

IS BANGLADESH READY FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK?

Findings from a foresight study on automation, AI, and the changing world of work

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by

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RECAP: THE BANGLADESH CONTEXT

Why Bangladesh?

- **Labour market dominated by informality ($\approx 90\%$)**, with women and disadvantaged groups disproportionately excluded.
- **Sluggish employment growth** despite increased value addition.
- **High proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) and low female labour force participation.**
- **Rising automation**, widening skills gaps, and evolving labour market demands.
- **Preparing for LDC graduation** amid rapid technological change and demographic shifts.
- **Global disruptions** (pandemic, climate shocks, debt stress, technological colonialism) reshaping the world of work, with Southern countries more vulnerable.
- **Democratic transition** following the 2024 political change.
- **Employment, inclusion, and resilience** central to national debates, with political shifts adding extra unpredictability to **labour market reforms and policy priorities.**
- **National data ecosystem insufficient** to adequately reflect rapidly evolving dynamics and inform policy decisions effectively.

THE QUESTION BEHIND THE PROMISE

10 million jobs in 5 years.

The real question: What kind of jobs?

1.22m

RMG jobs
threatened
by automation

60%

of female RMG jobs
could get lost by
2041

1.3m

total job losses in
2024, of which
~90% were women

8.1m

manufacturing
jobs, still below
2013, while
output has grown

25m

workers in
services—
many in insecure
jobs

2.4%

decline in
services
employment
between 2023 and
2024

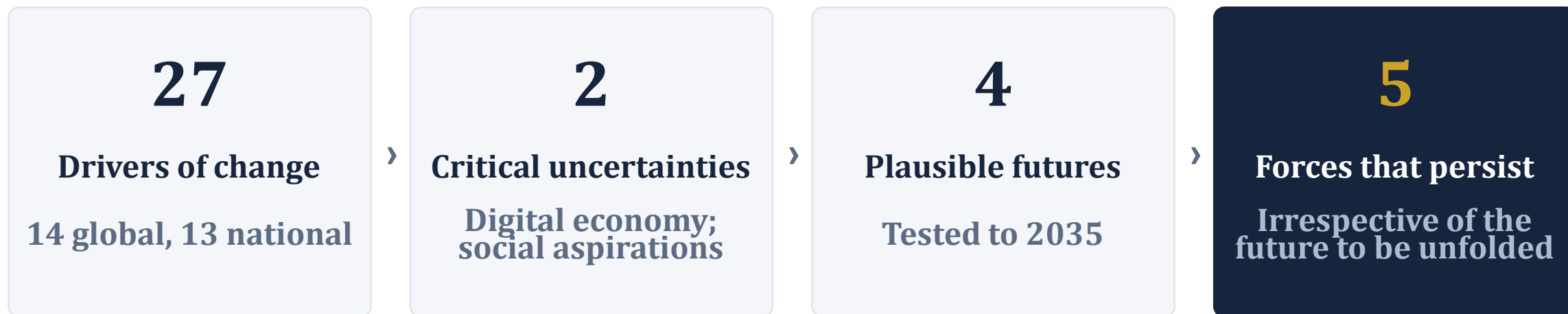
Economic growth is no longer translating into adequate decent (secure & productive) employment.

The burden falls disproportionately on women, youth and persons with disabilities.

HOW WE LOOKED AHEAD

Foresight Analysis: Not another expert poll or discussion.

We did not simply ask experts what they think. Across multiple rounds, experts independently ranked, voted on, and scored 27 drivers of change — forcing structured convergence through an integrated foresight methodology rather than triangulating individual reflections.

