes the NSSS assessments that highlight the absence of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system and the limited use of independent impact evaluations in routine decision-making.

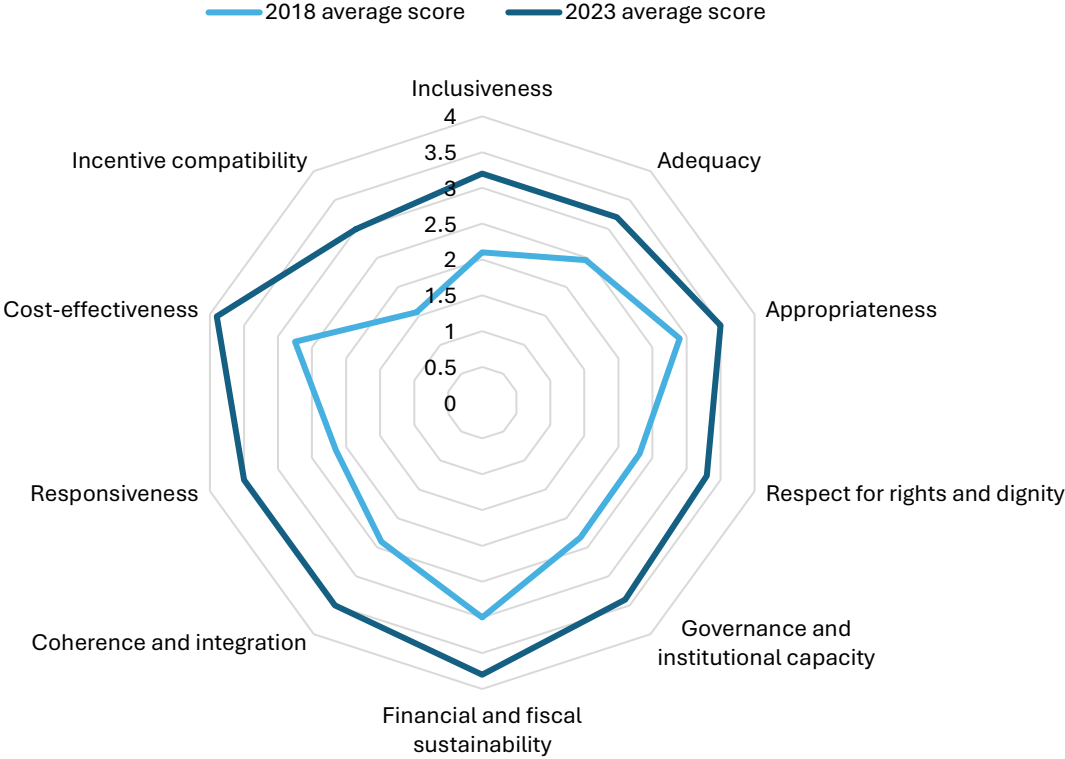
The digitalisation of delivery systems is most directly reflected in the cost-effectiveness criterion and several governance and integration indicators. The cost of programme delivery score increased from 2.75 to 3.9, which is consistent with the rapid roll-out of Government-to-Person digital payments through the SPBMU platform, the use of NID and iBAS++ for funds flow and validation, and the shift away from manual, cash-based transactions that previously involved high leakage and transaction costs. Similarly, the growing use of digital MIS in the Department of Social Services and other agencies, and the development of a Single Registry and NHD, are reflected in higher scores on integrated analysis of financing and, to a lesser extent, integration of implementation. Phase II reforms have therefore clearly changed how benefits are delivered, even if full interoperability and integrated monitoring systems are still in development.

Other performance criteria have also improved. Inclusiveness and adequacy now average 3.2, compared with 2.10 and 2.46 respectively in 2018, indicating broader non-contributory coverage

and somewhat better alignment of benefit levels with national benchmarks and programme objectives. Respect for rights and dignity scores an average of 3.3, up from 2.31, reflecting clearer legal entitlements and better grievance and complaint mechanisms, albeit from a modest base. Yet, the underlying indicator scores suggest that coverage gaps, modest benefit adequacy and uneven accessibility remain central challenges that Phase II reforms have only partly addressed.

Finally, incentive compatibility remains the weakest area, though the average has risen from 1.56 to 3.0. Incentives for persons covered now score 3.9, supported by workfare programmes, the Universal Pension Scheme and education-linked cash transfers, while incentives for employers and scheme administrators remain relatively low at 2.9 and 2.2. This shows that Phase II has focused more on system building, digitalisation and consolidation than on designing explicit incentives for employers and administrators to expand formal coverage and improve enrolment of eligible beneficiaries.

Figure 6.4: Radar chart (2018 vs 2023 CODI scores)



Source: Author’s presentation using the CODI 2018 and 2023.

6.9 Analytical Framework and Scoring Approach

The analytical framework for this chapter is designed to present a consistent and comparable picture of how institutional reforms under NSSF Phase II have evolved since 2021. It combines a numerical scoring of reform indicators with qualitative interpretation, so that both measurable progress and the underlying administrative context are captured. The method follows earlier

assessment work and has been refined through the SMART-Weighted Rubric Framework (SWRF)³³, which allows comparison across ministries while recognising that their mandates and capacities differ.

The assessment covers seven reform domains that together form the institutional backbone of NSSS implementation:

- development of a Single Registry and digitisation of programme Management Information Systems (MIS);
- expansion of Government-to-Person (G2P) payment systems;
- reform of targeting and beneficiary selection mechanisms;
- strengthening of the Grievance Redress System (GRS);
- establishment of results-based Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks and dashboards;
- consolidation and rationalisation of small or overlapping programmes where relevant; and
- strengthening of institutional capacity, including cluster coordination and cross-ministry arrangements.

From these domains, more than two hundred specific activities and indicators were identified from the NSSS Action Plan II (2021–2026). Each indicator is linked to a defined output, a responsible agency and a timeframe. Information on progress was compiled and verified using official documentation, written submissions from line ministries and selected key informant interviews with focal officials. Where direct documentation was not available, progress was triangulated using records from the Cabinet Division, including minutes of the Central Management Committee (CMC) and cluster coordination meetings.

Each indicator was then assigned a score on a five-point scale that reflects its stage of implementation relative to the Action Plan II target:

Score	Interpretation
1	Minimum progress or no verifiable evidence of implementation
2	Primary approval or initial preparatory steps taken
3	Some progress made though overall performance remains below expectation
4	Visible advancement against performance indicators with partial gaps
5	Full progress achieved and reform operational

³³ The SMART-Weighted Rubric Framework (SWRF) is an evaluation tool adapted from international public-sector assessment methodologies and lessons from the Mid-Term Review of NSSS Phase I. It integrates quantitative scoring, policy weighting, and rubric-based interpretation to produce balanced and comparable assessments across ministries and reform domains.

Where activities were completed after the planned deadline, a timeliness adjustment was applied by deducting 0.5 points from the score, so that late completion is recognised but not treated as fully equivalent to on-time delivery.

The individual indicator scores were then interpreted through the four-level rubric used in the SWRF, which converts numerical scores into qualitative categories for each reform domain:

Rubric Level	Interpretation
Scores 1	Seriously off-track – activities remain at early or preparatory stages
Scores 2	Moderately off-track – some progress observed but not sufficient to meet intended targets
Score 3	Moderately on-track – substantial progress made but far from completion
Score 4	On-track – substantial progress has been and close to complete
Score 5	Completed – reform completed, operational, and aligned with institutional objectives

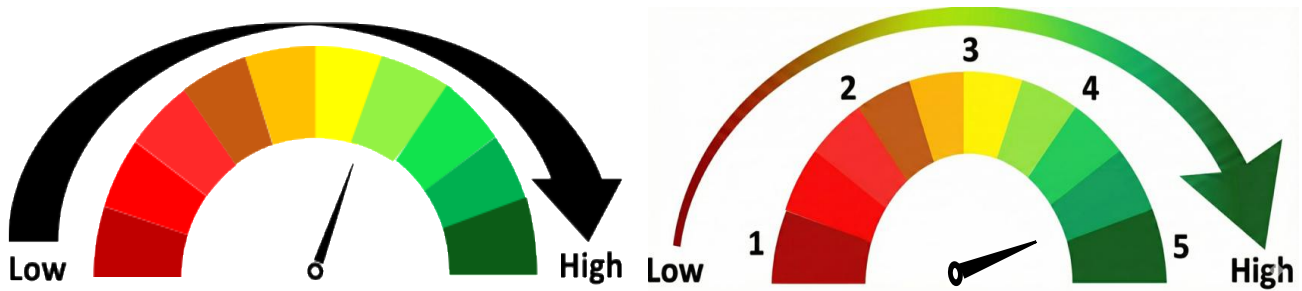
Within each reform domain, indicators were treated with equal weight for the purpose of domain-level averages. For cross-ministry and cross-domain aggregation, the SMART-Weighted Rubric Framework was then applied, giving more weight to indicators and domains with higher policy relevance, larger fiscal implications or stronger system-wide effects. This weighting allows the composite scores to reflect national priorities rather than a simple unweighted average of all actions.

The SWRF thus combines evidence-based scoring with structured qualitative judgement, using explicit anchors for both indicator scores and rubric categories. This helps keep the assessment grounded in verifiable information while still allowing space to recognise incremental improvements in areas where full operationalisation is still underway. The sections that follow apply this framework to each reform area in turn, summarising verified progress, highlighting institutional issues and reporting the corresponding rubric classification.

Applying the scoring framework described above, each reform domain was assessed on the basis of verified activities, documented outputs and the corresponding rubric classification. The following subsections summarise the performance of each institutional reform area, combining the numerical scores with brief qualitative explanations. This approach allows the reader to see not only where each domain stands on the five-point scale, but also the administrative and operational factors that have shaped progress since 2021.

Cluster coordination performance is strong overall, with most elements assessed as on track, reflecting continued operation of the coordination structure and progress in sustaining inter-ministerial engagement. Regular meetings and coordination processes have generally been maintained, and cluster functioning appears to have supported implementation follow-through in several areas. The key weakness is ensuring systematic follow-up on CMC decisions, which is assessed as only moderately on track, suggesting that decision tracking, documentation, and execution across ministries still need improvement to prevent slippage between agreement and implementation.

Figure 6.5: Thematic Clusters: Implementation performance



Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final review of NSSS (2026)

Performance under Single Registry MIS is largely on track, with core building blocks completed. The Finance Division has developed and operationalised key financial MIS components, including SPBMU-MIS and related platforms, and the Single Registry MIS has been rolled out nationally. A roadmap and master planning processes were completed with SSPS technical support and participation of implementing ministries, helping guide phased integration and scale-up. While progress is strong overall, a remaining constraint is ensuring consistent accessibility and use across relevant departments and sustaining integration improvements (including verification and linkages) to make the system fully functional for routine programme operations.

Figure 6.6: Single registry MIS



Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final review of NSSS (2026)

The G2P payment system shows strong implementation progress, with most actions assessed as on-track or almost on-track. Key enabling work such as developing payment architecture, piloting modalities, and expanding digital payment approaches has advanced, supporting wider and more standardised cash transfers. The main remaining challenge is completing full roll-out across all cash transfer programmes and ensuring uniform adoption across ministries and delivery channels, so that G2P becomes the default modality rather than operating in parallel with legacy approaches.

Figure 6.7 Government to Perso Payment System

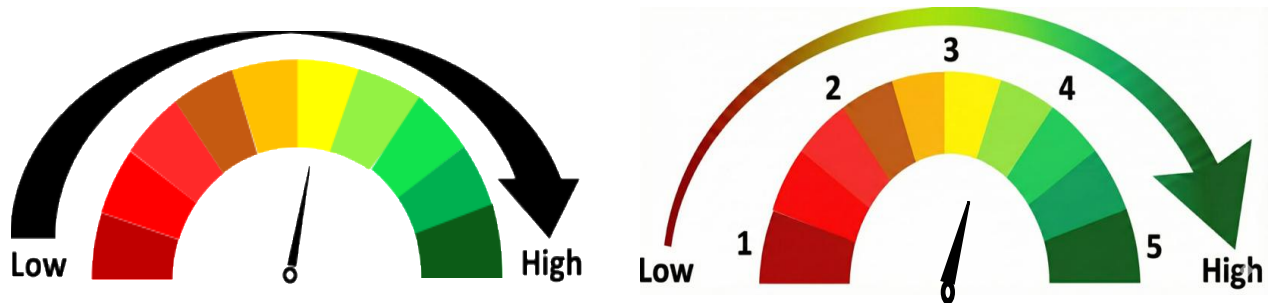


Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final review of NSSS (2026)

Beneficiary selection reforms show a mixed performance profile, with some activities progressing but overall assessed as moderately off-track due to major bottlenecks in foundational datasets and transparency measures. Steps related to improving selection procedures and strengthening validation appear to have moved forward in parts, but the development of the Bangladesh Household Database with GIS and socioeconomic profiling is seriously off-track, limiting the system’s capacity to consistently identify eligible beneficiaries using harmonised and up-to-date information. Publishing and maintaining updated beneficiary lists online also remains incomplete, indicating that transparency and routine updating mechanisms still require stronger institutionalisation.

Figure 6.8 Strengthening beneficiary Selection



Source: Midterm review report (2020)

Source: Final review of NSSS (2026)

GRS performance is almost on track, with the core system direction established and implementation progressing. The assessment suggests that the main architecture and functional mechanisms are in place, and improvements have been made towards systematic grievance handling. Remaining gaps relate to strengthening field-level complaint intake and expanding public awareness so that eligible populations can reliably access the system and receive timely responses.

Continued efforts are needed to standardise procedures across levels and ensure responsiveness is consistent across programmes and locations.

Figure: Grievance Redressal System



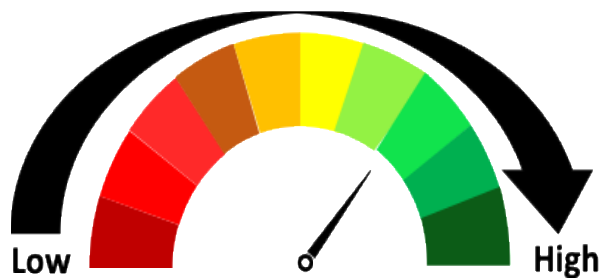
Source: Midterm review report (2020)



Source: Final review of NSSS (2026)

M&E reforms demonstrate generally good progress, but with a few areas lagging that affect system-wide effectiveness. Digitisation and dashboard-based monitoring have advanced and several actions are rated on track, indicating that monitoring functions are increasingly structured and data-supported. However, institutional resourcing issues remain important: the review of NGO roles and the allocation of adequate human and technical resources at local level is off-track, which risks weakening implementation monitoring where service delivery actually occurs. Overall performance is positive, but further strengthening of operational capacity and clarity of roles is needed to make M&E routine, timely, and decision relevant.

Figure: Result Based monitoring and Evaluation



Source: Midterm review report (2020)



Source: Final review of NSSS (2026)

Overall, the assessment indicates uneven but tangible progress across the institutional reform areas under NSSS Phase II. Core system-building domains such as the Single Registry MIS, G2P payment systems, monitoring dashboards and cluster coordination show substantial advancement, with several indicators assessed as almost on track or on track. These areas reflect sustained efforts to establish the administrative and digital infrastructure required for a more integrated social protection system. At the same time, reforms related to beneficiary selection, data integration and certain capacity-building measures remain moderately or seriously off-track,

largely due to delays in foundational datasets, uneven adoption across ministries and constraints at sub-national levels. The overall performance therefore suggests that while the architecture of the reformed system is increasingly in place, the next phase of implementation will need to focus on deepening operational use, improving data quality and ensuring consistent application across programmes to translate structural progress into fully functional and responsive social security delivery.

Chapter 7: Political Economy of Social Protection in Bangladesh

7.1 Introduction

The design and implementation of social protection systems are never purely technical or administrative exercises; they are fundamentally political processes shaped by the distribution of power, the interests of key actors, and the prevailing institutional landscape. Analysing social protection through a political economy lens, which shows the complex interplay of actors, incentives, institutions, power relations, and ideas, is critical to understanding why systems look the way they do and why certain reforms, such as those proposed in the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), often stagnate despite technical consensus (World Bank, 2021). This approach moves beyond optimal policy design to interrogate the "how" and "why" of outcomes, examining the interaction of actors, their incentives, the formal and informal institutions that constrain them, and the ideas that legitimize specific policy paths (Béland & Petersen, 2014).

Internationally, political economy analyses have revealed that the expansion of social protection in the Global South is frequently tied to electoral politics, elite bargains, and efforts to maintain social stability, rather than emerging solely from a normative commitment to welfare or evidence of efficacy (Lavers & Hickey, 2016). In Bangladesh, a growing body of literature applies this lens to social policy, highlighting how the country's distinctive form of competitive clientelism, dense patronage networks, and fragmented bureaucracy profoundly shape the social protection landscape (Hassan et al., 2021).³⁴ These political economy factors operate through multiple channels, influencing programme design, beneficiary targeting, financing decisions, and implementation quality, with profound implications for coverage, equity, efficiency, and sustainability.

For this chapter, political economy factors are defined as the constellation of actors (e.g., political elites, ministries, local officials, beneficiaries, development partners), their incentives (e.g., electoral gain, rent-seeking, bureaucratic survival), the formal and informal institutions that govern their interactions, the underlying power relations that determine whose interests prevail, and the ideas (e.g., on poverty, eligibility, fiscal prudence) that justify policy choices (Slater, McCord, & Mathers, 2014). These factors collectively shape every facet of a social protection system. They influence the design of programmes, determining whether they are universal or targeted, fragmented or integrated. They permeate targeting and beneficiary selection, often turning objective criteria into instruments of political patronage. They constrain financing options, with low revenue mobilisation reflecting the political power of those resistant to taxation. These dynamics operate through powerful channels that can divert resources from the intended poor to politically connected individuals, create complex programmes that serve administrative convenience over citizen needs,

³⁴ For example, the fragmentation of the system into nearly a hundred small schemes is not an accident of poor planning, but a strategic outcome that allows various ministries to maintain control over resources.

foster a culture of informal payments that erodes transfer values, and stymie systemic reforms that threaten established interests.

The objective of this chapter is to systematically identify and analyse the key political economy constraints inhibiting effective social protection reform in Bangladesh. It seeks to explain why, despite a progressive strategy like the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), deep-seated challenges in design, targeting, financing, and implementation persist. By interrogating the interests and power dynamics at play, the chapter aims to provide a realistic assessment of the reform landscape that will help develop feasible policy directions that account for Bangladesh's political economic reality.

7.2 Political-Economy Constraints to Social Protection Reform in Bangladesh

7.2.1 Inflated but inadequate social protection allocations

Bangladesh's social protection spending is substantially overstated which is frequently presented as a major political achievement. Official data indicate that allocations to social protection programmes amounted to 2.5 per cent of GDP and 17 per cent of the national budget in FY2024–25. These figures are inflated by the inclusion of expenditures that do not conform to the objectives of social protection as defined in the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), including government employee pensions, subsidies, interest payments on national savings certificates, and infrastructure-related programmes (Table 1).³⁵ A large share of these expenditures also diverges from internationally accepted definitions of social protection. Many schemes are not aligned with a lifecycle approach and do not address risks faced by individuals at different stages of life. For example, only one of the six largest schemes by budget allocation in 2024–25, the Old Age Allowance, can be considered a genuine social protection intervention. While it is true that the definition and scope of social protection programmes can arguably be quite broad, however, in that case nearly any public spending could be classified as social protection, undermining the focus and intent of social protection. Once schemes that do not conform to the objectives of social protection are excluded, effective spending falls sharply to around 1.2 per cent of GDP and 7 per cent of total budgetary expenditure (Figure 1).

Recognising these inconsistencies, the interim government revised social protection accounting in the FY2025–26 budget by removing several non-aligned schemes. In parallel, the Finance Division identified 39 pro-poor social protection programmes that directly address poverty and vulnerability, together accounting for only 0.6 per cent of GDP and 4.7 per cent of the national budget. Despite these adjustments, significant misclassification persists. Of the 95 schemes included under the social protection budget in FY2025–26, a substantial number remain weakly related—or unrelated—

³⁵ These programmes are not aligned with the ILO definition of social security and fail to effectively target poverty and vulnerability. According to ILO definition, social protection, or social security, provides benefits to individuals based on risks faced across the life cycle (e.g., unemployment, disability, maternity, etc.) and to those suffering general poverty and social exclusion. There are 9 branches of social protection; 1) Health protection, 2) Sickness benefits (earnings replacement), 3) Unemployment benefits, 4) Old-age pensions, 5) Employment injury benefits, 6) Family and child benefits, 7) Maternity benefits, 8) Disability benefits, and 9) Survivors' benefits.

to social protection objectives, including programmes such as free textbook printing and distribution, agricultural subsidy management, and agricultural rehabilitation assistance. The inclusion of such schemes inflates the reported social protection allocation to 1.87 per cent of GDP and 14.8 per cent of the national budget. Excluding these expenditures reduces the genuine allocation for social protection to approximately 0.9 per cent of GDP.³⁶ This allocation is substantially lower than that of many lower-middle-income, upper-middle-income, and peer countries.

