

Why are urban women disappearing from the manufacturing sector?



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Despite rising exports and growth in the overall labour force, female employment in urban industries is collapsing. However, women in Bangladesh's manufacturing sector are not voluntarily leaving the workforce; they are losing their foothold in the industry.

Although total female employment in Bangladesh increased from 1.82 crore in 2013 to 2.37 crore in 2024, as per the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2024, this growth has occurred almost entirely in rural Bangladesh. In urban areas, female employment has actually declined from 45 lakh to 39 lakh, while the urban female labour force participation rate has dropped sharply from 33 percent in 2013 to just 23 percent in 2024.

The data reveal that women are not leaving the workforce en masse; they are being pushed out of one sector in particular: manufacturing. Female employment in agriculture has nearly doubled, increasing from approximately 90 lakh in 2013 to 1.7 crore in 2024. However, in manufacturing, female employment has halved, decreasing from approximately 38 lakh to just 19.5 lakh during the same period.

The sharp decline in female employment in urban manufacturing is driven mainly by the ready-made garment (RMG) and textile industries. In 2012, Bangladesh exported \$22 billion worth of RMG products. By 2024, that figure had reached \$38.48 billion. Yet total RMG employment during this period did not increase at the same rate. Notably, the share

of female employees in this sector has fallen during this time.

These trends point to several key reasons behind the crisis that we must ponder upon.

First, as any economics student learns early on, output can rise even as labour remains unchanged when production becomes more capital-intensive. This is precisely what is happening in Bangladesh's garment sector. Many factories have invested heavily in advanced machinery to stay globally competitive. These machines require less labour and fewer labour hours, reducing the need for workers to produce the same output. Women are often the first to lose their jobs in this transformation because they are concentrated in low-wage, entry-level roles such as cutting, packaging or working as helpers, precisely the jobs most vulnerable to automation. Studies estimate that up to 48 percent of jobs in the cutting section alone are at risk of automation.

Second, skill disparities between men and women aggravate this problem. LFS data show that men receive a far more diverse range of training in fields such as welding, driving, and computer-related skills, while most women are trained in RMG, craftwork, or beauty services. This lack of transferable skills severely limits women's options if they lose their manufacturing jobs, restricting their ability to transition into new sectors or take on new roles.

Third, Bangladesh has built an economic "cocoon" around the RMG industry, shielding it from

competition and discouraging diversification. The sector enjoys several state-backed incentives such as duty drawbacks, bonded warehouse facilities, and direct cash benefits. They also face fewer regulatory and financial challenges than other industries, as evident from the World Bank Enterprise Survey (2022), which shows that RMG firms

investors venture beyond RMG, leaving the economy structurally dependent on a single sector and women with few alternatives once they lose their jobs in this particular industry.

A contrasting example is seen in East Asian countries such as Vietnam, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea. As these countries

nowhere else to turn.

Finally, structural barriers such as safety and security concerns, as well as the provision of childcare support, further constrain women's participation. The rising cost of living makes childcare increasingly expensive, and there are too few day-care centres and nurseries. As a result, many women are forced back

responsibility to drop-off and pick-up their child from school.

The path to reversing these trends is difficult but not impossible. Bangladesh must place all manufacturing sectors on an equal footing, ensuring fair competition and reducing policy distortions that favour RMG alone. In other words, we need a robust diversification in the manufacturing industry. The government should also launch a large-scale reskilling initiative, for example, training 100,000 women each year, focused on cutting-edge machine operation, automation, driving, catering, and other skills aligned with future labour market demands. Training for care work, nursing and language skills could open up millions of overseas employment opportunities for women.

It is equally important to build a social infrastructure that supports working women. Accessible childcare, extended school hours, and after-school programmes would significantly increase women's ability to participate in formal employment. Extending school hours to 9am-3pm, with time allocated for play or extracurricular activities, would alleviate this burden. After-school care services could also help, allowing children to remain in a safe environment until their parents finish work. Expanding such support systems is essential for enabling women to participate in the urban manufacturing sector.

Women must not be confined to their homes. Instead, they must have the freedom to choose their future from various alternatives and the capacity to seize the opportunities that arise. This is what Amartya Sen described as "development as freedom." Ensuring this "freedom" is not optional, it is mandatory. As a nation, we must achieve it; otherwise, our society will go downhill.



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FILE PHOTO: STAR

report some of the lowest obstacles in areas such as access to finance and tax administration.

In such a policy environment, why would businesses invest in non-RMG sectors when it is easier and more profitable to stay within the RMG sector? This monolithic focus dampens diversification and limits the emergence of new industries. Only the most determined or visionary

moved across the value chain from RMG, they simultaneously nurtured new manufacturing and service sectors. Electronics, automobile production, logistics, and hospitality grew alongside RMG, widening employment opportunities for women. Bangladesh has yet to follow this path. Its failure to diversify means that when women lose manufacturing jobs, they often have

into unpaid household labour or informal work. Education policies also contribute to the problem. The typical primary school day in Bangladesh lasts just four hours: from 8am to 11am or noon, compared to about seven to eight hours in most developed countries. Short school hours make it difficult for women with children to pursue full-time work, as they often have the

Gaza's endless waiting and the cruel cycle of hope and despair

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In Gaza, hope has become both a necessity and a burden. After years of broken promises, failed ceasefires, and devastating wars, Palestinians are once again clinging to the faint possibility that a powerful external actor, this time US President Donald Trump, might succeed where others have failed and bring an end to a conflict that has defined and destroyed generations.

