

Addressing the Vulnerability and Fragility of Young People in Bangladesh





Background

Vulnerability is a term used to describe a state or condition of being susceptible to harm, damage, or negative impacts. It may arise due to different causes and can be of various forms. Vulnerability to poverty measures the probability that the consumption of a household will lie below the predetermined poverty line in the near future due to the presence of shocks, risks, uncertainty, or other unforeseen events. Vulnerability to employment means the condition or factors that make it harder for people to find and keep a steady job. Vulnerability to the environment means how easily people, communities, or nature can be harmed by things like environmental changes or disasters. The concept of vulnerability with regard to young people implies the ones who are more exposed to risks than their peers. Vulnerability among young people often arises from a combination of factors, including - limited access to education, healthcare, employment, social support, and protection from harm, as well as exposure to adverse environmental and economic conditions. Vulnerable young people may face barriers to achieving their full potential and may require targeted interventions and support to overcome these challenges and build resilience.

In this context, this study tries:

- Identifying the most vulnerable cohorts of the young people in Bangladesh
- Highlighting the key dimensions of the vulnerability of the young people in Bangladesh
- Analysing the possible causes of the vulnerability of the young people

As a part of this study, SANEM in collaboration with ActionAid Bangladesh conducted a survey to assess the current scenario of the vulnerability of young people in Bangladesh. The survey was based on a short questionnaire covering all the major dimensions of the vulnerability of youth. The sample size of this survey was 382, covering five divisions of Bangladesh, namely Barisal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Khulna and Rangpur. The participants of the survey were young people aged between 15-35 from different vulnerable regions of the country, such as the climate-vulnerable southern and northern regions, and the urban slums areas. The survey findings helped identifying the dimensions as well as the depth of the vulnerability of young people from such hard-to-reach and marginalised regions. This study also conducted multiple focused group discussions with the young people from various regions and has identified four broad dimensions of the vulnerability of the young people.

			
Education & Skills	Employment	Health	Climate Change

Education & Skills

Bangladesh faces critical challenges in reaching seven sustainable development goals out of 17, where ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education (SDG goal: 4) is one of the significant obstacles that Bangladesh encounter along with SDG: 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, 16, and 17. Although it might seem like Bangladeshis on track regarding SDG:4; due to substantial drop-out, inadequate financing, poor student-teacher ratio, and the lower attainment of proficiency, still make the vision of achieving quality education by 2030 has become a tough one to attain.

The youth who deprived from the access to education are mostly from the relatively low income households, as well as vulnerable regions. The government has made significant progress to make primary education free and accessible to all the children. However, such initiatives tend to get ceased at the secondary and higher education leading to the significant increase in the rates of drop out.

Figure 1: Gross Enrolment Rate of Students (%)

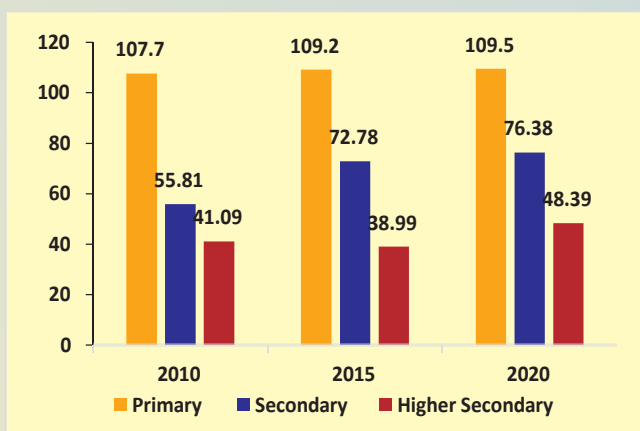
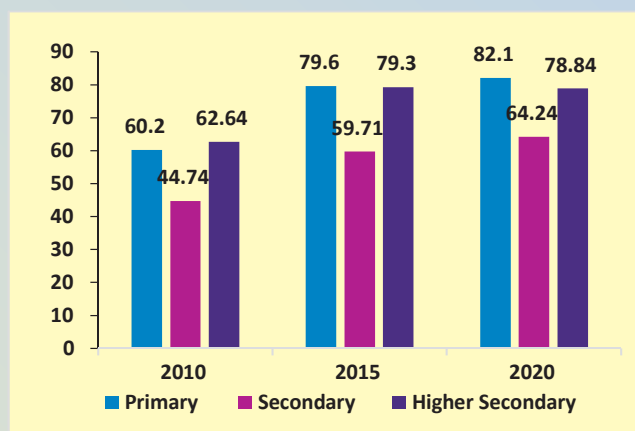


