



SUMMARY BRIEF



BANGLADESH: TIME-USE SURVEY 2021

Photo: UN Women/Tasfiq Mahmood

INTRODUCTION

Unpaid household work, ranging from caregiving to cooking, cleaning and other domestic work, is predominantly done by women. In fact, globally more than three-quarters of all unpaid care and domestic work is shouldered by women, and two-thirds of care workers are women.¹ Due to gender-based inequalities, stereotypes and power imbalances, the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work acts as a critical obstacle to women’s participation in the labour market and to their economic empowerment.

While unpaid care and domestic work is essential for economies to function, it is largely unrecognized, undervalued and unremunerated. Because it is left out of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) calculations, it is excluded from policy discourses and national budgets and not captured by the System of National Accounts (SNA) – the internationally agreed standard on how to measure economic activity.

As an emerging economy, Bangladesh is set to graduate from its United Nations classification as a Least Developed Country (LDC) in 2026.² Moreover, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Bangladesh achieved the highest gender parity in South Asia for the ninth consecutive year, ranking in 59th place globally. Women’s participation in the labour force has increased from 36% in 2017 to 42.8% in 2022.⁴ Yet as the country’s first time-use survey reveals, women also do the lion’s share of unpaid work.

THE TIME-USE SURVEY

Time-use surveys are useful tools to investigate how women and men divide their time between paid work, care and housework, studies, personal care and leisure activities.

In 2021, with technical and financial support from UN Women’s Women Count programme, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) conducted its first-ever [Time-Use Survey](#) (TUS) – a timely undertaking as the COVID-19 pandemic unraveled a care crisis.⁵ The TUS offers important insights into how gender roles shape the division of labour between women and men, and according to various demographic criteria beyond sex, such as geographical location, age, marital status, educational attainment and employment.

The TUS is radically shifting how gender statistics are used, produced and promoted to inform policy and advocacy on gender equality.⁶ The findings from the survey report has enabled Bangladesh to set a baseline to monitor progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 5.4.1⁷ for the first time.

Knowing how women and men spend their time in a 24-hour period will also help policymakers implement and evaluate programmes to reduce burdens on women, such as childcare policies. The survey has been used to update the 2011 National Women Development Policy Action Plan and there is now a dedicated indicator on unpaid care in the Gender Strategy for the country's 8th Five-Year Plan⁸.

In addition, the creation of a satellite account based on TUS data to measure the contribution of women's unpaid work to the economy is already underway (see p3).

BOX:

The survey process

Scope: The Bangladesh TUS was a nationally representative survey of 8,000 households and 17,770 respondents aged 15 and above across 64 districts.

Preparation: Multiple specialized and intensive trainings were organized for 100 enumerators, supervisors, data editors, coders and other BBS staff on the TUS methodology, questionnaire and data collection.

Data collection: Primary data collection was carried out in early 2021. The questionnaire was administered via paper-assisted personnel interviews by eight mobile field teams, each comprising one field supervisor and five enumerators. Since the survey was carried out during COVID-19, extra measures were adopted to ensure the health and safety of the enumerators, supervisors and respondents.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE TIME-USE SURVEY



On average, women in Bangladesh spend less time on paid work per day, compared to men. Men's work is generally perceived as more important than women's, by both sexes, reinforcing traditional stereotypes.



This highlights the persistent gendered division of labour in households. At least half of respondents also report believing in traditional gender roles.



>90% of respondents irrespective of their sex, age, residence, division, literacy or education, believe that both husband and wife should earn an income for the family.



Women take up responsibilities such as childcare and caring for dependent adults, indicating societal expectations of women as innate 'caregivers.'

Tasks like cooking and elderly care are mainly assigned to women.

Still, employed women see no reduction in their unpaid care and domestic work burdens.

Women devote most of their time to household chores, adding a "double shift" for women who work outside their homes.

Although urban women, especially women living in Dhaka, spend more time in employment-related activities, their time spent in domestic and care work remains the same as their rural women counterparts.

Women of prime working and child-bearing age bear the highest burden on unpaid care and domestic work.

Age	Time spent per day	
	Women	Men
25–44 years	7.1 hrs	0.9 hrs

The burden is pervasive, regardless of location.

The unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work persists across different locations, suggesting that women in their prime working and child-rearing years bear this burden consistently.



Women do
6-8x

as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, irrespective of where they live.

The burden of care increases significantly after marriage.



Married women bear

7.5x higher caregiving loads as men and
3.8x as much as unmarried women

Societal attitudes are shifting among youth.

Younger people (18–30 years) show greater gender sensitivity, suggesting a gradual shift in attitudes.