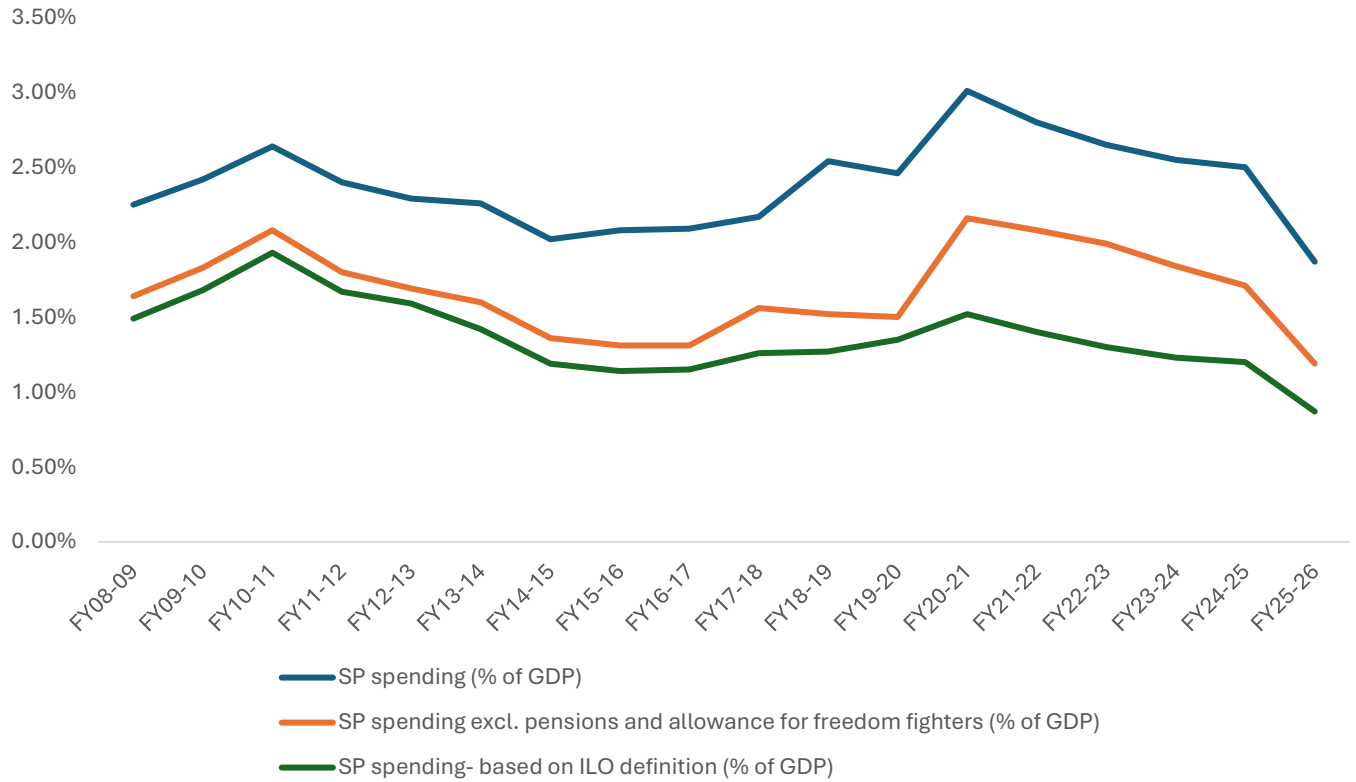
Table 1: List of social protection schemes not aligned with the NSSS emphasis on addressing poverty and vulnerability

Name of program	Budget (2024-25) (Crore BDT)
Pension for retired government employees and their families	36,580
Agriculture Subsidy Management	17,000
Savings certificate interest assistance	8,828.3
Honorarium for freedom fighters	4,728
Free textbook distribution among students	1,195
Housing construction project for the insolvent freedom fighters	1,004
Rural connectivity improvement project	613
Honorarium & medical allowances for injured freedom fighters	480
Printing and distribution of free textbooks	447.1
Ministry of public administration (welfare grants)	349.3
Procurement of equipment for search, rescue operation and emergency communication for earthquake and other disaster	342.3
Water supply project in coastal area through rainwater harvesting system	216.5
Bangladesh Employees Welfare Board	192.9
Cash Transfer Modernization (CTM)	165.5
Lump Sum Provision for Development of Special Areas (Except Hill Tracts)	100
Ration for shaheed family and injured freedom fighters	90
Capacity building of Joyeeta Foundation & construction of Joyeeta Tower	89.1
Interest free micro credit programme	70
Hilsha Resource Development and Union Level Fisheries...Agriculture Technology Program	70
Victory day allowance for heroic freedom fighters	70
Social Development Foundation	64

Source: Razzaque (2025).

³⁶ The ILO's World Social Protection Report 2024-26 estimates Bangladesh's social protection expenditure at only 0.9 per cent of GDP, underscoring the extent of underinvestment in social protection.

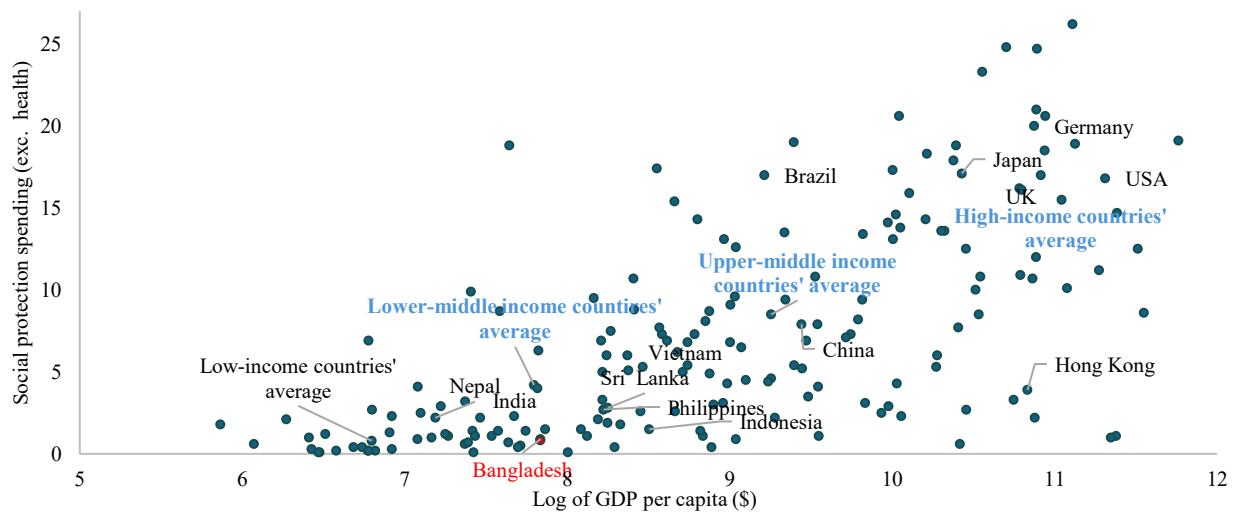
Figure 1: Social protection spending (% of GDP)



Source: Authors' estimation based on data from Ministry of Finance.

Note: Data are based on the revised budget. Proposed budget data are used for 2024-25. Revised GDP estimates for the base year 2015-16 are used to calculate the share of SSPs in GDP.

Figure 2: Cross-country comparison of social protection spending



Source: Based on ILO and World Bank data.

The persistent underfunding of social protection in Bangladesh is rooted in structural fiscal constraints. Government revenue remains exceptionally low, with the revenue-to-GDP ratio hovering at around 8 per cent—among the lowest globally—while social protection is financed almost entirely through general taxation in the absence of meaningful contributory schemes. This narrow fiscal base severely limits the resources available for social protection and represents a major supply-side constraint. As a result, programme budgets fall well short of what is required to cover the full population of eligible poor and vulnerable households, making widespread exclusion a structural outcome rather than an implementation failure.

These fiscal limitations are reinforced by the structure of budgetary decision-making. Although line ministries and implementing divisions routinely propose expanded coverage based on eligibility criteria and assessed needs, final allocations remain subject to the discretionary authority of the Finance Division. Within a context of weak domestic resource mobilisation, the Finance Division must balance competing demands from social protection programmes, development expenditures, and recurrent operating costs. Consequently, social protection allocations are frequently compressed as part of broader expenditure prioritisation decisions, rather than calibrated to the scale or distribution of poverty and vulnerability.

This centralised and fiscally constrained allocation process has direct implications for targeting outcomes. First, funding levels for social safety net programmes are commonly determined by historical allocations or administratively imposed ceilings, rather than by updated estimates of the eligible population. Programme coverage therefore remains largely unresponsive to shifts in poverty dynamics, demographic change, or emerging vulnerabilities. Second, the absence of explicit, poverty-sensitive allocation rules results in limited differentiation across locations. Regions with persistently high or rising poverty rates often receive allocations comparable to those of relatively better-off areas, producing a systematic mismatch between funding and need and intensifying exclusion precisely where demand for social protection is greatest.

7.2.2 Fragmentation of social protection programmes

Beyond aggregate underfunding and centralised fiscal constraints, the fragmentation of social protection programmes represents a major structural weakness of Bangladesh's social protection system. Scarce fiscal resources are dispersed across an excessively large number of schemes, resulting in thinly spread budgets, low benefit levels, and limited programme intensity. Despite the consolidation and harmonisation agenda articulated in the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), progress has remained modest. The number of social protection schemes stood at around 140 in FY2024–25 and, following the removal of some programmes from social protection budget accounting, declined to 95 in FY2025–26. However, this reduction largely reflects accounting reclassification rather than substantive consolidation or functional integration across programmes.

The limited progress on consolidation is not simply a technical or administrative failure but reflects deep-seated political-economy dynamics where institutional and political interests take precedence

over allocative efficiency (Idris, 2021). Social protection programmes are embedded in ministerial mandates, budgetary authority, and organisational influence. Control over programmes confers institutional power, political visibility, and access to resources, creating strong incentives for ministries and implementing agencies to retain ownership of schemes. As a result, there is little willingness to relinquish or merge programmes, even where consolidation could improve efficiency, coverage, and coherence. Weak cross-ministerial coordination mechanisms and the absence of a central authority with a clear mandate to enforce consolidation further entrench these dynamics. Small, visible schemes allow line ministries to maintain institutional turf, control rental streams, and demonstrate "outputs" to political leadership (Hossain, Jahan, & Warner, 2014; Idris, 2021). For political actors, a multitude of small programmes offers more opportunities for the visible distribution of patronage, which is essential in a competitive clientelist political settlement (Khan, 2018).

These political economy constraints are illustrated by the NSSS recommendation to consolidate the Widow Allowance programme and the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD/VWB) programme into a unified Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) scheme. Despite overlapping objectives, beneficiary groups, and delivery mechanisms—and a clear efficiency rationale—the reform has not been implemented. Resistance has stemmed from power asymmetries, competing institutional interests, and concerns over loss of control among the implementing ministries. Similar dynamics affect many small and overlapping programmes, where agencies prefer to maintain discrete schemes rather than integrate them into larger, more coherent frameworks managed by other ministries.

In addition, fragmentation is reinforced by the introduction of programmes driven by political priorities and agendas rather than by a coherent lifecycle-based social protection framework. Several schemes have emerged as flagship initiatives closely associated with political leadership and electoral commitments. A prominent example is the Ashrayan Project, which provides land and two-room housing facilities to poor and landless households. While the programme addresses a critical dimension of deprivation, housing insecurity, its initiation was closely linked to the political agenda and personal leadership priorities of the then Prime Minister. Such programmes are often designed and expanded outside the NSSS framework, operating with distinct objectives, eligibility criteria, and delivery arrangements. Over time, the proliferation of politically salient initiatives can dilute the strategic focus on lifecycle-based protection, diverting fiscal and administrative attention away from core social protection functions.

The consequences of programme fragmentation are evident in budgetary allocations. More than 75 social protection programmes each account for less than 0.5 per cent of the total social protection budget. With such limited resources, most schemes lack the scale required to cover a meaningful share of the eligible population or to deliver benefits at an adequate level. This fragmentation results in a structurally imbalanced system in which a small number of programmes absorb the bulk of resources, while the majority remain underfunded, benefiting a narrow set of beneficiaries and excluding many poor and vulnerable households.

7.2.3 Programme design

Social protection programmes (SPPs) are designed to mitigate lifecycle risks, reduce poverty and vulnerability, and address economic insecurity by providing income support, essential goods and services, and complementary assistance to disadvantaged populations (Barrientos, 2013; Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). In principle, these programmes function as buffers against economic shocks, safeguard livelihoods, and help build resilience by ensuring a minimum standard of living (ILO, 2021). Literature broadly conceptualises SPPs as instruments to protect the extreme poor, support the moderate poor in sustaining livelihoods, and prevent vulnerable households from falling into poverty in response to adverse shocks such as illness, climate-related disasters, or economic downturns (Gentilini et al., 2022; World Bank, 2018). Target groups typically include poor and vulnerable households, older persons, persons with disabilities, children, and marginalised populations, including women-headed households and those residing in rural or disaster-prone areas (UNICEF, 2019; Holzmann et al., 2003).³⁷

Although the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) recognises poverty reduction, vulnerability mitigation, and protection against economic shocks as the core objectives of social protection, the absence of large-scale, well-targeted interventions weakens the system's ability to address structural and transient poverty. More critically, eligibility criteria across many programmes do not consistently prioritise poverty or vulnerability as the primary basis for beneficiary selection. In several major schemes, eligibility is determined largely by individual characteristics such as age and self-reported income, without systematic consideration of household-level economic conditions.

Programme-specific eligibility criteria often complicate targeting. Many rely on static and outdated income thresholds that fail to reflect inflation, rising living costs, or sudden welfare losses due to shocks. Such criteria are ill-suited to capture dynamic and multidimensional poverty and often depend on self-reported information that is difficult to verify. This often leads to "categorical" targeting that may exclude the poorest individuals who do not fit into specific, politically popular categories (Kidd, 2015). Consequently, the system frequently prioritises schemes that are politically "safe" or easy to administer over those that would address structural lifecycle risks. As a result, individuals residing in relatively better-off households may qualify, while poorer individuals in economically distressed households remain excluded. These design features dilute the poverty- and vulnerability-focus of the system and weaken its overall redistributive impact.

Underlying these design choices are important political economy considerations. A core trade-off emerges between programmes that are tightly focused on poverty and vulnerability and those with broadly defined or loosely enforced eligibility criteria that prioritise administrative convenience, political visibility, or coalition-building objectives. Targeting based on poverty and vulnerability thresholds generally perform better in directing resources to those most in need, but it entails

³⁷ While poverty is commonly defined with reference to the national poverty line, vulnerability encompasses households just above that threshold who remain at high risk of downward mobility. Reflecting this distinction, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) operationalises vulnerability as households with incomes above the upper poverty line but below 1.25 times that level.

higher administrative complexity and often encounters greater political resistance (Gelbach & Pritchett, 2002). By contrast, more open or categorical eligibility—such as age- or status-based criteria—reduces contestation over eligibility and expands discretionary space at the implementation level, enabling political and bureaucratic actors to influence beneficiary selection in ways that may reinforce existing local power structures (Pritchett, 2005; Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

7.2.4 Beneficiary selection

The political economy of beneficiary selection for social protection programmes in Bangladesh is characterized by a significant divergence between formal administrative mandates and informal local power structures. While the central government establishes eligibility criteria, the operational reality of the selection process is highly decentralized, granting local actors extensive discretionary power. This discretion often results in systemic targeting errors, including both the exclusion of the most vulnerable and the inclusion of relatively affluent but connected individuals (Razzaque et al., 2019).

Beneficiary identification relies heavily on local-level representatives, primarily Union Parishad (UP) chairmen and members. In practice, the UP serves as the de facto authority in preparing and finalising beneficiary lists, while Upazila (sub-district) offices act as the formal approving authority and manage payroll generation (Ahmed, 2007). Although selection is officially mandated to occur through transparent public announcements and ward-level meetings to encourage community participation, evidence indicates that these processes are frequently bypassed. Many poor and marginalised households report little or no awareness of public announcements or meetings regarding programme enrolment, leaving the process opaque and susceptible to local influence (Razzaque et al., 2019).

Nepotism and patronage prevail in beneficiary selection. Local representatives and influential figures often prioritise personal, political, or party-aligned interests over official poverty-based criteria. UP representatives may maintain informal quotas to favour supporters or political cohorts, systematically excluding deserving households without connections (Morshed, 2009; Barkat et al., 2013). Survey evidence indicates that 76% of non-beneficiaries cite nepotism and 75% cite favoritism as major barriers to accessing programmes (Razzaque et al., 2019). As local elections have become increasingly party-based, this patronage system ensures that politically aligned households receive preferential access, while unaffiliated but vulnerable families are left out.

The integrity of the selection process is further compromised by the prevalence of "speed money" or bribes, which acts as a major prerequisite for being enlisted. For the poor and marginalized, the demand for bribes is one of the most significant access barriers due to their vulnerable economic status and lack of social and political influence (Razzaque et al., 2019). Survey findings reveal that 74% of non-beneficiary respondents identify bribery as a critical hurdle, and approximately 11.3% of current recipients acknowledged paying bribes to secure their benefits (Kamal & Saha, 2014). According to the latest HIES 2022 data, 14.6 per cent of social protection beneficiaries had to pay bribes to be included into social protection. The bribes sometimes reach as high as Tk. 14,000. Consequently, the inability to pay bribe results in significant targeting errors, excluding vulnerable

households without political or social connections while allowing fewer deserving individuals to benefit. Such inefficiencies weaken public trust, reduce programme effectiveness, and prevent resources from reaching those most in need.

Beyond elected officials, other locally influential actors play a dominant role in shaping beneficiary lists, often pressuring representatives to favour their supporters. This systemic influence produces widespread inclusion errors and mirrors patterns of elite capture observed in other developing countries, where community-based targeting is highly susceptible to local power dynamics and discretionary manipulation (Coady et al., 2004).

Targeting performance is further constrained by weak monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Studies across developing nations indicate that effective targeting requires high levels of governmental oversight, verification, and regular evaluation; in their absence, misallocation persists (Naher et al., 2020). In Bangladesh, audits and evaluations are rare, field-level verification of eligibility is minimal, and the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework remains largely undeveloped. Despite the introduction of the NSSS to improve governance, its implementation has been limited, allowing errors in beneficiary selection and allocation to persist unchecked. Consequently, the system perpetuates both inclusion and exclusion errors, reflecting how decentralised discretion, weak oversight, and entrenched local power structures interact to undermine the effectiveness of social protection programmes.

7.2.5 Universal versus targeted social protection

Social protection policy worldwide revolves around a fundamental question: should governments provide benefits to everyone (i.e. universal social protection), or only to the poorest (i.e. targeted social protection)? This debate shapes how vast public resources are allocated and determines who receives support in times of need. Two competing visions dominate this landscape. The first, championed by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, advocates targeting the poorest for social protection through means-testing (Kidd, 2018; World Bank, 2022). The logic appears straightforward: if resources are limited, focusing exclusively on those in extreme poverty allows governments to provide higher benefit levels where they are needed most. Proponents argue this approach maximises efficiency and ensures fairness by directing benefits to those who need it most (Kidd, 2018).

The opposing vision treats social protection not as charitable assistance, but as a fundamental human right (Kidd, Mansoor, & Barca, 2023; Kidd, 2015). Universalists advocate for lifecycle schemes (child allowances, old-age pensions, disability benefits) that cover all citizens regardless of income. Rather than asking "who is poor enough?", this approach asks "what does every person need to live with dignity?" Advocates point to persistent failures of means-testing: programmes intended for the poor frequently exclude eligible families through bureaucratic errors, whilst remaining vulnerable to political manipulation and patronage (Kidd, 2015; Mahmud, 2024).

Bangladesh finds itself caught between these two philosophies, pursuing what might be called a "third way" that satisfies neither. The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2015 introduced the

concept of "targeted universalism", a framework that promises universal coverage but only for those deemed eligible (General Economics Division, 2015; Mahmud, 2024). On paper, this compromise appears pragmatic: the country would avoid leaving vulnerable groups uncovered whilst conserving limited fiscal resources during its development transition (GED, 2015).