Figure 2: Completion Rate of Students (%)



Source: BANBEIS

The education sector also faces issues like low proficiency levels and a shortage of skilled STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) professionals. The lack of quality is another major concern of the education sector in Bangladesh. Despite progress in several educational indicators in recent years, the quality of education has not improved much. Particularly, poor performance in Mathematics, Science, and English even after secondary- and higher secondary-level education is disappointing. Vocational education is showing significant prospect in Bangladesh but is plagued with some traditional problems. The marketing and branding initiatives for Technical and Vocational Education is not adequate; government cannot attract mass population to this education.

Employment

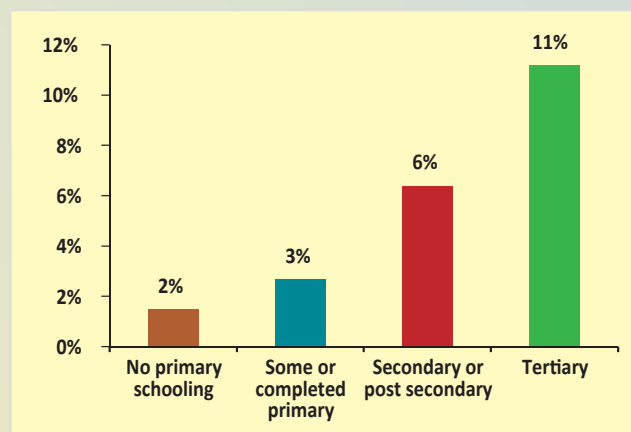
Youth vulnerability in Bangladesh's labour market is a multifaceted issue characterised by factors leading to various challenges, including unemployment, underemployment, and disengagement, often resulting in young people falling into the category of NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Graduate unemployment has become a common experience for tertiary education graduates.

According to the LFS 2016-17, youth unemployment rate was 10.6 percent substantially higher than the national unemployment rate of 4.2 percent. Total unemployed youths represent 79.6 percent of the total unemployed population. Reverse relationship is observed between the education level and employment status. Youth who have secondary or higher levels of education make up around 64 percent of the total unemployed population in Bangladesh. Additionally, there is demand in the labour market for those who have graduated in Computer Science, Finance and Accounting, English and Science, but the highest share of university graduates tend to study courses in Humanities and Arts. This creates a mismatch between the skills that are in demand in the labour market and the skills that graduates tend to possess. World Bank referred about 40 percent university graduates are unemployed due to skill mismatch.

At the national level, 29.8 percent of the young people aged between 15-29 were not in education, employment, and training. Youths NEET in Bangladesh is 16.2 percent higher than the global average of 21.8 percent and 9.4 percent higher than the South Asian regional average. Some of the major influences that lead to the young people NEET in Bangladesh are skills-mismatch, being located in a marginalised geographical location, the digital divide, traditional patriarchal norms and lack of legal rights and discriminatory practices.

The SANEM-ActionAid survey 2022 found that a staggering 90.67 percent of the country's youth have access to smartphones. In contrast, computer access among the surveyed youth is significantly lower, with only 21.5 percent reporting access to