Believe that men’s work is more important than women’s	18–30	31+
		60%

Moreover, 8.3% fewer women and 3.4% fewer men aged 18–30 believe that men have the right to beat their wives if they feel displeased.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

According to Matiar Rahman, Former Director General of the BBS, the data generated from the TUS provide a snapshot of people’s daily lives and are a rich source of information for the formulation and implementation of programmes on women’s empowerment.

The data confirm the gendered division of unpaid care and domestic work in Bangladeshi households, which continues to hinder gender equality. The unequal distribution of care and domestic work limits women’s opportunities for paid employment, contributes to their overall time poverty and affects their well-being. Failure to take these factors into account can lead to ineffective economic, social and environmental policies.

Based on the TUS data, the Parliamentary Standing Committee for the Ministry of Planning requested the creation of a Household Production Satellite Account⁹ to measure the economic value of unpaid work. This statistical tool will be instrumental in measuring the economic importance of unpaid work by assessing its share in the extended economy. This will, in turn, allow policymakers to both implement and evaluate gender-responsive care policies, services and infrastructure. It will also promote women’s access to decent work opportunities.

At a 2023 [Executive Committee meeting of the National Economic Council](#), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called for women’s unpaid household work to be brought into the calculation of the country’s GDP. This request has further escalated the creation of the Satellite Account as a national priority and will be a key Women Count intervention.



NEXT STEPS

Under Phase II of Women Count, BBS, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), UN Women and national experts are collaborating to create the Household Production Satellite Account in 2024. UN Women and the ADB are providing technical guidance to BBS based on three thematic areas – employment, unpaid care and domestic work, and the unpaid production of goods.

UN Women has also supported the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to update the National Action Plan for the National Women's Development Policy, informed by the TUS findings and reflecting a strong commitment to improve gender statistics. The new Action Plan, covering

48 ministries, includes activities such as the regular publication of gender budget reports and calling for the collection of sex-disaggregated data by all ministries and agencies. Importantly, it includes actions to assess and account for the economic value of unpaid care and domestic work in formal accounting systems.

UN Women will also actively advocate for the potential use of the Satellite Account to influence the upcoming 9th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) and to inform policies and initiatives related to care. This initiative will build on the current Gender Strategy and commitment to SDG Indicator 5.4.1 outlined in the 8th Five-Year Plan.

BOX 2

About WomenCount Bangladesh

Women Count is the gender data programme at UN Women and aims to create a radical shift in how gender statistics are prioritized, produced and used to inform policy change. Women Count Bangladesh started in 2018, and aims to support the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in producing, using and analysing gender statistics to facilitate the monitoring and reporting of the SDGs. It further seeks to enhance BBS's institutional capacity to minimize the gender data gap to meet both national and international monitoring commitments.

Now in its second phase, Women Count Bangladesh will continue to strengthen gender statistics coordination through an inter-agency mechanism, technical support and training on data production and use, and continued support to the BBS and its affiliates to produce data on violence against women and women's economic empowerment. Women Count will also advocate for the use of newly available data in programming and policymaking.



Download

Time Use Survey 2021

<https://data.unwomen.org/publications/bangladesh-time-use-survey-2021>

Opportunities for collaboration

Want to learn more about Women Count?

Visit: <https://data.unwomen.org/>

Contact person on UN Women's support to Bangladesh on TUS and gender data:

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Current Partners

Women Count Phase II currently benefits from generous support from the Governments of Australia, France, Ireland, Italy and Sweden and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. As key partners of the programme, each donor is represented on the Executive Donor Committee and Steering Committee, which help guide the implementation of the programme.

1. ILO. 2018. "Care Work and Care Jobs - for the future of decent work." insert link for the title https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/dgreports/-/dcomm/-/publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf
2. UN. 2023. [Least Developed Country Category: Bangladesh Profile](#).
3. World Economic Forum. 2023. ["Global Gender Gap Report."](#)
4. BBS. 2023. ["Labour Force Survey 2022 Bangladesh."](#)
5. Since the survey was conducted during COVID-19, the analysis may have yielded unexpected results due to the possible effect of the pandemic on the time spent on various activities.
6. UN Women. 2023. ["Women Count Phase II brief."](#)
7. Proportion of time spent on unpaid care and domestic work, by sex, age and location.
8. Jen Ross. 2022. ["Bangladesh blazes trails on measuring women's unpaid work."](#) 31 March. UN Women's Data Hub.
9. A Household Production Satellite Account seeks to acknowledge the economic production taking place in households. It assigns a monetary value (shadow wage) to the time spent on providing unpaid care and domestic services and is included in input-output tables for computing GDP.