In practice, however, this approach perpetuates the very problems it seeks to solve. The phrase "universal for eligible persons" is inherently contradictory. If coverage is universal, there should be no eligibility criteria beyond basic lifecycle categories like age or disability (Mahmud, 2024). This conceptual confusion translates into real-world failures. Without a robust Single Registry to identify beneficiaries accurately, selection processes remain vulnerable to errors and political interference (Razzaque & Rahman, 2025). Fiscal constraints compound these challenges, limiting the government's ability to expand coverage even when the need is clear (Razzaque & Rahman, 2025). The result is a system that combines the worst of both worlds: it retains the high exclusion errors of targeted programmes whilst failing to build the broad political coalitions that make universal schemes sustainable.

To understand why Bangladesh has struggled to move beyond this impasse requires examining the incentives that shape social protection spending. The distribution of benefits is never purely technical; it reflects underlying power dynamics, political calculations, and competing visions of the state's role (Kidd, 2018; Idris, 2021). These dynamics explain both why some programmes thrive whilst others languish, and why the path towards universalism faces such fierce resistance. Consider the starkly different political constituencies that targeted and universal programmes create. When benefits go exclusively to the poor, the primary stakeholders are typically amongst society's least powerful members: people with limited political voice, weak organisational capacity, and minimal ability to defend programmes during budget negotiations (Kidd, 2015). Politicians may support such programmes rhetorically, but they rarely champion them with the vigour required to secure adequate funding or protect them from austerity measures through high tax burden.

Universal schemes operate according to entirely different political logic (Kidd, 2015). When old-age pensions cover all elderly citizens or child benefits reach every family, the middle class becomes directly invested in these programmes' success. Middle-class families depend on these benefits, advocate for their expansion, and resist any attempts to cut funding. Politicians ignore these constituencies at their peril. Universal programmes create millions of beneficiaries who vote, organise, and demand accountability (Kidd, Mansoor, & Barca, 2023; Kidd, 2015). This broad-based support translates into durability: universal schemes are far more likely to survive political transitions, economic downturns, and changing ideological fashions.

Elite resistance to universalism stems from precisely this political potency (Kidd, 2018). Wealthy individuals and powerful interest groups often prefer poverty-targeting not because it is more efficient, but because it keeps the state's role limited and tax burdens low. If social protection remains confined to the poor, the middle class and wealthy can opt out entirely, relying on private insurance, savings, and market-based solutions. Universal programmes, by contrast, require higher

and more progressive taxation to function, a prospect that threatens elite economic interests even as it strengthens social cohesion.

Bangladesh's own spending patterns vividly illustrate these dynamics. The government service pension, a universal benefit available to all civil servants, consumes more than a quarter of the entire social protection budget (Khatun & Saadat, 2018; Razzaque & Rahman, 2025). This single programme, serving a politically influential middle-class constituency, receives more resources. The disparity is not accidental. Civil servants have job security, education, organisational capacity, and direct access to policymakers. They can defend their pensions effectively, but the rural elderly poor, scattered across thousands of villages with minimal political organisation, cannot.

The urgency of reform becomes even clearer when examining the human cost of the current system's failures. Exclusion errors in targeted programmes are not mere statistical artifacts. They represent families in desperate need who are denied assistance due to bureaucratic mistakes, or political favouritism (Mahmud, 2024). Each error perpetuates vulnerability and undermines trust in government institutions. Meanwhile, the discretionary nature of benefit allocation creates opportunities for patronage, where access depends less on need than on political connections (Mahmud, 2024; Birdsall, 2010).

Universalism offers a fundamentally different social contract. When benefits are provided as entitlements based on transparent lifecycle criteria (age, disability, parenthood), the scope for arbitrary exclusion shrinks dramatically. A universal old-age pension, for instance, requires only verifying someone's age, not investigating their income, assets, connections, or political allegiances. This simplicity reduces both administrative burden and opportunities for corruption. Equally important, framing support as a right rather than charity transforms the relationship between citizens and state, building the sense of shared citizenship that strong democracies require (Kidd, 2015; Mahmud, 2024).

Recognising both the imperative for reform and the genuine constraints Bangladesh faces, policymakers are exploring gradualist pathways towards universal coverage (Mahmud, 2024). One approach would establish universal social protection in high-poverty prone upazilas first, then gradually expand coverage to other upazilas. This approach was adopted for the oldage allowance and widow allowance during Covid-19, where these schemes were expanded comprehensively in most poverty prone 112 upazilas first, then to another 150 upazilas in the following year. But, then the progress stalled and remained unfinished due to limited fiscal space and support from development partners.³⁸

These phased approaches acknowledge fiscal realities without abandoning universalism's core principles. They would allow Bangladesh to begin building the broad political coalitions that sustain social protection over the long term, whilst demonstrating that universal programmes can be implemented effectively and sustainably. Most importantly, they would mark a decisive break from

³⁸ The government established comprehensive coverage of oldage allowance and widow allowance programmes in most poverty prone upazilas under Asian Development Bank's policy based lending conditionalities.

the current system's fundamental flaw: treating social protection as a favour to be granted selectively, rather than a right to be guaranteed universally.

The choice between targeted and universal social protection is not merely technical. It is a choice about what kind of society Bangladesh aspires to become: one where support depends on navigating bureaucratic hurdles and political connections, or one where basic security is guaranteed as a matter of citizenship and human dignity.

7.2.6 National Household Database (NHD) and Dynamic Social Registry (DSR)

In the absence of universal coverage, Bangladesh's social protection system relies predominantly on targeted approaches to beneficiary selection. Under such a system, ensuring that support reaches those who are genuinely poor and vulnerable is critical. However, accurate identification of eligible individuals and households is inherently challenging, as it requires comprehensive and reliable data on household socio-economic conditions, often complemented by proxy means testing to determine eligibility. To operationalise effective targeting, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) recommended the establishment of a National Household Database (NHD) and assigned the Statistics and Informatics Division (SID) the responsibility of conducting a nationwide census to develop this database. A key objective of the NHD was to construct a proxy means test scoring system which, in combination with existing community-based and administrative methods, would form the backbone of a more robust and transparent beneficiary selection process.

Led by the SID, the NHD was envisaged as Bangladesh's first comprehensive social registry, drawing on a census of approximately 35 million households to improve targeting accuracy across social protection programmes. Although the census was completed in 2017, the data could not be released due to significant inconsistencies and quality concerns. Consequently, the implementation of the Tk 727 crore project has emerged as a prominent example of institutional weaknesses and flawed data governance. Despite the project commencing in 2013 with a planned completion date of 2017, the database remained effectively non-functional years later, undergoing four revisions that more than doubled its original cost.

The non-release of the NHD for operational use raises profound concerns regarding institutional capacity. The Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) eventually declared the project's output as unusable, citing massive data inconsistencies and flawed execution. This failure was not merely technical but rooted in a lack of accountability within the bureaucratic machinery. For instance, hundreds of data entry operators were recruited without defined tasks, and senior programmers reportedly performed no noticeable work while the database shifted between different server environments, leading to the erroneous replacement of entries. This crisis of data governance meant that instead of the evidence-based targeting envisioned by the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), the government was forced to rely on outdated lists, further entrenching the discretionary power of local elites over selection processes.

A significant structural challenge to the NHD model is the immense fiscal and administrative burden of maintaining such database. Poverty in Bangladesh is dynamic, with millions of

households clustered near the poverty line and frequently moving in and out of poverty and vulnerability due to idiosyncratic shocks like illness or covariate shocks like flooding (Razzaque & Rahman, 2019). Consequently, a database requires regular updating to remain relevant. International evidence indicates that large-scale census sweeps are prohibitively expensive and logistically demanding, and can cost significant portions of the total programme budget (Majoka & Palacios, 2019).

The high administrative costs associated with updating the database every three to five years raise serious questions about long term feasibility. If re-certification is delayed due to costs, the data becomes obsolete, leading to high exclusion errors where newly poor families cannot access the system (Kidd & Athias, 2020). The failure of the NHD illustrated that the traditional approach of periodic mass surveys is inconsistent with a modern, responsive social security architecture, necessitating a shift toward more dynamic models of data management.

Recognising the limitations of the NHD, the Government of Bangladesh has pivoted toward the establishment of a Dynamic Social Registry (DSR).³⁹ Unlike static registries, the DSR is designed as an adaptive, real time information management system that allows for on demand registration and continuous data updates. The operational design involves a centralised portal where households can apply digitally via web or mobile platforms, authenticated through the National Identity (NID) or Birth Registration Number (BRN) systems (Finance Division, 2025). The institutional arrangements for the DSR are structured under a high level Steering Committee chaired by the Secretary of Coordination and Reforms in the Cabinet Division, with dedicated implementation units within the Finance Division and the Ministry of Social Welfare.

The DSR utilises an innovative architecture that pulls administrative data from various government databases, including self-reported data from beneficiary application system, Tax Identification Numbers (TIN), land records, and electricity consumption data (Finance Division, 2025). These data are subsequently validated through field visits conducted by social workers. Based on this verification process, a composite socioeconomic score is generated, which is then used by local committees to determine beneficiary eligibility.

The transition to a DSR presents both significant opportunities and persistent political economy risks. The primary opportunity lies in the reduction of discretionary power and the minimisation of "ghost beneficiaries." By integrating data interoperability with existing government records, the DSR can reduce the ability of local elites to use social protection as a tool for political branding or patronage. Furthermore, the DSR facilitates "shock-responsive" social protection, enabling the government to rapidly scale up assistance horizontally to newly vulnerable households or vertically to existing recipients during crises.

³⁹ This DSR is being supported by the World Bank through the Strengthening Social Protection for Improved Resilience, Inclusion and Targeting (SSPIRIT) project, which focuses on building the technical "software" of the system while ensuring interoperability across different ministry platforms.

However, the decision to pursue an expensive DSR following the failure of the National Household Database (NHD) reflects political and institutional incentives rather than purely technical considerations. After the NHD was declared unusable, discontinuing registry-based reform would have signalled a major governance failure. The DSR therefore allowed the government to demonstrate reform continuity, align with development partner priorities on digital governance, and reframe past failures as a transition toward a more “modern” system. In this sense, the DSR functions as a corrective narrative as much as a technical reform.

The DSR has also reshaped institutional interests and power relations. Key actors include the Cabinet Division, the Finance Division, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, and development partners. The allocation of approximately USD 8 million to the Finance Division for system development, coordination, and API integration expands its authority over social protection architecture and data governance. Beyond formal responsibilities, control over a high-value, donor-funded digital system creates incentives related to bureaucratic influence, capacity-building resources, and inter-ministerial coordination power. While the DSR may reduce discretionary control at the local level, it also risks concentrating decision-making authority within central agencies unless strong legal and accountability frameworks are established. The DSR is currently being piloted in eight upazilas, covering four flagship programmes: the Old Age Allowance, the Widow Allowance, the Disability Allowance, and the Mother and Child Benefit Programme. The prospect for scaling this up nationwide is central to the second phase of the NSSS reforms. Integration into the broader NSSS architecture requires that the DSR moves beyond its current pilot phase to become the foundation of a Social Registry (Kathy & Arifeen, 2025).

7.2.7 Contributory social protection

The absence of social insurance instruments constitutes a major gap in Bangladesh’s social protection system for the working-age population. Unemployment is not formally recognised as a core eligibility criterion for social protection. While several workfare programmes, such as the Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP), EGPP+, and Food for Work (FFW), seek to address seasonal rural unemployment, they do not provide comprehensive or continuous protection. The NSSS proposed the introduction of a National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS), covering unemployment, employment injury, sickness, and maternity benefits. However, progress has been limited, with implementation largely confined to a pilot Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) for RMG workers.

A central issue in the political economy of social insurance in Bangladesh is the institutional assignment of the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS). The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of 2015 initially proposed that the NSIS be managed under the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA), which operates under the Financial Institutions Division (FID) of the Ministry of Finance (General Economics Division, 2015). From a political economy perspective, this arrangement presents a nuanced conflict of interest and a struggle for institutional control. The FID is traditionally responsible for the regulation and promotion of the private, commercial insurance sector, which operates on a profit-maximising model. Entrusting a rights-based social security

mechanism to a division focused on market-based financial products creates a conceptual and operational mismatch.

This assignment reflects broader bureaucratic politics in Bangladesh, where powerful ministries compete for control over new policy domains to secure institutional authority and future resource streams. While the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) might seem the natural home for a scheme designed for workers, it was historically sidelined due to perceived capacity gaps, despite more recent assertions of its readiness to lead.⁴⁰ The decision to house social insurance within the FID effectively frames social protection as a financial transaction rather than a social contract. This placement suggests that the state views social insurance through the lens of capital accumulation and investment funds rather than as a transformative tool for redistribution and social justice (Idris, 2021).

However, the question of institutional leadership becomes more complex when the fragmented governance of labour across sectors is considered. Bangladesh does not have a single, unified authority responsible for all categories of workers. While MoLE regulates labour standards and occupational safety in sectors such as textiles and ready-made garments, other categories of workers fall under different ministerial jurisdictions. The Ministry of Industries plays a central role in industrial policy, skills development, and the management of state-owned enterprises, but it is not mandated to provide labour welfare or social insurance. Similarly, shipbuilding and maritime workers are governed through a fragmented arrangement involving the Ministry of Industries, the Ministry of Shipping, and MoLE, with no single ministry holding comprehensive responsibility for income security or social insurance.

In this context, assigning NSIS leadership solely to MoLE raises important institutional questions. While MoLE has sector-specific regulatory authority, particularly over factory safety and labour rights, it lacks cross-sectoral reach over workers employed in industries regulated by other ministries. This fragmentation weakens MoLE's capacity to act as an effective lead agency for a national social insurance system that, by design, must pool risks across sectors and employment types. Without a clear legal mandate that cuts across ministerial boundaries, MoLE's leadership risks reproducing the same coordination failures that have historically undermined labour market governance.

The implementation of the NSIS represents a fundamental shift in Bangladesh's social protection philosophy, moving from tax-financed social assistance to a model based on regular contributions from both employers and employees. The logic of the contributory system is to pool risks and

⁴⁰ Even eight years after the adoption of the NSSS, leadership over the implementation of the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS) remained unclear. On 3 March 2024, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) established a Tripartite Committee—bringing together representatives of workers' associations, employers' associations, and relevant ministries—to oversee the implementation of the NSIS and related social protection measures for workers. However, uncertainty surfaced during the Committee's inaugural meeting regarding whether MoLE would retain responsibility for leading worker-related social protection, particularly social insurance. This ambiguity in institutional roles and mandates resulted in a temporary suspension of all activities related to worker social protection, including the functioning of the Tripartite Committee. The issue was subsequently discussed at the CMC meeting held on 14 November 2024, where it was formally confirmed that MoLE would assume the lead role in implementing social insurance initiatives for workers.

provide a more sustainable, high-value benefit package that can cover lifecycle contingencies such as unemployment, maternity, sickness, and workplace injury (Razzaque & Rahman, 2025). Under the proposed models, workers and employers would each contribute a percentage of the gross salary into a national social insurance fund, which would then be invested to ensure long-term viability (Mansur & Khondker, 2015).

However, the transition to such a model is constrained by the structural realities of the Bangladeshi labour market, where nearly 85 per cent of the workforce is engaged in the informal economy. Contributory mechanisms are most effective when employment relationships are formalised and salaries are processed through transparent payrolls. In the current context, the lack of formal contracts and the prevalence of irregular wages make the collection of contributions a monumental administrative challenge. Furthermore, the absence of a unified worker database hinders the ability of the state to track contributions and manage individual accounts effectively, thereby stalling the reform momentum (Moazzem, Jebunnessa, & Shibly, 2024).

The expansion of social insurance is further obstructed by deep seated distributional conflicts among key interest groups, particularly employers and workers in the formal and informal labour market.. Employers have consistently demonstrated resistance to mandatory contributions, viewing them as an additional tax that increases the cost of labour and reduces global competitiveness, particularly in the labour intensive ready made garment (RMG) sector. Large exporting firms and employer associations therefore have a clear incentive to oppose the introduction of the NSIS, as it would institutionalise long-term payroll obligations and limit the flexibility of low-wage employment arrangements. Conversely, workers often express a preference for non contributory, government financed, or employer only liability schemes. Given that the majority of workers live at or near subsistence levels, any deduction from their meagre wages for future benefits is viewed as a threat to immediate survival (Idris, 2021).

These conflicts are highlighted by the experience of the Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) pilot. Launched in 2022 to provide compensation for workplace accidents, the pilot currently relies on voluntary contributions from international brands rather than a sustainable national contributory mechanism (Moazzem, 2025). While the pilot demonstrates institutional capacity to deliver benefits, it remains a donor and brand driven initiative that has not yet transitioned into a genuine social insurance model where domestic employers and employees share the financial burden. The inability to implement the EIS on a national contributory basis reflects the political difficulty of imposing new financial obligations on domestic elites within a competitive clientelist political settlement (Idris, 2021).

A significant barrier to the social insurance agenda is the limited public and bureaucratic understanding of what contributory social insurance actually entails. There is a frequent conflation of social insurance with private, commercial insurance products, which weakens public trust and diminishes the sense of social solidarity required for a mandatory system. Many workers and small-scale employers perceive contributions not as a collective investment in resilience, but as a loss of income with uncertain future returns. This lack of "institutional literacy" regarding the social

contract makes it difficult to generate the popular support necessary to overcome elite resistance (Schurmann & Mahmud, 2009).

7.2.8 Political economy of urban social protection

A significant feature of the political economy of social protection in Bangladesh is the historical and persistent rural bias in programme design and resource allocation. While Bangladesh is urbanising at one of the highest rates in the world, its social protection architecture remains anchored in a static rural paradigm designed to address agricultural seasonality and rural disasters. As discussed above, the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022 reveal a stark disparity in coverage; while approximately 44 per cent of rural households receive at least one form of social protection benefit, the coverage in urban areas is significantly lower at roughly 24 per cent (Razzaque, Rahman, & Hassan, 2025). This discrepancy is even more pronounced when examining specific vulnerable groups; major initiatives such as the Widow Allowance are often not operational in city corporation areas, and only 15 to 19 per cent of beneficiaries for old age and disability allowances are urban residents (Razzaque & Rahman, 2025).

Most urban social protection consists of general subsidies and emergency measures rather than predictable income support. The primary urban instrument is the Open Market Sales (OMS) programme, which functions as a price stabiliser for food grains rather than a rights-based transfer (Mansur & Khondker, 2013). Research indicates that only 4.1 per cent of the total social protection budget is dedicated to programmes that exclusively target urban populations (Razzaque & Rahman, 2025). Consequently, approximately 64 per cent of the urban poor remain excluded from the safety net, leaving them exposed to high living costs and informal sector volatility without the cushion of a national social protection floor.

The low coverage of urban social protection is partly driven by a deep-seated concern among policymakers regarding the political and demographic consequences of strengthening urban safety nets. There is a persistent belief within the bureaucratic and political machinery that the provision of robust social protection in cities could act as a significant "pull factor," thereby accelerating rural to urban migration (Razzaque & Rahman, 2025). This concern is rooted in a fear of "urban deprivation" and the potential destruction of traditional rural life through the creation of unplanned, high-density settlements that strain municipal services and infrastructure (Kabir, Jamil, & Islam, 2013).

From a political economy perspective, this "pull factor" argument serves as a justification for maintaining a low tax, low spending equilibrium in urban centres. By framing urban social protection as a potential trigger for unsustainable migration, the state avoids the fiscal and administrative burden of extending entitlements to a mobile and often invisible slum population (Idris, 2021). This ideological barrier has led to a scenario where the urban poor are treated as transient residents rather than as rights holders with a legitimate claim to the state's social contract. Even though the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) acknowledged the need for urban expansion as early as 2015, implementation remains sluggish because these populations

often lack the settled residency status or political "anchors" required to influence resource distribution.

Internal migration dynamics in Bangladesh suggest that the fear of social protection acting as a pull factor is largely unfounded. Migration is primarily driven by powerful "push factors" at the place of origin rather than the allure of urban safety nets. These drivers include climate induced disasters, riverbank erosion, and the chronic lack of rural employment opportunities during lean agricultural seasons (Eusuf, 2012; Kabir, Mansoor, & Barca, 2023). For example, nearly 52 per cent of urban poor households surveyed in 2024 migrated specifically due to climate related crises, with many originating from the northern and southern regions of the country. Moreover, the scale of social protection transfers in Bangladesh is too small to plausibly influence migration decisions. Total social protection spending amounts to only around 2–3 per cent of GNI, and individual cash transfers are modest, often insufficient to cover even a fraction of urban housing, food, and transport costs. It is therefore highly implausible that such limited benefits could incentivise households to relocate to cities where the cost of living is substantially higher than in rural areas.