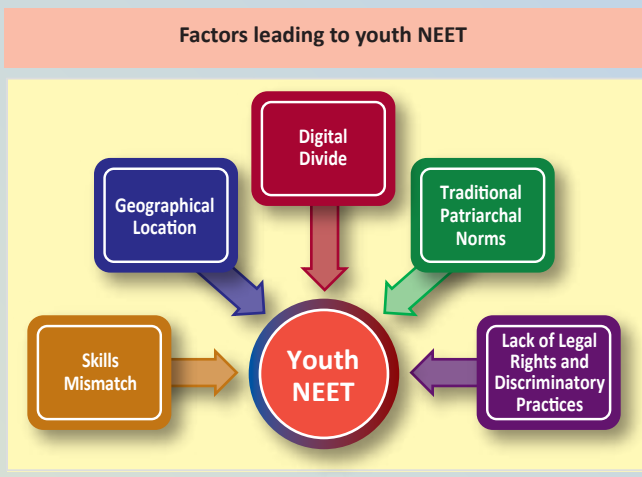
Unemployment rate by education level



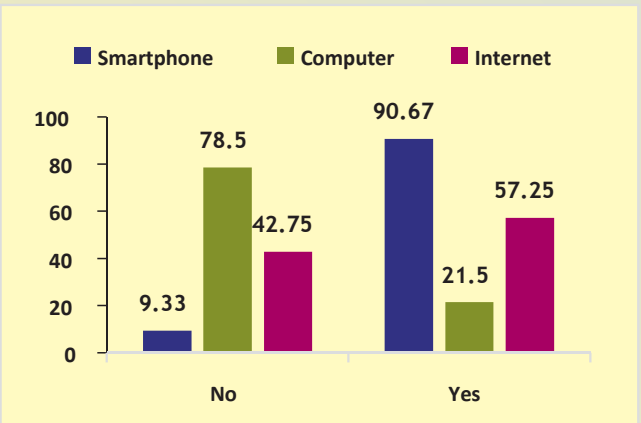
Source: LFS 2016-17

personal computers. This disparity in access to computers may pose challenges in terms of digital literacy and skill development, as many educational and job opportunities require computer proficiency. Besides, one of the most concerning findings from the survey is that 42.75 percent of the youth surveyed have no access to the internet.

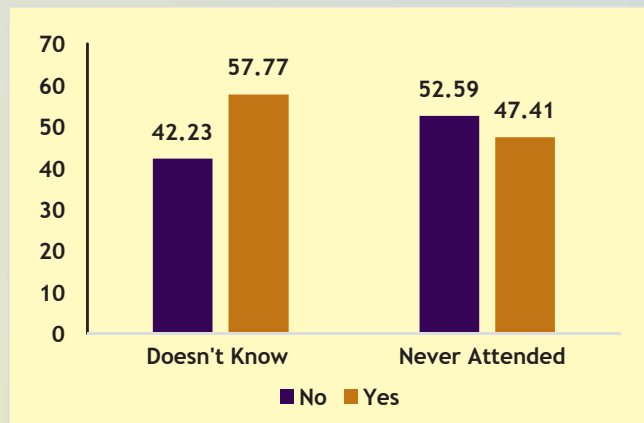
The country has established various training facilities and initiatives aimed to address young people’s employment and skill development. However, access to quality training programmes remains a challenge, particularly for young people in rural and disadvantaged areas. The survey shows that 42.23 percent of the young people does not know about the government-initiated programmes and 52.59 percent of the young people never attended in any such programmes. Apart from being not aware of the programmes, the main reasons of low participation are lack of financial resources, lack of access, lack of significant value addition, poor quality of the programmes and time constrains. The private sector and the industries have a significant role to play in this regard as they dictate the labor demands and are the first stakeholders to be exposed to the changing technology. They already have some good examples, demonstrating their significant role. For instance, a partnership between the The World Bank’s Skills and Training Enhancement Project and Bangladesh Garments Manufacturing and Export Association trained more than 11,000 unskilled workers and achieved an 80 percent employment rate after training. Despite these successes, the efforts of the private sector remain somewhat scattered. There is a pressing need for enhanced cooperation between the industry and academic institutions.



Youth ownership of smartphone, computer and internet (%)



Awareness among the young people regarding government training facilities (%)



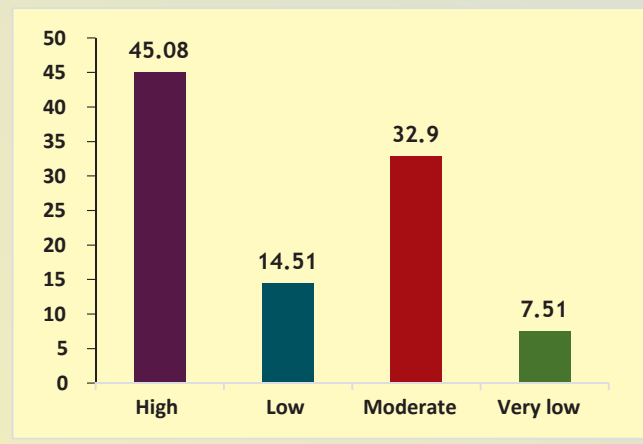
Source: SANEM-ActionAid youth survey 2022

Health

Malnutrition remains a significant issue among Bangladeshi youth, with a high prevalence of stunting and wasting. Early marriage and adolescent pregnancy are common issues affecting the health of young girls in Bangladesh. Mental health issues among youth are on the rise too.

The survey shows that 45.08 percent of the youth are at high risk exposure and 32.9 percent of the youth are at moderate risk to infectious diseases like dengue. Moreover, lack of medical equipment, insufficient financing, lack of proper health management, changing disease patterns, insufficient number of empirical research on health, inadequate supply of purified drinking water, high illiteracy rate, frequent natural disasters, inadequate supply of necessary drugs, and also lack of access to health information are responsible for low quality of health services.