The desperation was palpable in recent interviews with Gazans. "We want President Trump to keep pushing for an end to the war," said 32-year-old Saoud Qarneya, a resident of Gaza City, whose house was flattened in Israeli bombings. "Everything has been damaged, everything is destroyed." For Saoud, and millions like her, the plea is less about admiration for Trump and more about exhaustion with endless war and diplomatic stagnation. Two years into Israel's latest offensive, which began in October 2023, at least 67,000 Palestinians have been killed, while more than two million remain trapped in what has long been described as one of the world's most densely populated open-air prisons. Gaza has become a landscape of ruins with homes reduced to rubble, schools and hospitals bombed, and entire neighbourhoods turned into graveyards.

However, after multiple failed ceasefires and false dawns, many now cling to the idea that perhaps, this time, a political shake-up in Washington might alter the calculus. Some view Trump as unpredictable and therefore capable of driving change. Others are simply too tired for the faintest prospect of relief. "Every day of delay costs lives in Gaza," said Tamer al-Burai, a businessman displaced with his family in central Gaza. "Maybe Trump will bring us real peace this time."

But history offers little reason for optimism. The pattern over the years has been tragically consistent: high-profile negotiations, temporary truces, and renewed bombardment. This cycle of ceasefire and escalation has become so familiar that many no longer dare to believe peace

is possible. This war has been unbelievably brutal. Besides the widespread devastation, restrictions on humanitarian aid have pushed Gaza into famine. The United Nations has repeatedly warned of catastrophic humanitarian conditions, yet global diplomatic responses remain muted and fragmented.

For Palestinians in Gaza, waiting has become a central part of existence. They wait for electricity, water, aid trucks, and for the skies to quiet down. They wait for ceasefires that may or may not materialise, for negotiations that may collapse at any moment, for leaders to stop using their lives as bargaining chips. This waiting is both a survival

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Aya, 31, who was displaced with her family to Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, captured this sentiment poignantly. "Maybe there is a chance the war ends..." she said. "We feared, however, that Israel would not stop. Netanyahu always finds a way to continue the war."

This oscillation between hope and despair has deep psychological consequences. For children growing up in Gaza, war is not an interruption of normal life—it is their normal life. Entire generations have known nothing but displacement, bombings, and the constant threat of death. For adults, the trauma

compounds with each new round of violence. Many Gazans have lived through three, four, or even five wars in their lifetime. They rebuild homes, schools, and communities, only to watch them collapse again.

The international community has been both a witness and, in many ways, a participant in this cycle. Diplomatic statements expressing "concern" are rarely followed by decisive action. Ceasefire negotiations are often rushed, fragile, and lack enforceable mechanisms. Violations go unpunished. Calls for accountability are sidelined by geopolitical interests. As a result, Gazans have learned to expect very little from the world.

The current round of waiting centres on whether Trump's 20-point proposal aimed at ending the war in Gaza might change anything.

But Gaza's plight should not hinge on the whims of any single political figure. The problem is not the lack of negotiations; it is the lack of accountability and political will to enforce international law. Israel's military actions, including targeting civilian infrastructure and restricting aid, have been widely condemned by human rights organisations. Yet, without consequences, these condemnations ring hollow.

Breaking this cruel cycle requires more than a mediator. It requires a fundamental shift in how the international community engages with the conflict: prioritising civilian protection, ensuring accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, and addressing the root political causes rather than managing symptoms. It means empowering Palestinian voices in any negotiation, not sidelining them. It means treating Gaza not as a geopolitical chessboard but as a home to millions of human beings who deserve security, dignity, and a future.

For now, Gazans wait again. They wait for the bombs to stop, for borders to open, for a ceasefire that holds, for a future that has always been just out of reach. This endless waiting is not just a tragedy; it is an indictment of a world that has grown accustomed to watching suffering from a distance.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Changes

Bangladesh Forest Department

Office of the Divisional Forest Officer

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Memo No. 22.01.0000.000.654.29.001.25.4770

Date: 08.10.2025

e-Tender Notice

This is to notify to all concern that the following e-Tenders (OTM) have been invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following works & goods:

Sl.	e-Tender ID No.	Package No.	Name of goods/works	Date & time of publication on e-GP	Last date & time for selling/downloading tender document	Tender closing date & time
01.	1160495	TFD/Sal Forest/2025 -26/W-03	Establishment of Deer Breeding center and Wild Boar Breeding Center at Lahoria Bit, Jatio Uddan Sador, under Tangail Forest Division.	12 October 2025 at 13:30pm	27-October 2025 up to 12:00pm	27-October-2025 15.00pm
02.	1160775	TFD/Sal Forest/2025 -26/W-04	Fire lines created to prevent forest fires at Jatio Uddan Sador, Dokhola, Modhupur and Aronkhola Range under Tangail Forest Division.	12 October 2025 at 13:30pm	27-October 2025 up to 12:00pm	27-October-2025 15.00pm
03.	1160777	TFD/Sal Forest/2025 -26/W-05	Expanding and renovating Gargaria Lake at Jatio Uddan Sador, under Tangail Forest Division.	12 October 2025 at 13:40pm	27-October 2025 up to 12:00pm	27-October-2025 15.00pm
04.	1160778	TFD/Sal Forest/2025 -26/W-06	Re-excavation/renovation of 10 ponds under Modhupur National Park, under Tangail Forest Division.	12 October 2025 at 13:40pm	27-October 2025 up to 12:00pm	27- October-2025 15.00pm
05.	1160779	TFD/Sal Forest/2025 -26/W-07	Installing ropeways at the designated locations at Modhupur, under Tangail Forest Division.	12 October 2025 at 13:50pm	27-October 2025 up to 12:00pm	27-October-2025 15.00pm

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd) (+8809609112233, +880176225528, +8801762625529).

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