Furthermore, evidence indicates that migrants move in search of "expected income differentials"—primarily better wages in the industrial and service sectors—rather than social assistance (Eusuf, 2012). The urban poor typically have per capita incomes and expenditures that are more than 20 per cent higher than their rural counterparts, yet they face much higher costs of living and greater vulnerability to economic shocks (Eusuf, 2012; Razzaque & Rahman, 2025). There is no empirical data in Bangladesh to suggest that the existence of special urban programmes induces higher rates of urbanisation (Eusuf, 2012). In fact, despite significant rural urban migration, the absolute number of urban poor has decreased in certain periods, suggesting that migration often serves as a successful strategy for climbing out of poverty rather than a means to access welfare (Eusuf, 2012).

The continued exclusion of urban residents from the social protection framework represents a significant failure of the rights-based vision articulated in the NSSS. Realising an equitable society requires a paradigm shift that moves beyond the "pull factor" myth and recognises the spatial relocation of poverty (Social Security Policy Support Programme, 2025). As urban areas now contribute roughly 60 per cent of the national GDP, the political economy of the future must address the "missing middle" and the informal labourers who drive this growth but remain unprotected (Finance Division, 2025).

7.2.9 Dynamics of development partners' (DPs) engagement in social protection

The engagement of international development partners (DPs) has been a defining feature of Bangladesh's social protection landscape since independence. The reform of social protection architecture has relied heavily on external financial and technical support, particularly from major multilateral and bilateral actors such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Union, FCDO, DFAT, WFP, UNICEF, ILO, and FAO. These actors have played a central role in shaping the "software" of reform—policy frameworks, strategic blueprints, action plans, and system designs—often filling gaps in domestic technical capacity (Idris, 2021). However, such

support is frequently accompanied by policy conditionalities and reform expectations that are difficult to fully realise within existing political, fiscal, and institutional constraints. Excessive dependence on DPs for both budgetary support and technical assistance risks weakening government ownership, diluting incentives for capacity development, and embedding reform trajectories that are externally driven rather than domestically anchored (Barrientos, 2007; Valverde et al., 2020; Adamenko, 2022).

A persistent challenge in DP engagement is the weak alignment between externally supported interventions and nationally owned programmes. Development partners operate under diverse strategic priorities and accountability frameworks tied to their home constituencies and organisational mandates, which often leads them to promote specific thematic initiatives, pilots, or flagship programmes rather than system-wide integration. While DPs working on social protection have made efforts to coordinate and share information to avoid duplication, the absence of strong leadership at the ministry level has limited the effectiveness of such coordination. Ministries often struggle to clearly identify reform needs, articulate coherent strategies and roadmaps, coordinate DP initiatives, and conduct systematic evaluations of results (GED, 2020). Over time, this combination of fragmented DP engagement and weak domestic stewardship has contributed to the proliferation of numerous small-scale schemes, resulting in an unplanned expansion of the social protection portfolio. At its peak, the system encompassed more than 140 programmes (Razzaque & Rahman, 2025), producing a fragmented landscape characterised by overlapping objectives, thinly spread resources, and limited coherence (Idris, 2021; Majoka & Palacios, 2019). Such fragmentation weakens the effectiveness of social protection by dispersing fiscal and administrative capacity across too many interventions.

Sustainability remains a major concern for DP-supported programmes. Many social protection initiatives have been launched as donor-funded projects that struggle to continue once external financing ends (SSPS Programme, 2025). The Investment Component for Vulnerable Group Development (ICVGD), initiated with support from the World Food Programme (WFP), illustrates this challenge: despite its objectives, the programme did not scale up and concluded in FY2024–25. This reflects a broader tendency for DP engagement to prioritise short-term project delivery over the long-term development of fiscal and institutional capacity required for state ownership (World Bank, 2022). Transitions from DP-supported pilots to nationally financed programmes are frequently impeded by institutional inertia, reluctance to absorb recurrent costs into the revenue budget, and limited fiscal space, particularly in a context of a persistently low revenue-to-GDP ratio (Idris, 2021; Razzaque & Rahman, 2025). Heavy reliance on external financing also exposes programmes to volatility arising from shifts in donor priorities or reductions in aid, undermining continuity and long-term planning. As a result, social protection in Bangladesh continues to resemble a patchwork of donor-driven pilots and politically branded safety nets, rather than a unified and transformative system.

Recent efforts to formalise monthly coordination meetings among Social Protection Development Partners represent a potentially important step toward improving alignment and reducing

duplication. Regular coordination could enhance information sharing, harmonise approaches, and reduce overlapping interventions. However, there is a risk that such forums become routine consultative exercises without generating substantive reform agendas or providing candid feedback to government on systemic weaknesses. Their effectiveness will depend on whether DPs collectively move beyond information sharing toward supporting politically difficult reforms—such as programme consolidation, financing rationalisation, and institutional realignment—that challenge existing incentives and power structures within the bureaucracy.

Development partners also provide extensive technical assistance (TA) aimed at strengthening the capacity of line ministries and local government institutions. These TA-supported activities often serve as incentives for implementing agencies, offering opportunities for training, domestic and international travel, and meeting allowances. While such assistance is intended to professionalise staff and modernise delivery systems—particularly through digitalisation—its effectiveness is rarely rigorously evaluated. Digital systems are frequently well designed, yet line ministries often lack the institutional capacity or incentives to manage them independently once consultants withdraw. Capacity building is too often treated as a purely technical exercise, overlooking the political economy of bureaucratic behaviour, where actors may resist reforms that threaten discretion, rents, or established power structures (Idris, 2021). Greater emphasis is therefore needed on assessing the effectiveness of TA, strengthening institutional memory, and embedding reforms within incentive-compatible governance structures.

7.2.10 Implementation and institutional coordination

The implementation and institutional coordination of social protection in Bangladesh are governed by a complex interplay of high-level policy mandates and entrenched bureaucratic structures. The primary objective of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) was to transform a reactive and fragmented safety net landscape into a rights-based lifecycle system. Central to this transformation was the introduction of a three-tiered institutional framework designed for coherence and effective management. At the apex of this structure resides the Central Management Committee (CMC), chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, which serves as the ultimate authority for coordinating, monitoring, and approving social protection reforms (Cabinet Division, 2015). Directly beneath the CMC, the entire social protection portfolio was organised into five thematic clusters, each led by a designated ministry. This cluster-based approach was intended to rationalise programmes and move away from a system where dozens of independent agencies operated in silos with overlapping objectives and beneficiaries (Cabinet Division, 2015).

The assessment of the cluster-based coordination mechanism reveals significant progress in developing the 'software' of reform, such as strategic plans and thematic guidelines, but substantial hurdles remain in the 'hardware' of operationalisation. The five thematic clusters—Social Allowances, Food Security and Disaster Response, Social Insurance, Labour and Livelihood Intervention, and Human Development and Social Empowerment—were designed to align with the modern functions of social security: protection, prevention, promotion, and transformation (SSPS Programme, 2025). While this framework has provided a clearer conceptual map of the sector,

effectiveness is often compromised by information gaps and irregular meetings among the coordination bodies.

The effectiveness of the five programme clusters has been uneven, and a strong case exists for further restructuring to enhance system-wide synergy. Cluster coordination was mandated to include bi-monthly thematic meetings chaired by the Secretary of the cluster-coordinating ministry. Due to difficulties faced by implementing line ministries, the frequency was later revised to quarterly meetings. Despite this adjustment, most clusters failed to hold meetings regularly over the past three years. A key constraint is the reliance on the Secretary to chair these meetings. Given their heavy workloads, frequent travel, and periodic transfers, meetings are often delayed or cancelled. Transfers of Secretaries further disrupt continuity, as newly appointed officials require time to familiarise themselves with the NSSS, its implementation mechanisms, and the cluster approach to programme consolidation.

Similar challenges affect cluster focal points, typically at the Additional Secretary or Joint Secretary level. When primary focal points are unavailable, alternative officials attend, but interviewees noted that these substitutes are often less familiar with technical details and current programme issues. As a result, discussions tend to be less informed and less effective, even when meeting minutes are available. Limited internal information-sharing within ministries further reduces the effectiveness of meetings when key officials are absent.

More broadly, awareness of the NSSS remains low beyond a small group of designated officials. Even among focal points, some NSSS components—such as the MIS, single registry, social insurance—are not fully understood, limiting their ability to advance reforms. Interviews with implementing agencies as part of final evaluation find that many officials are not clear about their own action plan. While the General Economics Division has organised orientation workshops, these have primarily targeted focal points and have not addressed broader capacity gaps. Frequent staff transfers further erode institutional memory, and there is no systematic mechanism—such as regular induction or refresher training—to support newly appointed officials or mitigate knowledge loss.

Inter-ministerial coordination remains a persistent challenge in the implementation of the NSSS. Fragmented programming across 39 ministries and divisions has created a complex hierarchy where bureaucratic actors often resist consolidation to protect their institutional power and rental streams (Idris, 2021). Overlapping mandates are particularly visible in programs like the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) and the Widow Allowance, which serve almost similar demographics but are managed by different ministries, and a strong conflict exist between these ministries regarding the ownership of the schemes.

A core ambition of the NSSS 2015 was to transition the leadership of lifecycle-based programs to the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) by 2026. This ministry was envisioned as the nodal agency for social allowances, covering pregnancy, childhood, disability, and old age (Cabinet Division, 2015; Finance Division, 2025). However, a critical analysis of the MoSW's institutional capacity suggests

that it is not yet fully equipped for this expanded role. While the Department of Social Services (DSS) maintains the largest field presence among implementing agencies, it suffers from severe human resource constraints. In many regions, a single Union Social Worker is responsible for multiple unions, resulting in excessive workloads (Transparency International Bangladesh, 2025). In addition, MoSW is not yet clear about its role and function in leading all life-cycle based social protection schemes. The Cabinet Division did not take any steps to synthesise MoSW officials on their functions in the next phase of NSSS as a leading ministry of life-cycle based programmes. Without a firm commitment to institutionalising this leadership transition and providing a dedicated capacity-building budget, the MoSW remains preoccupied with administrative control rather than strategic policy formulation (SSPS Programme, 2025; Razzaque & Rahman, 2025).

The capacity of the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) to lead the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS) is also a central concern for the sustainable expansion of the system. While MoLE has a legal mandate and experience with pilots like the Employment Injury Scheme and statutory funds, its institutional infrastructure is fragmented and under-resourced. Key technical functions for introducing the NSIS, such as actuarial analysis, contribution tracking, benefit calculation, and digital case management, are absent. Human resource limitations are compounded by frequent officer transfers, multitasking across unrelated responsibilities, and reliance on project-based technical support, which undermine continuity and institutional learning. While the establishment of Social Security Unit (SSU) has strengthened their capacity, the unit is still understaffed and heavily depends on external consultations support. Existing digital systems, including LIMS and openIMIS, are either sector-specific pilots or not fully integrated, leaving worker data fragmented and eligibility verification cumbersome. The legal framework for the introduction of NSIS is yet to be developed. Therefore, MoLE's readiness to implement and scale comprehensive social insurance for workers remains constrained, necessitating targeted institutional strengthening and capacity development across multiple dimensions.

7.3 Conclusion

The political economy of social protection in Bangladesh reveals that the system's performance is driven less by technocratic design and more by the complex interplay of institutional interests, fiscal constraints, and patronage networks. While the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) provided a progressive blueprint, its implementation has been hampered by a "competitive clientelist" political settlement where social benefits often serve as tools for political branding rather than rights-based entitlements. The persistent gaps between the progressive vision of the NSSS and the on-ground reality of the system are predictable consequences of the distribution of power, competing incentives, and institutional barriers.

A synthesis of the key constraints reveals a self-reinforcing cycle. First, a structurally narrow fiscal base, with one of the world's lowest revenue-to-GDP ratios, creates a foundational scarcity of resources. This scarcity is politically managed through a centralised and discretionary budgetary process that prioritises competing claims, often compressing social protection allocations. Second, this fiscal constraint interacts with a deeply fragmented programme architecture. Proliferation into

dozens of small schemes is not an accident but a strategic outcome, serving the institutional interests of ministries and the political logic of a competitive clientelist settlement. Fragmentation allows for the visible distribution of patronage, maintains bureaucratic turf, and creates numerous small rental streams, directly undermining the NSSS consolidation agenda. Third, the design and implementation of programmes are pervaded by power relations. From eligibility criteria that prioritise administrative and political convenience over poverty focus, to a beneficiary selection process captured by local elites, the system is routinely diverted from its intended goals. The failure of the National Household Database (NHD) and the cautious rollout of the Dynamic Social Registry (DSR) underscore how technical solutions falter when they threaten established discretionary powers and institutional interests. Fourth, strategic biases are institutionalised, most notably the systemic neglect of urban social protection justified by a largely unfounded “pull factor” myth, which effectively excludes a growing share of the poor from the social contract. Finally, the engagement of development partners, while crucial for technical and financial support, has often inadvertently reinforced fragmentation, weak domestic ownership, and a project-based rather than systemic approach to reform.

These constraints have profound implications for the next phase of NSSS reforms. Effective governance requires not just formal structures but political backing and aligned incentives. Advocacy for social protection must be integrally linked to advocacy for progressive tax reform and domestic revenue mobilisation. Addressing financing constraints necessitates confronting elite resistance to progressive taxation. Simultaneously, the budget must be cleansed of misclassified expenditures to present a true picture of social protection spending, building a credible case for increased allocation. Financing strategies must also be planned for the long-term fiscal sustainability of donor-supported pilots to avoid collapse after external funding ends.

Technical blueprints like the NSSS, while valuable, are insufficient without addressing underlying power relations and political incentives. Understanding the political logic driving current practices enables identification of feasible reform pathways. Incremental reforms that align with political incentives, build on institutional strengths, and create constituencies for change can gradually shift Bangladesh's social protection system toward greater effectiveness, equity, and sustainability. The ultimate goal remains transforming social protection from a fragmented system of political patronage into a rights-based framework providing universal coverage and adequate protection. Achieving this vision requires sustained political commitment, institutional capacity building, progressive tax reform, and construction of broad-based coalitions linking social protection to economic development and social cohesion.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

Bangladesh has made commendable progress in socio-economic development over the past decades; however, this momentum has weakened in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and amid recent political and macroeconomic disruptions. Persistently high inflation over the last two years has significantly eroded real incomes, disproportionately affecting low-income and vulnerable households. The recent reversal in poverty trends underscores the urgency of renewing policy attention to social protection, not only as an instrument for poverty reduction, but also as a means of mitigating inequality, protecting livelihoods, and preserving social cohesion during periods of heightened economic stress.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh's social protection system assumes renewed strategic importance. Considerable progress has been made in expanding coverage and bringing a large share of the population under various social protection programmes. For a lower-middle-income country facing rising inequality, demographic transition, urbanisation, and climate vulnerability, social protection constitutes a foundational pillar for inclusive and equitable development. Growing awareness of widening disparities and their long-term socio-economic implications has reinforced the need to re-strategise social protection as a core component of national development policy. This urgency has been further amplified by recent shifts in the political landscape, which have brought poverty, inequality, and social justice more prominently into national discourse, creating an important window of opportunity for transformative reform.

In this context, the adoption of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) was both timely and forward-looking. The NSSS articulated a long-term vision to move beyond a fragmented and discretionary safety-net system toward a more coherent, inclusive, and lifecycle-based social protection framework. It introduced several transformative design principles, including a shift from isolated programmes to lifecycle-oriented support, the development of a Single Registry and integrated management information systems to improve beneficiary identification, and the establishment of a results-based monitoring and evaluation framework to strengthen programme effectiveness. Importantly, the NSSS also acknowledged that such transformation would require far-reaching programmatic and institutional reforms, sustained political commitment, and strengthened coordination across line ministries and implementing agencies.

To operationalise this vision, two sequenced Action Plans (Phase I and Phase II) were developed, translating the NSSS into a set of time-bound and well-defined reform tasks. These Action Plans provided a structured roadmap for implementing seven major programme reforms and six institutional reforms, thereby anchoring the strategy in a results-oriented implementation framework. The objective of this final evaluation has been to assess the extent to which the NSSS reform agenda, particularly under Action Plan Phase II, has been implemented, as the strategy approaches its conclusion in June 2026.

Given Bangladesh's capacity constraints in terms of infrastructure, human resources, and fiscal space, it was always anticipated that implementing the NSSS reform agenda would be challenging. These challenges are compounded by the sheer scale and complexity of the system, which encompasses an extensive beneficiary base and involves numerous ministries, departments, and agencies. Nonetheless, the reform tasks assigned under the Action Plans were specific, measurable, and accompanied by realistic timelines. This evaluation has therefore focused on assessing progress against these agreed benchmarks, while also identifying the key constraints, technical, institutional, fiscal, and political, that have shaped implementation outcomes.

The evaluation followed a systematic and indicator-based approach, drawing directly on the NSSS Action Plan framework. More than 150 performance indicators related to programme reforms and over 100 indicators linked to institutional reforms were assessed, enabling a comprehensive comparison between planned milestones and actual progress. Detailed findings are presented in the preceding chapters.

Overall, the evidence suggests that while meaningful progress has been achieved on both the programmatic and institutional fronts, several structural challenges continue to limit the effectiveness and transformative potential of Bangladesh's social protection system. A constrained and fragmented resource base remains a binding constraint, restricting both benefit adequacy and programme expansion. Budgetary distortions, stemming from the inclusion of non-social-protection expenditures, obscure actual spending levels, while coverage gaps persist in urban areas and in climate- and shock-responsive protection. Fragmentation across a large number of schemes, combined with weak data systems, continues to generate targeting inefficiencies, exclusion and inclusion errors, and uneven benefit incidence. These challenges are further reinforced by political-economy dynamics, including bureaucratic resistance, vested interests, and discretionary practices, which have slowed consolidation, harmonisation, and accountability reforms.

While the NSSS has laid an essential foundation for addressing these long-standing weaknesses, the evaluation finds substantial scope to further strengthen and modernise Bangladesh's social protection system in line with citizens' evolving needs. Realising this potential will require a strategic shift toward reform-oriented outcomes, underpinned by stronger national ownership, clearer institutional accountability, and sustained political commitment. Against this backdrop, the following section presents a set of policy recommendations intended to inform the next phase of Bangladesh's national social protection strategy beyond 2026.

- 1. Effective social protection reform requires renewed political commitment to expand coverage, mobilise sustainable financing, and strengthen accountability in implementation.**

Social protection reform in Bangladesh requires a renewed, and credible political commitment that is publicly declared, institutionally embedded, and consistently acted upon. Recent shifts in the

political landscape create a critical window of opportunity to elevate social protection to the centre of the national development agenda, with major political parties increasingly recognising—through their electoral manifestos—that social protection must function as a core pillar of state responsibility rather than as a residual welfare function. The government must seize this moment to reframe social protection as a non-negotiable foundation of national development and social priority, supported by predictable domestic financing and insulated from short-term political cycles. Such commitment is essential to mobilise the resources needed to expand coverage, reduce excessive dependence on development partners, and move decisively away from fragmented, discretionary schemes. In this context, a strong political mandate is required to shift from the prevailing reliance on categorical and patronage-based targeting toward universal-type lifecycle programmes—such as universal child benefit, old-age allowance, and family-based programmes—which international evidence shows are administratively more efficient, politically more durable, and better aligned with rights-based social contracts. By incorporating broad segments of the population, including the middle class, these programmes can generate durable political coalitions with a vested interest in fiscal sustainability, benefit adequacy, and long-term system expansion.

Equally, political commitment is the only viable mechanism to dismantle entrenched bureaucratic barriers and institutional turf wars that have repeatedly undermined the consolidation and harmonisation objectives of the NSSS. Control over individual schemes confers visibility, discretion, and organisational power, giving line ministries strong incentives to resist integration and resulting in a fragmented system characterised by thinly spread budgets and low benefit levels. High-level political leadership is therefore indispensable to enforce inter-ministerial coordination, and rationalise programme portfolios so that implementation authority follows functional efficiency rather than institutional legacy. The political commitment is also required to ensure accountability and transparency in social protection delivery, including patronage-free selection, independent evaluation, credible financial and performance audits, effective grievance redress mechanisms, and systematic public disclosure of beneficiary information. Without sustained political backing to confront discretionary practices and elite capture, technical reforms alone will remain insufficient, and social protection will continue to operate as an instrument of fragmented patronage rather than as a coherent, rights-based system capable of delivering equitable and transformative outcomes.