Exposure to the risk of infectious diseases like dengue (%)



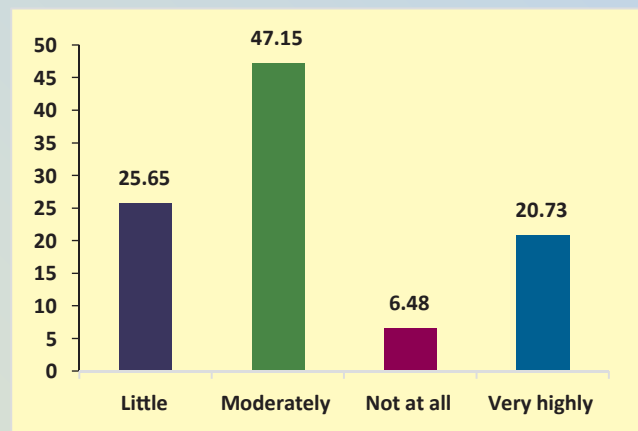
Source: SANEM-ActionAid youth survey 2022

Climate Change

Last but not the least, Bangladesh is recognised as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change and faces significant challenges in safeguarding its young population from the impacts of climate-induced disasters.

Young people, particularly those in marginalised communities, bear the brunt of these challenges, including cyclones, flooding, rising sea levels, and climate-induced displacement. These disruptions affect their education, social connections, and access to healthcare. These natural disasters also have severe health consequences, leading to injuries, waterborne diseases, and mental health issues among young people. The survey shows – 67.88 percent of the youths admitted that climate change affected their livelihood either moderately or very highly.

Effects of climate change or the disasters associated with climate (%)



Source: SANEM-ActionAid youth survey 2022

Recommendations

Skill-building and employment opportunities for young people need to be a top focus to prevent long-term negative impacts.

Collaboration between the government and the private sector is vital to invest in youth upskilling and job creation, with a strong emphasis on providing in-demand short courses and micro-credentials through flexible platforms.

Allocation of adequate resources and efficient utilisation is crucial, with a specific focus on technical and vocational education that equips young people with market-oriented skills.

Access to digital services and quality training should be guaranteed, including upgrading training equipment and enhancing training programme awareness.

Health care facilities need to be streamlined, and mental health should receive greater emphasis in the government's development plan to bridge the treatment gap and combat societal stigmas.

Special attention is required to address the vulnerability of young people in climate-vulnerable regions, including providing adequate public service infrastructure and ensuring young people's participation in climate resilience activities across the disaster-prone areas.

Overall, a holistic and targeted approach is necessary to uplift the well-being of young people in Bangladesh.

This document is jointly developed by ActionAid Bangladesh and SANEM. The authors are Selim Raihan, Sayema Haque Bidisha, Eshrat Sharmin, Sakil Ahmmed, Ekramul Hasan from SANEM. From ActionAid Bangladesh, the document is contributed by Nazmul Ahsan and Zohora Binte Zaman.

About ActionAid

ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to further human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe everyone has the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

ActionAid works in over 70 countries across the world with more than 15 million people. We have a 'bottom up' approach to decision making. Our secretariat is located in Johannesburg, South Africa with hubs in Asia.

We believe that we can only achieve our goals by working collaboratively-locally, nationally and globally- with people in poverty, our supporters, partners, and peers. We are more powerful and effective when we work together.

About SANEM

SANEM, launched in January 2007 in Dhaka, is a non-profit research organization registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms in Bangladesh. It is also a network of economists and policy makers in South Asia with a special emphasis on economic modeling.

SANEM aims to promote the production, exchange and dissemination of basic research knowledge in the areas of international trade, macro economy, poverty, labor market, environment, political economy and economic modeling. It seeks to produce objective, high quality, country- and South Asian region-specific policy and thematic research. SANEM contributes in governments' policy-making by providing research supports both at individual and organizational capacities.

SANEM

Flat K-5, House 1/B, Road 35, Gulshan-2
Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh, Phone: +88-02-58813075
E-mail: sanemnet@yahoo.com, Web: www.sanemnet.org

actionaid

House SE(C)(Old 9) 5/B, (old, 8 Rd 136, Dhaka 1212
Phone: 02-55044851, Email: aab.mail@actionaid.org
Web: www.actionaid.org/bangladesh