2. Streamline social protection budget reporting to clearly identify genuine social protection spending and align allocations with NSSS objectives and international standards.

Bangladesh's current social protection budget reporting has historically overstated the scale of social protection by including expenditures that do not directly address poverty, vulnerability, or lifecycle risks faced by poor and marginalised populations. Following recent political shifts, the Finance Division has taken an important corrective step by removing several non-relevant programmes from social protection budget reporting. In parallel, a new classification of pro-poor programmes has been introduced; while this is a welcome initiative, allocations under this category

remain limited, amounting to only 0.6 per cent of GDP. At the same time, several schemes—such as free textbook printing and distribution, agricultural subsidy management, and agricultural rehabilitation assistance—continue to be reported under the social protection budget, blurring the distinction between core social protection and broader development expenditures.

To realign public spending with the core objectives of poverty alleviation and vulnerability reduction, a comprehensive review and rationalisation of programmes included in the social protection budget is therefore essential. This process should begin with a clear and operational definition of social protection, guided by the principles of the NSSS and aligned with international standards, including those of the ILO, to systematically exclude non-relevant schemes. Developing a transparent and disaggregated budget framework that clearly distinguishes core social protection interventions from ancillary expenditures would improve fiscal clarity, strengthen accountability, and create the conditions necessary for programme consolidation and harmonisation. Over time, such reforms would help reduce fragmentation, address inefficiencies, and ensure that social protection resources are directed toward high-impact interventions for the poorest and most vulnerable.

3. Substantially scale up budgetary allocations for core life-cycle social protection programmes and mobilise resources through alternative financing mechanisms

Addressing exclusion in Bangladesh’s social protection system ultimately requires confronting the mismatch between eligibility and available resources. As discussed above, genuine social protection spending remains too limited to finance meaningful coverage of core life-cycle programmes. Under current allocations, exclusion is not an implementation failure but a structural outcome of chronic underfunding, with programme budgets capped well below the level required to reach all eligible individuals.

Without a substantial rise in funding, the majority of eligible beneficiaries will continue to be excluded. With the current fiscal space, it is not possible to comprehensively cover all eligible population. A phased approach should be adopted to gradually expand coverage under flagship schemes such as the Old-Age Allowance, Widow Allowance, Mother and Child Benefit Programme, and Disability Allowance, which would allow the government to manage fiscal pressures while progressively closing exclusion gaps. Available estimates indicate that achieving full coverage across these schemes would require an additional allocation of around 0.4 per cent of GDP (Razzaque and Rahman, 2025)—an amount that is modest relative to overall public expenditure and well below the headline social protection figures often cited in budget documents. At the same time, continued efforts to reduce inclusion errors through improved targeting, administrative efficiency, and digitalised delivery systems can enhance the redistributive impact of spending and ensure that additional resources are directed to those most in need.

While fiscal space remains constrained, stronger political and institutional commitment to social protection can itself support progress on domestic revenue mobilisation, particularly in a context where Bangladesh’s tax-to-GDP ratio remains exceptionally low. Expanding tax-financed social

assistance should also be complemented by the gradual introduction of contributory social insurance for eligible taxpayers, drawing on international experience to improve sustainability and extend protection to the working-age population. In parallel, the government could explore complementary financing options, such as social protection bonds, earmarked lotteries, and structured use of zakat funds, adapting successful international practices to diversify funding sources and reduce exclusive reliance on general taxation.

4. Introduce a dedicated income support programme for poor and vulnerable households as a core pillar of the social protection system.

A fundamental limitation of Bangladesh's current social protection architecture is the absence of a programme explicitly designed to provide sustained income support to households facing chronic poverty and vulnerability. This structural gap constrains the system's ability to reduce deprivation at scale and limits its effectiveness in protecting those most exposed to economic, climatic, and social shocks. Addressing this requires the design of a comprehensive income support intervention that is fiscally realistic, institutionally feasible, and capable of delivering predictable and adequate support to the poorest segments of the population.

- One potential avenue is to adopt multi-dimensional approaches that integrate regular cash stipends with asset transfers, skills development, financial literacy, and mentoring—have demonstrated strong and sustained impacts in helping the ultra-poor escape poverty traps. The experience of programmes such as BRAC's Ultra-Poor Graduation model highlights the value of sequenced and time-bound support that goes beyond short-term consumption smoothing to address structural constraints faced by marginalised households. Embedding such approaches within the national social protection framework, rather than as stand-alone projects, would strengthen their scalability and long-term impact.
- Alternatively, simplified income transfer mechanisms should be explored to complement graduation-style interventions, particularly in contexts where conventional targeting is administratively complex or prone to exclusion errors. Variants of a Universal Basic Income (UBI)—such as poverty-targeted or geographically targeted schemes focused on highly vulnerable or climate-exposed areas—offer a potentially efficient and transparent modality for delivering income support. This approach is similar to the universal income support programme like the Family Card. While a fully universal UBI may not be fiscally feasible, recent estimates suggest that targeting the bottom 40 per cent of households would require around 3.5 per cent of GDP, while limiting coverage to households below the poverty line would reduce the cost to approximately 1.35 per cent of GDP (CPD, 2024).
- Careful piloting and evaluation of these options would allow Bangladesh to identify a balanced approach that strengthens income security for the poor while remaining consistent with long-term fiscal sustainability and the objectives of the next phase of social protection reform.

5. Prioritise programme consolidation and harmonisation to build a coherent, lifecycle-based social protection system

Programme consolidation and harmonisation, explicitly recommended under the NSSS, failed to gain meaningful momentum during the implementation period, largely due to entrenched political-economy constraints. Cross-ministerial rivalry, institutional ownership concerns, and vested bureaucratic and political interests consistently undermined reform efforts, as discussed in the political economy chapter of this report. Control over individual programmes confers budgetary authority, administrative discretion, and political visibility, creating strong incentives for ministries to retain fragmented portfolios. While both the Cabinet Division and the General Economics Division (GED) undertook analytical work to identify opportunities for consolidation and harmonisation, these assessments were not translated into binding decisions or reflected in the NSSS Action Plans. In the absence of clear mandates, timelines, and enforcement mechanisms, consolidation remained largely aspirational. As a result, although incremental improvements in coordination were observed, substantive programme mergers and structural streamlining did not take place.

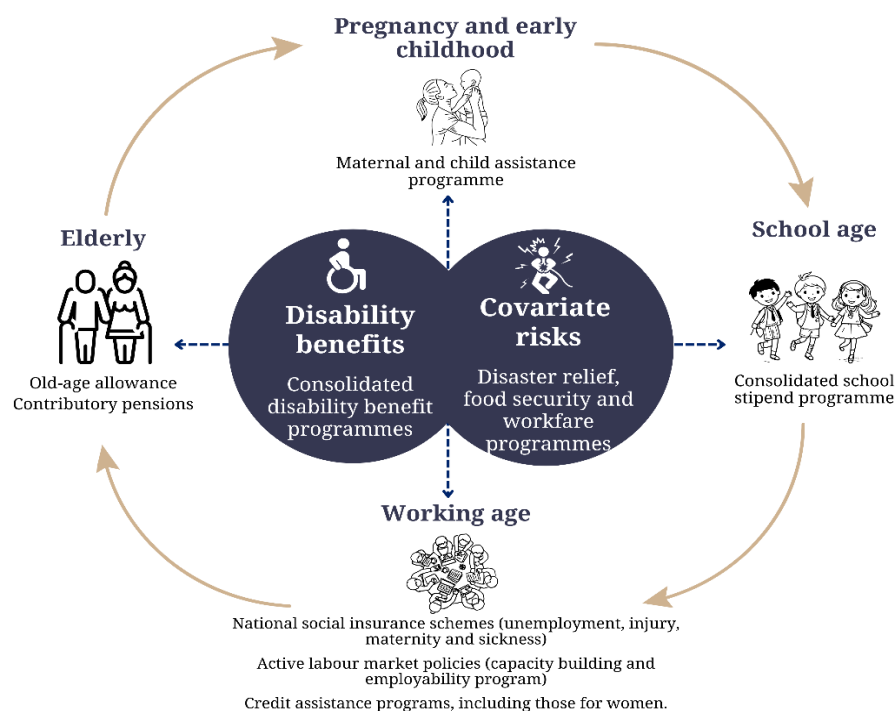
This lack of consolidation has had significant system-wide consequences. Bangladesh's social protection landscape continues to be characterised by a large number of small, overlapping schemes with narrowly defined objectives, thin budgets, and limited coverage. Fragmentation has diluted programme impact, increased administrative costs, and constrained the ability of the system to scale up benefits or respond effectively to covariate shocks such as inflation, climate disasters, and economic downturns. Without consolidation, scarce fiscal resources are spread across too many schemes, leaving most programmes underfunded and unable to provide adequate support to eligible populations.

Consolidation and harmonisation should therefore be treated as an urgent reform priority in the next phase of social protection policy. Consolidation—through the merger of overlapping schemes—can significantly improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and free up fiscal space to enhance benefit adequacy and coverage. Harmonisation—through aligning eligibility criteria, benefit structures, and delivery mechanisms across programmes—can improve coherence even where full mergers are not immediately feasible. Both processes must be carefully sequenced and accompanied by transition safeguards to ensure that no eligible beneficiaries are excluded and that benefit levels are maintained or enhanced during restructuring.

- In the short term, consolidation efforts should focus on areas where overlaps are most evident and political resistance is comparatively manageable. Priority entry points include merging food-based interventions such as OMS and TCB truck sales; integrating closely related workfare programmes (EGPP, EGPP+, FFW, WFM, and Test Relief) into a unified employment and disaster-response framework; and bringing together small, fragmented relief initiatives under a single humanitarian assistance programme.

- Similarly, consolidating programmes targeting vulnerable women—such as the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) with other allowance programmes for women—would reduce administrative duplication.
- A politically sensitive but illustrative example of missed consolidation opportunities lies within the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, which currently administers around eight separate social protection schemes. The NSSS explicitly recommended merging these into a single, unified Freedom Fighters’ Benefit. However, due to the political sensitivity of the constituency and the symbolic importance of these programmes, consolidation was never pursued, despite clear efficiency and coherence gains. Importantly, consolidation in this case does not require any reduction in benefit levels or entitlements; rather, it would simplify administration, reduce duplication, and improve transparency. With a new government assuming office, this presents a timely opportunity to revisit the reform and demonstrate that consolidation can be achieved without undermining politically important commitments.
- Over the medium term, consolidation should aim to reduce the total number of programmes to a manageable portfolio of around 15–20 core schemes, explicitly aligned with lifecycle risks and covariate shocks. A streamlined system could be anchored around flagship programmes such as the Mother and Child Benefit Programme, harmonised education stipends, disability benefits, old-age support, and social insurance instruments for the working-age population, complemented by shock-responsive mechanisms for climate and disaster risks.
- To materialise this objective, an independent and technically robust assessment of the scope for programme consolidation and harmonisation should be undertaken, building on—but not limited to—earlier analytical work by GED and the Cabinet Division. This assessment should systematically identify which programmes should be retained as core schemes and which should be merged or phased into consolidated platforms, based on overlap in objectives, beneficiary groups, and delivery mechanisms. Fiscal space released through consolidation—particularly from reduced administrative duplication and fragmented budgeting—should then be deliberately reallocated to expand coverage and enhance benefit adequacy of flagship programmes

Figure 6: Programme consolidation around the lifecycle framework



Source: Razzaque and Rahman (2025).

Achieving meaningful consolidation and harmonisation will ultimately require strong, high-level political leadership. The Cabinet Division and the Ministry of Finance must be empowered with clear authority to enforce inter-ministerial coordination, set binding timelines, and ensure alignment with national social protection objectives. Without such leadership, institutional resistance and turf protection will continue to impede reform. If pursued decisively, programme consolidation can become a cornerstone of a more efficient, equitable, and resilient social protection system in Bangladesh—one capable of delivering adequate support at scale while remaining fiscally sustainable.

6. Institutionalise periodic review and inflation indexation of social protection transfer values across all cash-based programmes.

The effectiveness of social protection depends not only on coverage but also on the real value of benefits received by beneficiaries. In Bangladesh, many social protection programmes have gradually lost their poverty-reducing impact because transfer amounts were not revised regularly in line with inflation and rising living costs. As a result, allowances that were initially meaningful have seen their purchasing power eroded over time, weakening their ability to protect households against poverty and vulnerability. This concern is explicitly recognised in the NSSS, which emphasises the need for systematic inflation adjustment of cash transfers under core life-cycle programmes to preserve their real value.

Recent policy decisions represent an important step toward addressing this long-standing weakness. The Finance Division has formally initiated a Periodic Review of benefits under cash-based social security programmes and established a Working Committee mandated to conduct annual inflation-based reviews of six selected programmes.⁴¹ The committee is responsible for assessing benefit adequacy and submitting recommendations to the Advisory/Cabinet Committee on Social Security Programmes. Following the 2026 review, the Advisory Committee approved increases in transfer values for the Old-Age Allowance, Widow Allowance, Disability Allowance for students with disabilities, and livelihood improvement programmes for disadvantaged groups, with the revised benefit levels to take effect from FY2026–27. This marks a critical institutional shift from ad hoc revisions toward a more systematic approach to benefit indexation.

To prevent future erosion of real benefit values and sustain the poverty-reducing impact of social protection, this periodic adjustment mechanism should be institutionalised and extended to all cash-based programmes. Regular benchmarking of transfer values against transparent economic indicators such as the Consumer Price Index would help ensure that benefits keep pace with inflation and economic transition.

7. Adopt a multifaceted, transparent, and data-driven approach to minimise targeting errors and strengthen beneficiary verification

Reducing targeting errors in Bangladesh’s social protection system requires moving beyond single-solution reforms toward a balanced strategy that combines improved data systems, institutional safeguards, and community-based validation. Selection mechanisms should be anchored in observable and verifiable criteria that explicitly account for poverty and vulnerability, with eligibility thresholds and parameters reviewed regularly to reflect changing economic conditions. At the same time, expanding the scope for universalising selected life-cycle programmes, particularly the Old-Age Allowance, Widow Allowance, and the Mother and Child Benefit Programme, could significantly reduce exclusion errors while simplifying administrative processes that currently rely on complex and discretionary targeting rules.

A strengthened role for communities and non-governmental organisations is essential to enhance transparency, legitimacy, and fairness in beneficiary selection. Bangladesh’s long-standing experience with NGO-led community development offers a valuable institutional asset that can be leveraged to improve targeting accuracy and reinforce local accountability, especially in underserved areas. Structured community participation, including public validation of preliminary beneficiary lists, can help identify errors, limit elite capture, and build trust in the selection process.

Adopting systematic beneficiary verification is a critical element to ensure that benefits reach the intended recipients. Historically, no mechanism existed to confirm the survival or continued

⁴¹ These programmes include ‘Old Age Allowance’, ‘Allowance for Widow and Deserted Women’, ‘Disability Allowance and Education Stipend Program’, and ‘Livelihood Improvement Program for Underprivileged People’ implemented by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW); the ‘Mother and Child Benefit Program’ implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA); and the ‘Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP)’ implemented by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR).

eligibility of beneficiaries, resulting in cases where Old-Age Allowance payments continued for deceased recipients and Widow Allowance benefits persisted after remarriage. To address this gap, the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) conducted a pilot verification of Old-Age Allowance recipients in eight upazilas between September and December 2025, covering one upazila from each administrative division.⁴² The pilot demonstrated the feasibility and effectiveness of verifying beneficiary status. Based on these results, beneficiary verification processes should be institutionalised and expanded across all social protection programmes, combining registry-based checks with field-level validation to minimise leakage, prevent fraud, and improve overall programme efficiency.

At the system level, a pragmatic and cost-effective approach to data-driven targeting remains essential. Given the prolonged delays and sustainability concerns associated with the National Household Database, scaling up the Dynamic Social Registry under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Welfare—working in collaboration with the Finance Division and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs—offers a viable alternative. A decentralised registry that integrates applicant-provided information with administrative data from multiple government agencies can generate proxy means test scores to inform eligibility decisions, while remaining adaptable and financially sustainable.

8. Introduce a social protection graduation approach to all life-cycle based programmes for enhanced programme efficiency and sustained impact.

Bangladesh’s social protection system would benefit from a structured graduation approach that treats support as responsive to changing household circumstances rather than as a permanent entitlement. Although programmes have expanded, eligibility often remains fixed even when beneficiaries experience sustained improvements in their socioeconomic status, constraining access for other equally vulnerable households. A well-designed graduation policy should therefore be embedded within major programmes, with clearly defined and transparent exit criteria based on a combination of financial and non-financial indicators that reflect genuine and sustained improvements in wellbeing.

To operationalise this approach, programmes should undertake regular and systematic assessments of beneficiaries’ socioeconomic progress to identify households that have achieved a reasonable level of self-reliance or no longer require the same level of support. Local committees would continue to play an important role in validating that observed improvements are durable rather than temporary, particularly in shock-prone contexts, with decisions carefully documented and communicated so that graduation is understood as a positive transition rather than an abrupt withdrawal. At the same time, graduated beneficiaries should automatically create space for the

⁴² As part of the process, DSS officials at the Upazila and District levels, together with representatives from local government, conducted open meetings at Union Parishad offices and school or college grounds. All current beneficiaries were invited to participate and provide information on their socio-economic circumstances and household conditions. Data were collected on factors such as age, income, land ownership, employment status, and other relevant indicators. Using this information, DSS will verify the eligibility of beneficiaries, and any individuals found ineligible will be replaced with eligible persons who are not yet included in the programme.

enrolment of new, deserving households, with freed-up places reallocated through updated and transparent selection processes to ensure fairness and equity.

Strong monitoring and evaluation systems are essential to track post-graduation outcomes, ensuring that former beneficiaries continue to thrive independently while guarding against unintended consequences such as a relapse into poverty. When combined with complementary interventions—such as skills development, employment facilitation, and access to appropriate financial tools—a graduation approach can promote sustainable empowerment, improve programme efficiency, and preserve the core protective function of social protection for those who need it most.

9. Prioritise contributory social insurance to safeguard the working-age population in the next phase of the national social protection strategy, underpinned by strong political commitment

To safeguard the working-age population and place Bangladesh’s social protection system on a fiscally sustainable and inclusive footing, a decisive policy shift toward contributory social insurance is essential. The continued absence of contribution-based schemes has created a structural gap in addressing key lifecycle risks faced by working-age individuals, notably unemployment, employment injury, sickness, maternity, and disability. Although the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) explicitly recognised the importance of introducing a National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS), progress has remained limited, and these vulnerabilities continue to be addressed through fragmented and largely non-contributory interventions. As Bangladesh moves toward the next phase of its social protection strategy, the introduction and operationalisation of the NSIS should therefore be accorded critical importance as a central pillar of reform.

- Within this reform agenda, the introduction of a national unemployment insurance scheme should be prioritised and operationalised through a phased, time-bound approach. Unemployment remains one of the most significant unprotected risks for the working-age population, particularly in the absence of formal income replacement mechanisms during job loss. Given the high prevalence of informality in Bangladesh’s labour market, initial implementation should focus on formal sector workers, where payroll systems and reporting structures already exist, while establishing a clear pathway for gradual expansion to informal and semi-formal workers as coverage mechanisms and administrative capacity evolve.
- In parallel, the successful piloting of the Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) in the ready-made garments (RMG) sector—co-financed by international buyers—offers a practical and instructive model for scaling up contributory insurance. Building on this experience, the government should adopt a phased approach to develop and implement a national EIS framework, supported by a clear legal architecture and a time-bound roadmap for nationwide rollout. The EIS pilot demonstrates that contributory schemes can be operationalised effectively when institutional roles are clearly defined, financing arrangements are credible, and stakeholder buy-in is secured.

- Consistent with the NSSS vision, other contributory schemes covering maternity, sickness, and disability benefits should be gradually introduced to strengthen income security and resilience across the working-age population. Together with unemployment insurance and employment injury protection, these schemes would form the core pillars of a comprehensive NSIS capable of addressing multiple lifecycle risks in an integrated manner.
- Institutional arrangements will be decisive for the success of contributory social insurance. International experience suggests that the NSIS—designed primarily for the working population—should be implemented and eventually operated by a dedicated institutional authority rather than embedded within existing social assistance structures. A separate institution would enable centralised governance, streamlined administration, and coordinated decision-making, thereby reducing institutional fragmentation and operational inefficiencies. In this context, the Social Security Unit within the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) should be strengthened and established as an independent statutory authority, equipped with adequate human resources and technical capacity to undertake actuarial analysis, financial management, scheme administration, and compliance monitoring.
- The governance structure of the NSIS authority should be based on a tripartite model, bringing together representatives from government, employers, and workers, complemented by actuarial, legal, and administrative experts. Tripartite participation would strengthen ownership, promote social dialogue, and enhance compliance, while technical expertise would underpin sound financial management and long-term sustainability.
- Alongside institutional reform, systematic capacity building and sustained public awareness efforts are essential to ensure effective rollout. Significant knowledge gaps persist among policymakers, government officials, employers, and workers regarding the principles and functioning of contributory social insurance, often leading to confusion with traditional social assistance and undermining the identity of the NSIS as a risk-pooling, entitlement-based system. Limited public understanding also constrains trust, political support, and willingness to contribute. Without targeted training for implementing agencies and well-designed communication and outreach for employers and workers, reforms risk remaining confined to policy commitments rather than translating into effective coverage.
- A foundational requirement for this transition is the development of a robust and dynamic workers' database. While the Single Registry Management Information System (SRMIS) has made progress in digitising non-contributory programmes, its architecture is not suited to the operational needs of social insurance. A functional NSIS requires real-time data on employment histories, contribution records, contribution densities, and benefit entitlements.

In this regard, MoLE, with technical support from the ILO and DFAT, has prepared a detailed NSIS roadmap with defined timelines covering database development, stakeholder sensitisation, legal procedures, actuarial assessments, financing frameworks, and the phased introduction of unemployment, employment injury, maternity, and sickness insurance. This roadmap should be

presented for endorsement at the high-level Cabinet Monitoring Committee and the advisory committee on social protection programmes and should guide coordinated implementation across institutions. Strong and sustained political commitment in the next phase of the social protection strategy will be indispensable to translating this roadmap into action and operationalising the NSIS nationwide.

10. Expand and align urban social protection within the national framework

Bangladesh's rapid urbanisation, combined with the rising cost of living and sustained inflation, has increased the vulnerability of urban populations, particularly those engaged in informal employment or living in insecure housing. Despite increasing urban vulnerability, social protection coverage remains heavily skewed towards rural areas, with urban beneficiaries accounting for only a small share. Policy reluctance to expand urban social protection—often driven by concerns that it may encourage rural-urban migration—has further slowed progress. Such assumptions, however, are inconsistent with a rights-based approach to social protection, which should respond to vulnerability wherever it occurs rather than restrict access on the basis of location.

Addressing this imbalance requires a deliberate expansion of core life-cycle-based schemes in urban areas, including allowances for older persons, widows, and persons with disabilities, as well as school stipends and the Mother and Child Benefit Programme. At the same time, employment-based programmes originally designed for rural contexts should be recalibrated for urban labour markets, taking into account the nature of informal work, higher population density, and distinct service delivery challenges.

Recent inflationary pressures have further highlighted the importance of urban-focused interventions that can stabilise household consumption during periods of stress. Programmes such as Open Market Sales, which provide essential goods at subsidised prices, play a critical role in cushioning vulnerable urban households against food insecurity and sudden price increases, and should be strengthened as part of a broader urban protection package.

While the National Social Security Strategy provides limited operational guidance on urban vulnerabilities, the Urban Social Protection Strategy and Action Plan (USPSAP) offers a clear pathway for integrating urban social protection into the national system. The next generation of social protection frameworks should place greater emphasis on urban risks and align implementation plans accordingly. Effective implementation will be crucial to institutionalising urban social protection, ensuring inclusive coverage, and strengthening social resilience as Bangladesh's urban population continues to grow.

11. Strengthen adaptive social protection measures to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations.

Bangladesh faces frequent natural disasters and a growing array of idiosyncratic and covariate shocks, such as floods, cyclones, and erosion-related losses. However, current disaster response programmes remain largely reactive, providing short-term relief through cash or food transfers

after disasters, but they fall short of building long-term resilience among vulnerable households. Many programs, including Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and Food for Work (FFW), fail to foster sustained adaptation and resilience.

To address these challenges, the Government of Bangladesh has developed an Guidelines on Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) in Bangladesh aimed at enhancing the responsiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of social protection programmes. These strategies promote better coordination across sectors, risk-informed decision-making, and improved targeting, combining social protection with disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation. ASP also emphasizes collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations, streamlined through inter-ministerial committees and field-level management structures. The Guidelines on Adaptive Social Protection in Bangladesh provide a strategic roadmap for enhancing resilience, but significant gaps remain in implementing adaptive measures on a broader scale.

A proactive approach to climate adaptation requires integrating measures that reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience. Evidence shows that disaster risk reduction (DRR) training and early warning systems can reduce income losses by up to 19 percentage points (Diwakar et al., 2022). Scaling access to these tools, coupled with awareness-building and anticipatory planning, should be central to an ASP framework. Innovative technologies, such as GIS mapping and mobile applications, can further improve monitoring, targeting, and disaster preparedness. Flexible financing mechanisms—including dedicated adaptive social protection funds and weather-indexed insurance—are critical for rapid post-disaster response.

Local governance and community-based organisations should play a central role in designing and implementing adaptive measures, ensuring responses are timely, context-specific, and inclusive. Key priorities include expanding coverage to climate-affected populations, embedding DRR training and early warning systems in existing programmes, establishing ASP funds and piloting climate-risk insurance, and strengthening coordination across local and national actors.

Recently, MoDMR revised the implementation manual for the Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP) to incorporate adaptive measures. A similar approach should be applied across all social protection programmes to enhance their responsiveness and resilience to both idiosyncratic and climate-related shocks

12. Make disability social protection more adequate and universal in practice

Disability-related programmes need to move closer to the NSSS vision of universal protection for persons with disabilities; while recognising the higher costs they face in daily life. At present, all six disability schemes together aim to reach 5.2 million beneficiaries, which means that only about 55 per cent of the estimated 9.4 million persons with disabilities in Bangladesh receive some form of social protection benefit, leaving more than 4 million outside coverage. Moreover, the cash allowance provided under Disability Allowance and Education Stipend Programme is only BDT 900, which is not enough to offset extra spending on medicine, assistive devices or personal care. A reform agenda should therefore follow a medium-term path that expands coverage progressively

towards all eligible persons with disabilities and gradually raises benefit levels in line with evidence on disability-related costs, with scope for higher support to those with more severe or multiple impairments. Alongside this, the enrolment process should be simplified so that people identified in government databases, or certified under existing disability assessments, can be brought into the schemes with fewer steps. The promise of universality should reflect not only in reports but in the actual experience of people seeking the support.

13. Redesign migrant worker protection programmes around risks across the migration cycle

Currently, only one social protection programme with a minimal budget of BDT 500 million under the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment targets migrant workers. This limited coverage is perhaps because, within the current NSSS framework, migrant workers do not neatly fit conventional definitions of poverty or vulnerability, and their challenges are episodic and location-specific, which makes them an unsuitable fit for the existing life-cycle approach. Going forward, a distinct, well-resourced migrant worker support window should therefore be established under the wider social protection framework, with interventions clearly defined at each critical point of the migration journey and organised around the risks migrants face before departure, while abroad and on return, rather than as a small, symbolic welfare fund. Before departure, this would include quality-assured training that combines job-specific skills with financial literacy, information on rights and contracts, and realistic expectations about costs and conditions abroad. During employment, migrant workers and their families should be covered by expanded social insurance packages that go beyond small death benefits to include workplace injury and disability, emergency medical care, repatriation and accessible legal aid when contracts fail. On return, structured reintegration support should combine temporary income assistance with recognition of skills acquired abroad, counselling and active links to domestic employment services or self-employment support. Designing migrant worker protection in this way would offer meaningful security to a group that is currently only weakly covered by the social protection system.

14. Continue the CMC-led cluster coordination approach in the next phase of the social protection strategy, with targeted adjustments to cluster composition and a clearly defined, time-bound mandate for steering reforms.

The Central Management Committee (CMC) and the five thematic clusters have emerged as the primary institutional platforms for reviewing progress under the NSSS and its Action Plan. However, in practice, the frequency of cluster meetings, the depth of discussion, and the follow-up on decisions continue to vary across ministries. Among the clusters, the social insurance cluster has shown the least progress. To improve efficiency and coherence, the social insurance cluster could be merged with the labour and livelihoods cluster, with the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) serving as the cluster lead. This consolidation would strengthen coordination over worker-related social protection, reduce fragmentation, and minimise duplication across closely related policy areas.

To enhance the effectiveness of the CMC and cluster mechanism overall, the government should formalise their roles through a single government order that clearly specifies meeting frequency, roles and responsibilities of the CMC and each cluster convenor, and expectations for decision-making and follow-up. The order should mandate the preparation of standardised meeting minutes, introduce a simple and transparent action-tracking system, and link the achievement of agreed milestones to accountability tools that ministries already engage with, such as the Government Performance Monitoring System (GPMS) and relevant sectoral plans. Embedding cluster outputs within these existing performance frameworks would help translate coordination into tangible reform progress.

The NSSS recommended that the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) assume leadership over all life-cycle-based social protection programmes from 2026 onward. However, given prevailing political-economy dynamics, institutional turf considerations, and entrenched practices of shared authority, full implementation of this recommendation is likely to be challenging. Moreover, the capacity of MoSW and DSS has not been strengthened in line with the envisaged leadership role, and there remains limited clarity among officials regarding their responsibilities as lead agencies, as well as the nature of support expected from other line ministries.

As an interim approach, the MoSW should continue to lead the social allowance cluster, with all ministries, divisions, and departments administering life-cycle programmes participating as members of the cluster. This arrangement would allow coordination to be maintained while avoiding disruptive institutional realignment. At the same time, targeted investments should be made to strengthen the technical, managerial, and coordination capacity of MoSW and DSS, enabling them over time to assume a more comprehensive leadership role across life-cycle social protection programmes in line with the NSSS vision.

15. Strengthen the G2P system further by addressing last-mile risks.

The shift to government-to-person (G2P) payments is well underway, with 22 social protection programmes already using digital payment systems. However, for many beneficiaries the experience remains uncertain and, in some cases, risky. Elderly people and beneficiaries with low digital literacy are particularly vulnerable, as they often depend on others to access their allowances and may share PIN codes due to limited awareness of digital security. While progress has been substantial, all remaining cash-based social protection programmes should be brought under the G2P system to ensure consistency, transparency, and efficiency across the social protection landscape.

At the same time, the expansion of G2P must be accompanied by practical safeguards at the beneficiary level. Payment dates and benefit amounts should be widely publicised in simple, accessible language so that beneficiaries know exactly what to expect and can identify irregularities. Assisted payment points at union or ward level should be strengthened, where trained staff can help elderly or digitally challenged beneficiaries cash out safely, without having to

rely on relatives, informal agents, or intermediaries. In addition, short and targeted financial literacy messages—covering PIN protection, receipt verification, and procedures for reporting suspected fraud—should be delivered through SMS, community meetings, and frontline social workers.

Routine monitoring mechanisms are also essential to ensure that digital payments function as intended. Regular tracking of delayed or bounced payments, unexplained deductions, and complaints against payment agents should be institutionalised, alongside rapid corrective action when problems are identified. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring timely disbursement, with cash transfers released within the designated quarter to maintain predictability and trust.

16. Strengthen data systems for designing informed social protection policies

Strengthening data systems is fundamental to informed policymaking and effective delivery in social protection. A robust, data-driven framework is essential for improving targeting accuracy, enhancing programme implementation, and reinforcing transparency and accountability within Bangladesh’s social protection system. Recognising this, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) recommended the establishment of a unified registry management information system (MIS) to consolidate beneficiary and programme data across all ministries. While progress has been made, the existing system has yet to function as a reliable analytical platform and remains largely inaccessible to the public. Expanding and reinforcing data systems—covering both existing and emerging social protection programmes—is therefore critical to building a more inclusive, responsive, and evidence-based social protection framework.

A key priority is the development of a comprehensive and fully functional single registry MIS that integrates data from all social protection interventions. Such a system should provide gender-disaggregated and region-specific information on beneficiaries, enabling systematic assessment of programme efficiency, resource allocation, and distributional equity. By allowing policymakers to identify overlaps, gaps, and inefficiencies, a strengthened MIS would support more effective targeting and improved inclusiveness. Making the database publicly accessible—subject to appropriate data protection and privacy safeguards—would further enhance transparency, promote accountability, and facilitate evidence-based engagement by researchers, civil society, and development partners. Public access can also support the identification of coverage gaps and inform more strategic resource allocation decisions.

At the same time, dedicated data systems must be developed for new and emerging social protection programmes. The introduction of schemes such as unemployment insurance will require the collection and management of detailed labour-market information, including employment histories, duration of work, wage levels, and contribution records. Addressing persistent data gaps related to persons with disabilities should also be treated as an immediate priority. This requires the systematic collection of more comprehensive and disaggregated data on disability prevalence, types, and associated vulnerabilities, which is essential for designing targeted

interventions, improving accessibility, and ensuring that social protection programmes respond effectively to the specific needs of persons with disabilities.

Finally, strengthening institutional capacity for data development, management, and maintenance is critical to sustaining data-driven reforms. The implementation challenges encountered in developing the single registry MIS and the National Household Database highlight the need for enhanced technical expertise, stronger inter-agency coordination, and clearer accountability arrangements. Long-term success will depend on strong domestic ownership, including adequate and predictable financing, continuous training of personnel, and the integration of data systems into core government processes. Embedding these systems within national institutional frameworks will be essential to ensuring their durability, functionality, and continued relevance in supporting an adaptive and inclusive social protection system.

17. Make grievance redress a system requirement, integrated with MIS and designed around how people actually complain

A grievance system will only work if it matches the way people already raise problems, which is usually through local representatives or programme staff rather than a distant website or hotline. Every major social protection scheme should therefore have clearly visible complaint options at union and ward level, such as a simple register with the Union Parishad member or social service officer, a dedicated phone number posted at payment points, and, where literacy is low, a designated “complaint day” each month when beneficiaries can speak to an official in person. Those local entry points need to be linked directly to the central GRS and programme MIS, so that when an older woman reports that her allowance has stopped, or several beneficiaries from the same village complain about deductions by an agent, the case is logged, tracked and resolved within a defined time. Programmes should publish summaries of how many complaints were received, what they were about, and how quickly they were settled, and clusters should periodically review patterns in the data to see, for example, if certain areas have repeated targeting disputes or frequent payment problems.

18. Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation framework and reporting as core accountability infrastructure

The NSSS sets out an extensive set of indicators to guide monitoring and evaluation (M&E), yet current data systems remain insufficient to support this ambition. While the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) includes some information on social protection coverage, the data are limited in scope, cover only a small subset of schemes, and do not align with beneficiary figures reported through programme MISs. Given the breadth and complexity of the NSSS M&E framework, a systematic assessment of data requirements is therefore essential. The General Economics Division (GED) should commission a dedicated study to identify data gaps, assess limitations in existing surveys—particularly the HIES social protection module—and determine the need for specialised surveys or data enhancements. Based on these findings, the GED or the Cabinet Division should formally request the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) to introduce the

necessary variables, sampling approaches and methodologies to ensure that national surveys adequately support NSSS M&E requirements.

Beyond data availability, greater attention is needed to methodological capacity. The M&E activities envisaged under the NSSS are technically demanding, and current institutional capacities may be insufficient to meet these requirements consistently. To address this gap, the GED should consider developing a practical handbook that sets out standardised methodological approaches for NSSS monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment, including guidance on mixed-methods evaluation, use of administrative data and interpretation of results for policy decision-making.

At present, the annual NSSS M&E report is prepared by the Cabinet Division, which creates a risk of perceived or actual bias in assessing progress against government targets. To strengthen credibility and transparency, future M&E reports should be commissioned to independent research organisations or consultants through an open and competitive process. Independent assessment would enhance objectivity, improve analytical rigour and strengthen public and stakeholder confidence in reported findings.

More broadly, progress in monitoring and evaluation has not kept pace with the rapid expansion and digitalisation of social protection programmes. A key institutional priority is therefore to develop an integrated data and analytical architecture that links programme MISs, the Single Registry, grievance redress systems and public finance data. Such integration would enable routine analysis of coverage, adequacy and outcomes, allowing government to assess not only who is being reached, but also what support is being delivered and with what effects. Major social protection programmes should be subject to regular stand-alone evaluations on a clearly defined cycle, using mixed methods and drawing on this integrated data infrastructure, with findings systematically feeding back into programme design, targeting criteria, consolidation decisions and budget allocations.

Although the NSSS assigns responsibility for monitoring and evaluation to the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED), its current Allocation of Business does not permit the evaluation of programmes financed through the revenue budget. To address this gap, monitoring and evaluation of tax-financed and revenue-funded social protection programmes should be commissioned to independent research organisations. Such evaluations would provide critical evidence on impacts on livelihoods, poverty reduction and vulnerability, while also identifying implementation barriers and design weaknesses that need to be addressed to strengthen the overall effectiveness of the social protection system.

19. Embed gender equality as a core principle in the next phase of social protection strategy

Future strategy should treat gender equality as a central organising principle for social protection, shaping how programmes are designed, financed and delivered, rather than appearing only as a cross-cutting label in policy documents. This implies that each major scheme; including old age allowance, widow allowance and disability benefit, should set out explicit gender-related objectives

and indicators, showing how it will reach women, strengthen their control over income and assets, and reduce specific risks they face, such as abandonment and violence. Payment rules and delivery arrangements should be reviewed so that, wherever appropriate, transfers are made into accounts in women's own names, documentation requirements do not exclude women with weaker formal identification, and enrolment, payment schedules and service contact points reflect women's mobility limits and care responsibilities, including in urban informal settlements and hard-to-reach rural areas. At the same time, programme guidelines and grievance mechanisms should explicitly recognise gender-based violence and economic coercion as risks that can affect access to benefits, with safe channels for women to raise concerns. All schemes should routinely collect and report sex-disaggregated data on coverage, benefit amounts, complaints and outcomes, and the next strategy should make it standard practice.

20. Bring under-served priorities into the mainstream of next national social protection strategy 2026; street children, and the care economy

Several areas remain weakly served by the current social protection system and should be explicitly built into the next strategy. First, support for street-connected children is still limited and fragmented; a dedicated, nationally recognised programme stream is needed to provide them with access to shelter, education, psychosocial support and eventual family or community reintegration. Second, the care economy, such as childcare, care for persons with disabilities and elderly people requires a clear policy direction, so that social protection helps build affordable, good-quality care services for low-income households and acknowledges the unpaid care work currently carried by women.

21. Develop a sustainable and diversified financing strategy for social protection

Social protection commitments are expanding faster than the available budget, which means that many eligible individuals still cannot be included, benefit levels lose value during periods of high inflation, and grievance redress becomes difficult when there is simply no fiscal space to add new beneficiaries or adjust payments. To avoid a permanent "waiting list" situation and repeated ad hoc cuts, the government should adopt a medium-term financing strategy for social protection that explicitly links programme design to predictable resources and gradually reduces the system's heavy reliance on tax revenue alone. In practical terms, this would require increasing the share of the national budget allocated to social protection by diversifying financing sources in a carefully designed way, for example through contributory and co-financed schemes for better-off groups and dedicated channels such as state lotteries which will be transparently directed to a social protection reserve. A defined share of these resources should be allocated to benefit indexation and shock response, so that programmes can maintain purchasing power and scale up temporarily during crises without undermining their core budgets. Altogether, such measures would allow programmes to plan coverage and benefit adjustments more transparently, reduce exclusion errors and give the grievance system real meaning.

22. Reduce dependence on donor-based project support and build strong, nationally owned systems

At present, many important parts of the social protection system, from information systems to training and pilot programmes still depend heavily on short-term, project-based support from development partners. This can be useful in the early stages, but over time it creates a risk that priorities, systems and capacities follow donor project cycles rather than a clear national plan. The next phase should therefore focus on gradually increasing the share of domestic resources allocated to social protection and improving central coordination of how social protection funds are used across ministries.

23. Use and strengthen the Local Consultative Group (LCG) to align development partner support with national priorities

Development partner engagement in social protection and the wider social security agenda would benefit from a clearer, more predictable coordination mechanism that ensures external support is aligned with government priorities rather than driven by individual projects or agencies. The Local Consultative Group (LCG), as the primary platform for government–development partner dialogue, should be more deliberately positioned as the main umbrella for discussion of social protection issues. This could be operationalised through the establishment of a dedicated social protection working group or a standing agenda item that consistently brings together all relevant actors. To maintain inclusivity and avoid dominance by any single organisation over time, facilitation and chairing responsibilities should rotate on a regular basis, with participation spanning bilateral, multilateral and UN partners while remaining sufficiently focused to support decision-making.

Within this framework, development partner support should be required to align with and strengthen the national social protection system, rather than creating new pilot projects or stand-alone schemes that risk fragmentation. Greater use of the LCG can help partners and government jointly agree on the division of analytical work, pilot initiatives and financing, with a clear expectation that interventions are complementary and explicitly aligned with the NSSS. Establishing clear terms of reference, regular meeting schedules, and concise records of decisions and follow-up actions would strengthen continuity, institutional memory and accountability, even as government counterparts or development partner portfolios change. Taken together, these measures would provide government with a single, stable forum through which to steer external support towards evolving national social protection and social security priorities.

24. Strengthen institutional memory through simple continuity tools for NSSS focal persons

Frequent transfer of focal persons has made it difficult to sustain momentum on NSSS reforms, although the NSSS strategy itself provides some continuity, institutional memory often moves with individuals. A practical response is to treat continuity as a basic requirement of the NSSS architecture and to embed a small set of tools that every ministry must use, regardless of who holds the focal role at any given time. This would include a standard, one-to-two page handover

note that outgoing focal persons are required to complete whenever they are transferred, summarising current programmes, outstanding Action Plan commitments, key decisions from the Central Management Committee and cluster meetings, and any ongoing technical assistance, with the note filed both in the ministry and with the Cabinet Division. A short induction session should be provided for all new focal officials, so that they understand the strategy, their responsibilities and the current state of play within their portfolio. In parallel, minutes, action trackers and core analytical documents related to the NSSS should be stored in a simple digital repository under the Cabinet Division, accessible to authorised officials, so that the history of decisions does not depend on personal files or memories.

25. Strengthen capacity across core social protection ministries to progress social protection reforms

Social protection programmes in Bangladesh are implemented across multiple ministries, and while the number, scope and coverage of these programmes have expanded over time, the institutional capacity of implementing agencies has not kept pace. In several cases, mandates have grown without corresponding investments in staffing, skills, systems and field-level presence. For example, although there is scope to expand training-based interventions under the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), its current capacity is insufficient to design, manage and monitor multiple large-scale schemes targeting high volumes of beneficiaries. This highlights the need to treat capacity development as a core pillar of social protection reform rather than an afterthought.

A practical first step would be to undertake structured capacity assessments for key implementing ministries, covering staffing levels, technical skills, information systems, data management, field operations and coordination arrangements. Such assessments would help ensure that new responsibilities, pilots or scale-ups are preceded by a clear understanding of capacity constraints. On this basis, targeted capacity-building measures—alongside selective external technical assistance where required—can be deployed in a sequenced and realistic manner.

Capacity gaps are particularly salient in relation to rolling out contributory social insurance under the next phase of the national social protection strategy, including the National Social Insurance Scheme (NSIS). Managing such schemes requires advanced capabilities in worker data management, actuarial analysis, fund management and beneficiary tracking. At present, the Social Security Unit within MoLE does not yet possess the full range of technical, managerial and communication capacities needed to perform these functions effectively. Strengthening this unit should therefore be prioritised through recruitment of specialised staff, targeted training on social insurance administration, with sustained technical support from the ILO and other development partners.

These challenges are even more critical for the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), which under the NSSS is expected to assume a central leadership role over lifecycle-based social security programmes in the next phase. Although MoSW was envisaged to lead all lifecycle programmes by FY2026, no systematic assessment has been conducted to determine its readiness for this

expanded mandate, nor have clear operational modalities been established. Institutional capacity, staffing and management systems have not grown in line with the ministry's expanding responsibilities. The next phase of the strategy should therefore provide explicit guidance on MoSW's leadership role, clarify its coordination arrangements with other ministries and agencies, and define required functions at both central and field levels. This should be accompanied by a time-bound and adequately resourced plan to strengthen MoSW's human resources, management systems and analytical capacity, enabling it to credibly and effectively as the lead ministry.

26. Strengthen accountability for delivering agreed NSSS reforms

At present, responsibilities for many NSSS actions are assigned to specific ministries and divisions, but there is no consistent system that can hold these institutions to account when agreed tasks are delayed or not implemented. This weakens incentives to complete reforms such as MIS integration, consolidation of schemes, or improvements in targeting and grievance handling. A clearer accountability framework is needed so that when a lead organisation fails to deliver, the issue is formally recognised and corrective action is required. In practical terms, each major NSSS reform should have a designated lead agency, measurable milestones and timelines, all reflected in instruments that already shape behaviour. The Cabinet Division and CMC could publish a short annual "NSSS implementation scorecard" summarising progress by ministry, and where targets are repeatedly missed, the responsible agency should be required to submit an explanation and a time-bound remedial plan. Linking visible progress on social protection reforms to existing performance management and budget processes would move accountability from informal expectations to a routine practice.

27. Integrate social protection with structural reforms to reduce inequality

Strengthening social protection is essential for alleviating poverty and cushioning vulnerable households from economic and social shocks. However, social protection alone cannot meaningfully reduce inequality unless it is complemented by reforms that address the deeper structural drivers of disparity. Current programmes, while necessary, are largely residual, addressing immediate needs without tackling systemic barriers that limit access to wealth, resources, and economic opportunities.

To achieve lasting reductions in inequality, structural reforms should target the root causes of disparity, including entrenched asset and wealth gaps that hinder equitable access to opportunities. Fiscal measures such as progressive taxation and enhanced resource mobilisation can help narrow income and wealth inequalities while financing public investments that prioritise universal access to quality education, healthcare, and infrastructure. In addition, policies that expand access to productive assets, credit, and financial services for marginalised communities are critical for enabling broader economic participation and levelling the playing field.

Enhanced social protection measures—such as better targeting, inflation-adjusted benefits, and expanded coverage—can mitigate immediate deprivation, but their impact will remain limited without alignment with broader structural interventions. A coordinated approach that integrates

robust social protection with systemic reforms is essential to promote inclusive development, reduce inequality, and ensure sustainable progress.

28. As the NSSS expires in 2026, it is time to develop the next social protection policy to build an internationally comparable, rights-based, and integrated system

As the initial ten-year phase of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) draws to a close in June 2026, Bangladesh faces a critical opportunity to reposition its social protection system for the next stage of development. This transition provides scope to move beyond incremental adjustments and to reframe social protection as a rights-based, shock-responsive, and nationally owned system, aligned with international standards and capable of responding to economic volatility, demographic change, and climate-related risks.

To capitalise on this opportunity, Bangladesh should move toward the adoption of a follow-up National Social Protection Policy, supported by a clearly sequenced and time-bound Action Plan. A formal policy framework—rather than a strategy alone—would carry stronger legal and institutional weight, enhancing enforceability across line ministries and reducing discretionary interpretation. To preserve reform ambition and credibility, the Action Plan should be developed with independent technical support, ensuring that indicators prioritise substantive structural reforms rather than easily achievable outputs. Annual progress reporting should likewise be undertaken by independent research institutions or third-party evaluators to strengthen accountability, objectivity, and course correction over time.

- The next phase of social protection reform should firmly anchor programme design in a lifecycle-based framework, spanning pregnancy and early childhood, working age, disability, and old age, while explicitly integrating mechanisms to address covariate shocks such as inflation, climate events, and economic downturns. Priority should be given to the gradual introduction of universal-type programmes, including a family or household-based benefit, universal child benefits, and universal disability allowances. Recognising fiscal and administrative constraints, universalisation should follow a phased approach—beginning in the poorest and most vulnerable upazilas and urban slum areas—before progressively expanding nationwide as systems and fiscal space mature.
- A core mandate of the next policy phase should be programme consolidation, embedded explicitly within the policy framework. The continued proliferation of small, fragmented schemes targeting narrow population groups undermines efficiency, benefit adequacy, and administrative coherence. As universal or near-universal programmes are introduced, overlapping and redundant schemes should be systematically phased out, with savings reallocated to strengthen benefit levels and coverage under consolidated programmes. Given entrenched institutional resistance, consolidation should be enforced through high-level directives, with clear timelines and accountability mechanisms across ministries.
- Institutional coordination arrangements should also be reviewed and rationalised. While the cluster-based coordination mechanism has supported several critical reforms under the NSSS, its effectiveness varies across clusters. In particular, the social insurance cluster has

struggled to drive meaningful progress or coordinate effectively with related actors. Merging the social insurance cluster with the labour and livelihoods cluster would better align policy objectives, reduce fragmentation, and strengthen linkages between labour market policies and contributory social protection.

- Reducing targeting errors must remain a priority, but through a multi-pronged and system-based approach rather than reliance on any single instrument. The next policy phase should expand the coverage and use of a dynamic social registry across all programmes, supported by harmonised Proxy Means Testing (PMT) where appropriate. This should be complemented by transparent, field-level validation mechanisms, including public selection meetings at the union level, structured community engagement, and the involvement of credible NGOs in verification processes. Importantly, eligibility criteria should be updated to rely on quantifiable and verifiable household- and individual-level indicators, reducing discretion and elite capture.
- A renewed and time-bound commitment to social insurance is also essential. The next policy should include a clear roadmap for introducing a National Social Insurance Scheme, encompassing unemployment, employment injury, sickness, and maternity benefits. This roadmap should specify institutional leadership, financing arrangements, sequencing, and pilot-to-scale pathways, ensuring that social insurance evolves from isolated pilots into a nationally anchored system.
- To strengthen whole-of-government coherence, the Cabinet Division should be formally mandated as the central coordinating authority for social protection reforms in the next phase. This role should go beyond convening functions to include oversight of reform implementation, inter-ministerial dispute resolution, and progress tracking. Assigning a dedicated Secretary within the Cabinet Division to lead social protection coordination would significantly enhance institutional accountability and reform momentum.
- Finally, digital and delivery systems require consolidation and deepening. All cash-based programmes should be brought under a unified Single Registry and Management Information System without exception, enabling real-time monitoring and interoperability. The Government-to-Person (G2P) payment system should be strengthened to reduce payment failures and bounce-back rates through improved beneficiary verification and provider oversight. Grievance redress mechanisms should be enhanced by integrating field-level grievance collection with centralised systems, ensuring accessibility for digitally excluded populations and reinforcing trust in the system.

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Annex

Annex 1: Methodology of the construction of vulnerability scorecard

The scorecard uses twelve indicators, each with categories assigned a point value to reflect the household's condition. For example, children aged 6 to 12 who are enrolled in school earn higher points, while households with no school-going children or with children out of school score lower. Housing materials are similarly differentiated, with cement or brick dwellings given higher points than bamboo, mud, or tin structures. Energy sources for cooking, ownership of a television or fans, and whether the household is located in a slum are also considered, along with the presence of widowed or elderly members, chronic illness, or disability. Poverty status and recent experience of shocks are included as well, making the tool comprehensive in scope. The scoring ranges from 0 to 150, where lower scores indicate higher vulnerability. The full set of indicators and point values is presented in Table A1, which also provides a structured view of how living conditions are translated into numerical scores.

Table A1: Construction of vulnerability scorecard⁴³

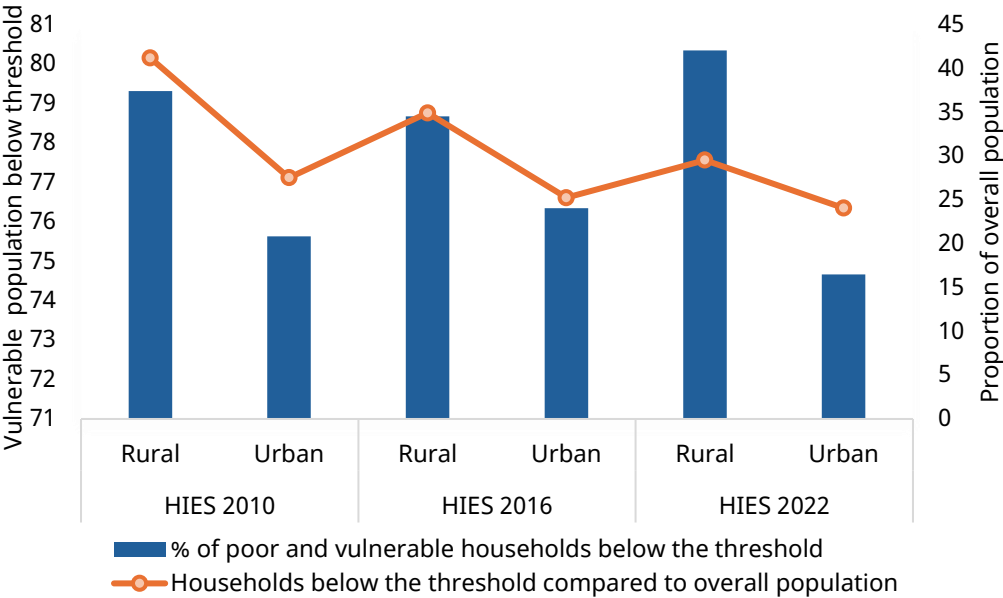
Indicators	Value	Points
1. Do all household members aged 6 to 12 currently attend a school or educational institution?	A. No	0
	B. No children in the household	5
	C. Yes	10
2. Is this a slum household?	A. Yes	0
	B. No	5
3. Does the household have a separate dining room?	A. No	0
	B. Yes	10
4. What is the construction material of main room of the household?	A. Hemp/Hay/Bamboo/Mud brick or others	0
	B. Tin (CI sheet)/Wood	5
	C. Brick/Cement	20
5. What is the household's primary source of energy for cooking?	A. Firewood and chips, or charcoal	0
	B. Biomass fuels	5
	C. Natural/LPG	15
	Gas/Gasoline/Diesel/Kerosene/Electricity/Others	
6. Does the household own any television?	A. No	0
	B. Yes	10
7. How many fans does the household own?	A. No fan	0
	B. One	5
	C. Two or more	10
8. Does the widow or elderly person?	A. Yes	0

⁴³ The vulnerability scorecard was constructed by the authors following the methodology of Bhattacharya et al. (2024). Scores for each indicator were assigned based on evidence from existing literature, and where direct data were unavailable in earlier survey rounds, proxy measures were applied. For example, in the 2010 HIES, information on slum households and cooking energy was not collected, so dwelling materials were used to approximate slum status and fuelling or lighting data were applied to identify cooking sources.

	B. No	5
9. Has anyone in the household experienced a chronic illness in the past year?	A. Yes	0
	B. No	5
10. Does the household have any members with a disability?	A. Yes	0
	B. No	5
11. Household poverty status	A. Extreme poor	0
	B. Moderate poor	15
	C. Vulnerable	30
	D. Non poor and non-vulnerable	50
12. Was the household affected by shock?	A. Yes	0
	B. No	5

The results demonstrate that the scorecard is effective in capturing deprivation among households already classified as poor or vulnerable by income criteria. In 2022, for example, 80.4 per cent of rural and 74.7 per cent of urban households defined as poor or vulnerable by income were also below the scorecard threshold, showing a strong overlap between the two approaches (Figure A1). At the same time, the overall share of households considered vulnerable has declined across survey rounds, reflecting improvements in living standards. In 2010, about 41 per cent of rural households and 27.5 per cent of urban households were categorised as vulnerable, but by 2022 these shares had dropped to 29.6 per cent and 24.1 per cent respectively. This trend is consistent with broader poverty reduction in Bangladesh, though the persistence of significant shares of households below the threshold highlights continuing risks.

Figure A1: Proportion of poor and vulnerable households identified through the vulnerability scorecard, by area and HIES round (%)



Source: Authors' estimation based on HIES data (2010, 2026, and 2022), BBS.

Annex 2: Implementation Progress of Institutional Reforms

	Performance indicator	Time frame	Implementing Ministry/Division	Status	Score (scoring should start from 1 up to 5 depending on the status of implementation)	Justification	Score
A. Single Registry MIS							
Develop software for Financial MIS and run pilot test	Financial MIS developed and pilot tested	Done	Finance Division	IBAS++ software has been developed and tested, and the ADP-RADP Management System 2.0 (AMS 2.0) has recently been operationalised. The Finance Division developed and piloted the Social Protection Budget Management Unit Management Information System (SPBMU-MIS) to support the administration and monitoring of social protection programmes.	5	The SPBMU-MIS has been developed and tested and is now available to support the management and monitoring of social protection programmes.	Completed
Roll out Financial MIS nationwide integrating with Single Registry MIS	MIS rolled out nationwide	Done	Finance Division	Following a successful pilot phase, the Single Registry MIS has been rolled out nationwide.	5	The Single Registry MIS is currently operational nationally.	Completed
Prepare master plan for Single Registry MIS in coordination with Cabinet Division	Master plan prepared	Dec-22	General Economics Division (GED)	A Single Registry Roadmap was prepared with technical support from the SSPS Programme, with active participation from key implementing ministries and divisions.	5	A Master Plan was prepared to guide the phased development, integration, and scaling-up of MIS platforms for social protection.	Completed
Create online-based MIS for major programmes	MIS digitized for major programmes	Jul-23	Line ministries 44	In FY2025–26, out of 30 cash-based social protection programmes, MIS is operational for 22 schemes. Of these, 19 schemes are integrated with the SPBMU-MIS, while three are linked to IBAS++. Currently, four ministries—MoSW, MoWCA, MoLWA, and MoDMR—operate their own programme-specific MIS. In addition, the Finance Division has developed and manages MIS platforms for five departments or ministries. As a result, a total of 12 MIS platforms are currently in use across nine ministries.	5	Several ministries have not developed programme-specific MIS platforms. In many cases, this reflects the nature of the programmes administered, as ministries implementing in-kind social protection interventions may not require full-fledged MIS comparable to those used for cash-based schemes. MIS has been created by FD for EGPP which will be linked to SPBMU MIS and will be operational from next year.	Completed

⁴⁴ Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED), Technical and Madrasa Education Division (TMED), Ministry of Food (MoFood), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), Health Services Division (HSD), Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), Rural Development & Co-operatives Division (RD&CD), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Housing and Public Works (MoHPW), Ministry of Land (MoLand), Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), Ministry of Industries (MoInd), Ministry of Textiles and Jute (MoTJ), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)

Continue improving MIS-based online self-enrollment and selection procedures by integrating database with NID verification, SPBMU, MoH&FW for pregnancy information, local government and Civil Registration and Vital Statistic (CRVS) for birth registration. Capacity building - regularly undertake.	Inter Departmental arrangement established	Jul-24	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) has successfully integrated the Maternity Cash Benefit Programme (MCBP) and Vulnerable Women's Benefit (VWB) MIS with the National ID (NID) database of the Election Commission, enabling online self-enrolment and improved beneficiary selection. The MCBP MIS has also piloted interoperability with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for pregnancy verification and with the Office of the Registrar General of Birth and Death Registration (ORGBDR) under the Local Government Division for birth registration data.	4	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) is actively working with relevant ministries to further strengthen interoperability across MIS platforms, with a focus on data exchange and system integration.	On-track
Operationalise and strengthen MIS unit in DWA for effective management of beneficiary information	Human and technical resources in place	Dec-23	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Department of Women Affairs (DWA) MIS unit has received sustained technical support from WFP and UNICEF, including the deployment of MIS officers and university-based IT interns on a pilot basis. At the same time, MoWCA has initiated plans to gradually develop and deploy its own in-house technical capacity, reducing reliance on development partner support over time.	4	Permanent human resources with the specialised technical capacity required to administer, maintain, and further develop MIS platforms are not yet in place, creating risks for system sustainability and continuity.	On-track
Make the MIS accessible by relevant departments	Inter-departmental arrangement established	Jul-24	Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE)	A memorandum of understanding has been signed among the Central Fund, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), and the Employment Injury Scheme to enable the use of the Labour Inspection Management Application (LIMA) for data sharing and operational coordination.	3	The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) currently does not operate a dedicated MIS for social protection programmes.	Moderately on-track
Link MIS with cash disbursement	MIS linked with SPBMU MIS	Dec-23	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME)	Overall, 22 of the 30 cash-based social protection programmes are now linked to digital cash disbursement systems. Among these, three programmes are integrated with IBAS++, while 19 programmes are connected to the SPBMU-MIS, strengthening the linkage between programme administration and payment execution.	4	A few cash-based social protection programmes remain outside the digital cash disbursement system and are not yet integrated with existing payment platforms.	On-track
Average Score for Single Registry MIS					4.38		
B. G2P payment system							
Comprehensive review of payment systems	Review completed	Done	Finance Division	The review of the payment system was completed	5	Achieved the target.	Completed

Design digital payment architecture	Digital payment architecture designed	Done	Finance Division	A comprehensive digital payment architecture was designed to support the transition from manual to electronic disbursement of social protection benefits.	5	Achieved the target.	Completed
Pilot G2P for two core cash transfer programmes	Two programmes piloted	Done	Finance Division	Pilot G2P programmes were implemented during the First Action Plan period (2016–2021), generating practical lessons that informed subsequent scale-up efforts.	5	Pilot was completed.	Completed
Roll out G2P for all cash transfer programmes	G2P for all cash programmes	Jun-22	Finance Division	Out of 30 cash-based social protection programmes, 22 are currently operating under the G2P system, reflecting substantial progress in digitising benefit payments. The G2P payment system, operated through the Finance Division's Single Registry System for Social Protection, currently delivers payments directly to the accounts of more than 35 million beneficiaries. Each beneficiary is verified using their National ID (NID) and registered mobile phone number, which helps prevent duplication, fraud, and erroneous claims while strengthening the integrity of the payment system.	4	A few cash-based programmes are still outside G2P system.	On-track
Maintain G2P system	System maintained	Continuous	Finance Division	The G2P system is actively maintained and regularly updated to ensure operational continuity, system security, and compatibility with evolving programme requirements.	5	G2P is being maintained on a regular basis.	Completed
Pilot G2P modalities	Pilot completed	Dec-23	Line ministries 45	The TMED, MoLWA, and MoCA successfully completed pilot G2P modalities and subsequently rolled out G2P for their respective cash-based programmes. Other responsible ministries and divisions did not pilot G2P modalities, largely because many of them do not administer cash-based programmes, making this action less relevant in those cases.	4	Most responsible ministries do not operate cash-based programmes. Therefore this action may not be relevant for them.	On-track
Roll out G2P for major programmes	G2P rolled out for major programmes	Jul-23	Line ministries 46	Currently, nine ministries and departments (excluding the Finance Division) operate 22 cash-based programmes through the G2P system. Several other responsible ministries, divisions, and departments do not manage cash-based programmes, and therefore G2P implementation is not applicable to them.	4	A few cash-based programmes are not included in G2P system.	On-track
Coordination at national and sub-national levels with financial service	The rate of bounce back reduced. Several	Dec-22	Ministry of Women and Children	The DWA facilitated consultations with Mobile Financial Service Providers (MFSPs) to support MIS integration with the Maternity Cash Benefit Programme (MCBP), with the objective of reducing payment bounce-back rates. API integration with MFS providers	4	API integration with MFS providers has not been completed.	On-track

⁴⁵ Technical & Madrasha Education Division (TMED), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Fisheries & Livestock (MoFL), Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), Medical Education & Family Welfare Division (MEFWD), Health Services Division (HSD), Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare & Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), Rural Development & Cooperatives Division (RD&CD), Ministry of Youth & Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), Ministry of Industries (MoInd), Ministry of Textiles & Jute (MoTJ), Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC)

⁴⁶ Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief (MoDMR), Technical & Madrasha Education Division (TMED), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Fisheries & Livestock (MoFL), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Medical Education & Family Welfare Division (MEFWD), Health Services Division (HSD), Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare & Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), Rural Development & Cooperatives Division (RD&CD), Ministry of Youth & Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), Ministry of Industries (MoInd), Ministry of Textiles & Jute (MoTJ), Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC).

providers and the Bangladesh Bank to reduce the rate of bounce back. Sensitize beneficiaries on financial inclusion procedures.	awareness materials were developed and disseminated .		Affairs (MoWCA)	is currently underway.			
Develop and introduce Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to regularize timely disbursement of beneficiary payment.	A clearly defined standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is available to ensure monthly disbursement .	Dec-22	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	DWA has developed and introduced a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) under the Detailed Implementation Plan to standardise processes and ensure the timely disbursement of beneficiary payments.	5	SOP was developed and introduced.	Completed
Average Score for G2P system					4.56		
C. Strengthen beneficiary selection							
Update manual for selection procedures and disseminate to people	Circular issued	Dec-22	All relevant line ministries	Implementation manuals for several major social protection programmes—including the Widow Allowance Programme, Livelihood Improvement Programme for Marginalised People, Disability Benefit Programme, Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP), Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB), and the Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP)—have been updated. The Old Age Allowance implementation manual was revised by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), but it is yet to receive approval from the Cabinet Division. In addition, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) has updated the EGPP implementation manual by incorporating climate-adaptive actions. For several other social protection schemes, beneficiary selection manuals have not been updated.	4	The implementation manuals for major cash-based social protection programmes have been updated.	On-track
Publish updated list of beneficiaries online	Updated list available online	Jun-24	All relevant line ministries	Beneficiary lists are not publicly available online. However, the lists can be accessed by relevant ministries through programme-level MIS platforms that are integrated with the SPBMU-MIS.	3	Beneficiary data are accessible through SPBMU-MIS.	Moderately on-track
Create Bangladesh Household Database with Geographic Information System (GIS) and socioeconomic	Database created	Dec-22	Statistics and Informatics Division (SID)	The Statistics and Informatics Division (SID) conducted a census covering approximately 35 million households with the objective of developing a National Household Database (NHD). Due to significant data quality issues and the lack of integration with the National ID (NID) system, the database could not be completed or released.	1	SID could not release the household database.	Seriously off-track

condition of people				In the absence of an operational NHD, the Finance Division, MoSW, and MoWCA initiated the development of a Dynamic Social Registry for four social protection programmes, relying on self-reported applicant data collected through online applications.			
Follow poverty database of BBS (when available)	Instructions given	Jun-22	All relevant line ministries	SID could not release the household database. Because the household database was not made available, some ministries—particularly MoSW—have developed customised beneficiary selection systems. Under this approach, applications are submitted online and require households to provide socio-economic information across 41 indicators. These self-reported data are used to generate a poverty score, similar to a Proxy Means Test (PMT), which then informs beneficiary selection. This approach is expected to be expanded through the ongoing development of the Dynamic Social Registry.	3	In the absence of household database, MoSW is using self-reported applicants data for poverty scoring and beneficiary selection.	Moderately on-track
Review, update, and disseminate VWB and Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) implementation guidelines	MCBP and VWB implementation guidelines available	Dec-22	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) reviewed and approved the MCBP implementation directive and the VWB targeting guidelines in 2024, and also approved the new beneficiary enrolment system for the VWB programme cycle. The VWB MIS has achieved interoperability with the Widow Allowance MIS, contributing to improved targeting accuracy. MoWCA also drafted a communication and campaign strategy for MCBP and VWB, and developed, printed, and disseminated outreach materials with technical assistance from WFP. To strengthen evidence-based targeting for the 2023–2024 VWB cycle, MoWCA—supported by WFP—upgraded web-based cloud infrastructure and refined system design in line with updated guidelines. A mobile application for the VWB programme was also developed to enable both online and offline service delivery, particularly for vulnerable populations in remote areas.	5	MoWCA has reviewed and updated implementation manuals for MCBP and VWB programmes.	Completed
MCBP and VWB MIS Integration with BBS database (NHD) when prepared	BBS database integrated and used for beneficiary selection	Continuous	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The SID-led NHD initiative has been discontinued, and the household database is not currently used for beneficiary selection in social protection programmes.	No score	As the database has not been released, this action is not relevant for MoWCA.	
Develop verifiable indicators following Proxy Means Test (PMT) to reduce inclusion/exclusion errors	Clearly defined indicators (rural and urban contexts) prepared	Jan-22	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	MoWCA has developed well-defined PMT indicators for the MCBP and VWB programmes, with technical support from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and WFP, to identify eligible beneficiaries in both rural and urban contexts.	5	MoWCA has developed PMT indicators.	Completed
Average Score for G2P system					3.50		
D. Grievance Redress System (GRS)							
Arrange for	Instruction	Contin	Relevant	The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), among others, has made	4	Field-level complaints recording	On-track

recording complaints at field level	issued	uous	line ministries 47	significant progress in strengthening the grievance redress system. The ministry operationalised a single, comprehensive online Grievance Redress System (GRS) starting in FY2025-26. The system is accessible at all administrative levels and is designed to receive complaints from both general citizens and programme beneficiaries. It is integrated as a dedicated “window” within the main MIS portal and is actively used, particularly following benefit disbursement cycles. The internal workflow is structured and time-bound: grievances routed to the ministry level must be resolved within three days by the responsible officer. If this deadline is missed, automated reminders are issued, followed by escalation alerts to supervisory authorities to ensure accountability. More complex grievances can be escalated to a higher tier for resolution. From the user perspective, the system promotes transparency by providing a tracking ID and clearly communicating expected resolution timelines. Under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), Project Implementation Officers (PIOs) have been assigned at the upazila level to record complaints at the field level. This action is not relevant for many agencies that are not involved in social protection interventions; for example, the Ministry of Land does not administer any social protection programmes.		is not uniform across the line ministries/divisions/departments.	
Create public awareness about the Central GRS of the Cabinet Division	Public meetings held in all Upazilas	Jul-23	Relevant line ministries 48	The MoSW also undertook initiatives to socialise the online grievance system by organising public meetings prior to its operationalisation. A key feature highlighted during outreach is the system’s initial screening step: applicants who identify themselves as non-beneficiaries are asked whether they have already received information about the programme from field officials. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) has drafted awareness materials and is preparing to pilot them in selected locations with support from WFP. Other ministries, divisions, and departments organise public meetings on the	4	Public awarness initiatives are not uniform across line ministries. One major challenge of the central GRS is that it covers all grievances under the public institutions. It was basically developed to address the grivances of citizens receiving services from government offices. There is not particular	On-track

⁴⁷ Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), Ministry of Food (MoFood), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), Medical Education and Family Welfare Division (MEFWD), Health Services Division (HSD), Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), Rural Development & Cooperatives Division (RD&CD), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Housing and Public Works (MoHPW), Ministry of Land (MoLand), Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), Ministry of Industries (MoInd), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)

⁴⁸ Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), Ministry of Food (MoFood), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), Medical Education and Family Welfare Division (MEFWD), Health Services Division (HSD), Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), Rural Development & Cooperatives Division (RD&CD), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Housing and Public Works (MoHPW), Ministry of Land (MoLand), Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), Ministry of Industries (MoInd), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)

				central GRS at the upazila level on an irregular basis. As with other actions, this is not relevant for ministries and agencies that are not engaged in social protection service delivery.		central GRS for social protection programmes.	
Integrate Mother and Child Benefit Programme MIS with Cabinet-led GRS mechanism	GRS integrated into MCBP and VWB MIS	Continuous	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Department of Women Affairs (DWA) regularly receives and resolves complaints through its central GRS platform. In addition, MoWCA has initiated the design and introduction of a comprehensive grievance redress mechanism for social protection programmes, linking field-level offices through a single hotline number aligned with the national GRS framework.	5	MCBP and VWB MIS are integrated with central GRS.	Completed
Encourage NGOs in supporting GRS	General instructions issued	Jun-22	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR)	At the field level, district and upazila officers organise meetings with NGOs on an ad hoc basis, where programme-related instructions are shared informally.	4	No formal documented instructions have been issued yet.	On-track
Instruct Union Digital Centres (UDCs) to receive and forward grievances to UNO offices	UDCs sensitised	Mar-23	Local Government Division (LGD)	Although instructions on grievance handling were issued earlier, updated or regular instructions are not disseminated consistently.	No scoring		
Formation of Grievance Redress Committee and staff training	G&A Progress Report submitted	Jun-22	Financial Institutions Division (FID)	Progress reports related to grievance redress are submitted on a regular basis.	No scoring		
Roll out GRS for social security governance	Sensitisation workshops organised (4-5 districts/year)	Continuous	Cabinet Division	Sensitisation workshops are organised annually in four to five districts. In parallel, the Cabinet Division has introduced a second-generation version of the GRS software to further strengthen functionality and system performance.	5	2nd generation GRS was introduced.	Completed
Average Score for G2P system					4.40		
E. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)							
Digitize monitoring of programmes; review dashboard regularly	Dashboard established; Progress monitoring digitised; Review dashboard	Continuous	Relevant line ministries ⁴⁹	Dashboards have been established for social protection programmes that operate with MIS platforms, and these MIS dashboards are reviewed on a regular basis to support programme monitoring and management.	4	Dashboards have not been established for social protection programmes that do not operate with MIS platforms.	On-track

⁴⁹ Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief (MoDMR), Ministry of Primary & Mass Education (MoPME), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Medical Education & Family Welfare Division (MEFWD), Health Services Division (HSD), Rural Development & Cooperatives Division (RD&CD), Ministry of Youth & Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Housing & Public Works (MoHPW), Ministry of Land (MoLand), Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), Ministry of Industries (MoInd), Ministry of Textiles & Jute (MoTJ), Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC)

	regularly						
Conduct mid-term and end-term evaluations of the programme	Programme evaluated regularly	Continuous	Relevant line ministries 50	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) initiated an impact evaluation of the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) programme in 2025 with technical support from WFP. In addition, evaluations are routinely undertaken for project-based social protection interventions.	4	Undertaking evaluations is not within the formal mandate of line ministries, and these ministries require additional technical and financial support to commission or conduct rigorous evaluations.	On-track
Conduct a couple of research/ studies under MCBP and VWB to assess programme and process outcomes.	Assessment and research report available and recommendation incorporated in programme design	Dec-23	Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA)	MoWCA has undertaken a wide range of learning and evaluation activities. These include a joint learning assessment of the VWB self-registration process conducted in 2022, with findings published; an assessment of the impact of the Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) on children's cognitive development conducted jointly with WFP and published in 2024; completion of the ICVGD baseline study and submission of the report; completion of the ICVGD regional livelihood mapping study with report submission; a Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) study on MCBP conducted and disseminated in 2024 with support from the EU and UNICEF; and research undertaken jointly with WFP and IFPRI on leveraging social transfer programmes in Bangladesh to improve nutrition outcomes, with the final report expected in 2026. In addition, the ICVGD endline evaluation report was published and disseminated at the National Social Protection Conference in 2025, while the baseline survey for the VWB impact study has been completed and the final report is under preparation.	5	Several studies related to social protection programmes have been conducted.	Completed
Review the role of NGOs in programme implementation and allocate required human resources at union level and technical resources to fully operationalize MIS unit.	The role of NGO reviewed and defined in programmes implementation. Submitted human, technical, and financial resources proposals to FD and MoPA.	Dec-23	Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA)	Instead of relying on NGOs, MoWCA introduced a resource pool composed of government frontline workers to facilitate beneficiary training under the MCBP.	2	The role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in programme implementation has not been formally reviewed.	Moderately off-track
Use CODI for assessing	CODI framework	Jun 2023 &	Ministry of Disaster	A CODI assessment was conducted under the SSPS programme with the involvement of the Cabinet Division, the Finance	No score	The CODI framework is used by the SSPS programme and the	

⁵⁰ Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA), Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief (MoDMR), Ministry of Primary & Mass Education (MoPME), Ministry of Liberation War Affairs (MoLWA), Ministry of Labour & Employment (MoLE), Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare & Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), Rural Development & Cooperatives Division (RD&CD).

programmes	used for assessments	Jun 2025	Management & Relief (MoDMR)	Division, and the General Economics Division (GED).		European Union to assess progress in social protection. Its application does not fall within the mandate of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR).	
Develop coordination mechanisms and monitoring guidelines for Workplace Childcare Services	Monitoring guidelines available	Jan-24	Ministry of Women & Children Affairs (MoWCA)	The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) undertook several initiatives to strengthen coordination mechanisms for workplace childcare services. The Day Care Act was enacted in 2021, and the Day Care Rules (2022) have been drafted and are currently under revision for finalisation.	4	The Day Care Rules has not been adopted yet.	On-track
Review M&E reports of line ministries	M&E report reviewed	Continuous	Cabinet Division	Monitoring and evaluation reports are prepared and reviewed on a regular basis. The Cabinet Division routinely prepares progress reports on the implementation of the NSSS Action Plan; however, the progress report was not prepared in 2025.	4	The NSSS Action Plan progress report was not prepared in 2025.	On-track
Oversee implementation of reform action plans through 2nd Mid-Term Review (MTR)	2nd MTR commissioned	Dec-23	Cabinet Division	A mid-term review (MTR) of the NSSS reform was commissioned and conducted by an independent think tank, focusing on implementation progress during Action Plan Phase I. A second MTR was not undertaken. However, the Cabinet Division has commissioned a final review of the NSSS, which is currently being carried out by an independent research organization.	5	A midterm implementation review of the NSSS was conducted, and the final implementation review is currently underway.	Completed
Review the existing M&E system of social security	Report prepared on prevailing M&E system	Jun-22	General Economics Division (GED)	The General Economics Division (GED) has reviewed the monitoring and evaluation system for social protection programmes.	5	The review was undertaken.	Completed
Monitor implementation of ongoing projects and report to CMC	Component-wise physical & financial progress reported	2021-22 to 2025-26	Implementation Monitoring & Evaluation Division (IMED)	Project-based social protection programmes are monitored and evaluated by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED). However, IMED does not undertake evaluations of tax-financed social protection programmes.	4	The IMED does not evaluate tax-financed social protection programmes, as this falls outside its formal mandate.	On-track
Average Score for G2P system					4.11		
F. CMC-led Cluster							
Organize regular meetings of the Central Management Committee (CMC)	At least two meetings organized per year	Continuous	Cabinet Division	The Central Monitoring Committee (CMC) held regular meetings following the adoption of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS). During the implementation of Action Plan Phase I, the CMC convened 15 meetings. In comparison, five meetings were held during Phase II.	4	The frequency of meetings during Phase II was affected by several external factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the national election, and political instability during July-August 2024.	On-track
Follow up on implementation of	Progress reviewed	Continuous	Cabinet Division	Implementation progress was regularly reviewed through CMC and focal point meetings. However, as noted above, the	3	Meetings held irregularly.	Moderately on-track

CMC decisions	regularly through CMC and Focal Point meetings			regularity of CMC meetings declined during Phase II, and focal point meetings were also held less consistently during this period.			
Integrate Social Protection reform plan into Annual Performance Agreement (APA)	SP reforms plan integrated into APA	Dec-22	Cabinet Division	Social protection reform actions were incorporated into the Annual Performance Agreement (APA) framework. However, the APA is no longer operational, having been replaced in August 2025 by the Government Performance Monitoring System (GPMS). The GPMS has been designed to be more pragmatic and dynamic, with a stronger emphasis on long-term results.	5	Achived.	Completed
Capacity building of thematic clusters	At least 2 training programmes conducted each year	Continous	Cabinet Division	During the implementation of Action Plan Phase II, more than 20 capacity-building training programmes were conducted. While these initiatives contributed to strengthening institutional capacity, greater alignment of training activities with the reform priorities outlined in the NSSS would have further enhanced their effectiveness. In addition, structured orientation and capacity-building programmes for newly appointed NSSS focal points on strategic reform areas were limited.	5	Achived.	Completed
Strengthen and operationalize field-level management committees (DivMC, DMC, UMC)	Training programmes organized in at least 10 districts annually	Continous	Cabinet Division	Training programmes were implemented across all districts to strengthen the technical capacity of field-level management committees, including Divisional, District, and Upazila Management Committees (DivMC, DMC, and UMC). Several training sessions were also organised for Union Parishad Chairmen, Secretaries, and members, focusing on key aspects of social protection, particularly targeting and beneficiary selection processes.	5	Achived.	Completed
Organize dialogues and conferences with DPs and NGOs	At least one national dialogue/conference organized each year	Continous	Cabinet Division	Two national conferences on social protection and one national workshop were organised during the implementation of NSSS Action Plan Phase II. These events brought together policymakers, practitioners, experts, and field-level officials to discuss social protection priorities and emerging challenges.	5	Achived.	Completed
Publish reports highlighting government achievements in social security	Annual Report and Flow of External Resources including NSSS funding published	Continous	Economic Relations Division (ERD)	The Economic Relations Division (ERD) regularly publishes annual reports on external resource flows for all externally financed development projects, including those supporting social protection reforms. Since FY2023–24, the Finance Division has also been publishing the Social Protection Budget Report, which provides updates on social protection programmes, management information systems (MIS), government-to-person (G2P) payments, and social protection financing.	4	The social protection budget reports were not published before 2023-24.	On-track
Coordinate with Development Partners for fund mobilisation in social security programmes	External assistance mobilised for NSSS-related projects	Continous	Economic Relations Division (ERD)	Development partner engagement in social protection has expanded since the COVID-19 period. Several partners, including the World Bank, ADB, IMF, EU, and the Government of Germany, have provided budget support and policy-based lending with a focus on social protection reforms. In addition, a range of development partners and international organisations—such as FCDO, DFAT, UNICEF, WFP, ILO, and GIZ—have extended	5	Achieved.	Completed

				technical assistance and external resources to support ongoing reforms.			
Average Score for G2P system					4.50		