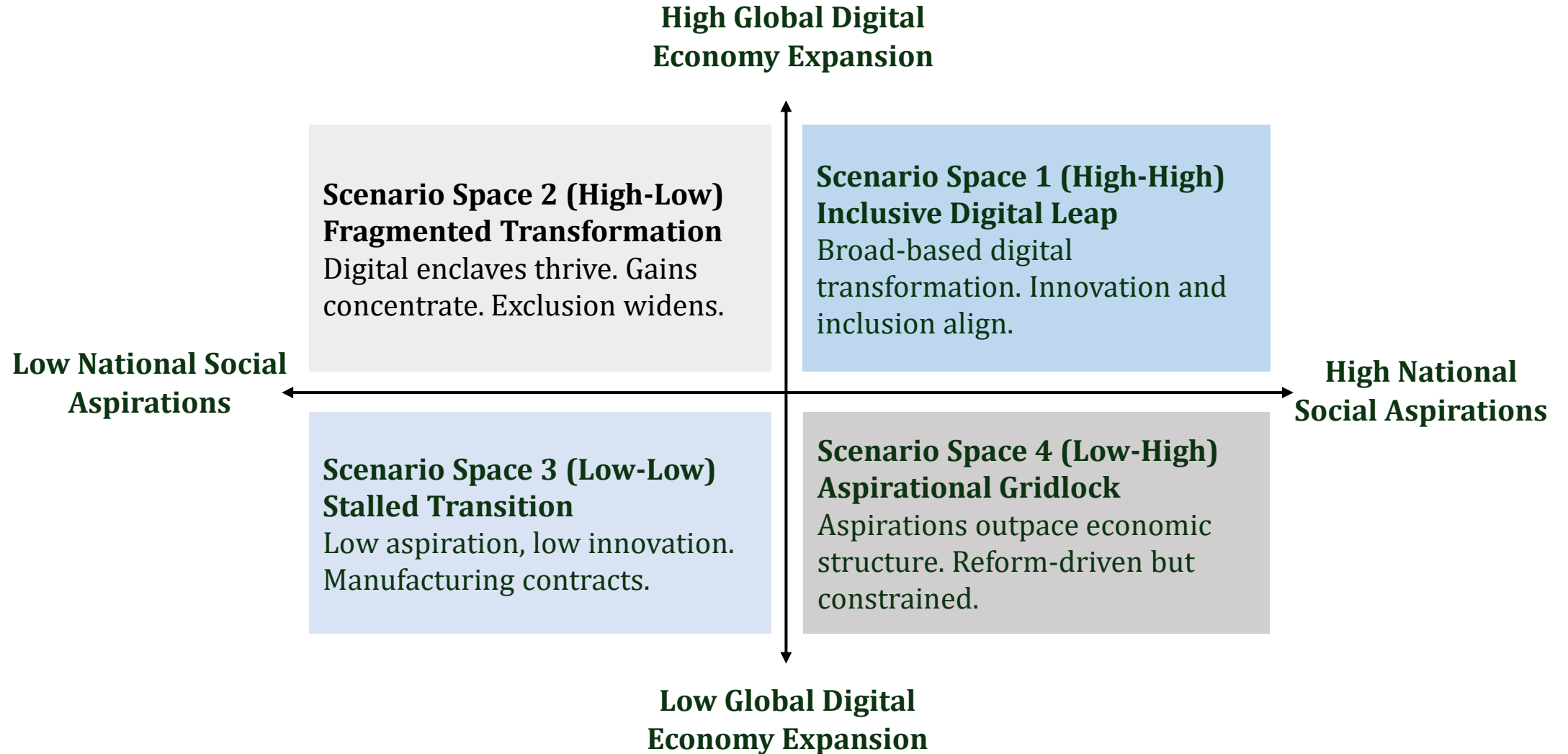


This is why our recommendations are not the usual list.

27 Drivers of Change & 2 Critical Uncertainties

Global drivers (14)	National drivers (13)
1. AI, AI ethics & surveillance, and automation 2. The digital economy 3. Digital divide among countries / concentration within companies 4. Anti-migration sentiment 5. Climate change & green transition 6. Demographic shifts: ageing North, youthful South 7. Geopolitics and geoeconomics 8. Global IPR regime 9. Global trade shifts, supply & value chain realignments, standards 10. Financial markets change & emergence of a new currency 11. Labour rights in the digital economy 12. Shifting social aspirations & work values 13. Weakening global multilateral order & rise of polycentrism 14. Global obligations & commitments	1. Technological transformation & automation in manufacturing 2. Climate-induced labour market disruptions 3. Defence & security innovation (incl. data privacy) 4. Digital divide 5. Mismatch between education & skills (domestic and overseas) 6. Elapsing demographic window & job creation 7. Growth of digital services, gig economy & platform work 8. Labour market policies & rights 9. Macroeconomic management & policies 10. Political uncertainty & policy volatility 11. Structural change in workforce participation 12. Shifting social aspirations, work values & socio-cultural norms 13. Trade & industrial transition post-LDC graduation

4 Plausible futures



Five forces persist.

- 1 Digitalisation is irreversible
- 2 Employment reorients towards higher-value services
- 3 Education and skills systems trail demand
- 4 External shocks persist — trade, climate, LDC graduation
- 5 Institutional agility decides who is included, and who is not

The fifth is the one this room controls more than any of the above four.

THE DIAGNOSIS

The problem is not that we cannot see it.

Tested against the scenarios, policy fails in four recurring ways.

1 Not on the radar

Platform work governance. Portable social protection. The changing nature of work itself.

2 Known, but not designed for

Automation projections have not shaped incentives, TVET targets, or industrial policy.

3 Designed, but not nuanced

No distinction between new entrants, displaced workers, and those still in school.

4 Designed, but no way to deliver

Institutions proposed without data architecture, financing, or integration.

The plans largely exist. The discipline to execute them does not.

WHAT MUST CHANGE

Eight moves that hold in every future.

1

Reform the education and skills sector

Industry-led TVET, labour-market-informed curricula, expanded apprenticeships, and operationalisation of the BNQF

2

Promote reskilling as lifelong learning

Support new entrants, existing workers, and displaced workers through continuous reskilling

3

Link industrial support measures to employment

Employment-linked incentives, financing, and export support for job creation and workforce upgrading

4

Invest in skills

Higher public spending aligned with current and future labour-market demand

WHAT MUST CHANGE

Eight moves that hold in every future.

5

Strengthen labour-market information

An integrated LMIS to inform skills, education, and industrial policy

6

Transform social protection for a changing labour market

Portable social protection and governance frameworks for platform work, non-standard work, and AI at work

7

Leave no one behind

Targeted transition pathways for women, youth, and persons with disabilities

8

Coordinate across stakeholders

A future-of-work framework integrating employment, education, industrial, export, and social protection policies

WHAT IT WILL TAKE

We have done this before.

Near-universal primary enrolment. Nationwide immunisation.

Both advanced because they commanded a minimum national consensus — sustained across governments.

Preparing the workforce for the future of work does not require agreement on everything.

It requires a minimum consensus that this is a national priority.

Technological progress is inevitable. Marginalisation is a policy choice.

Future growth must translate into decent, resilient, and inclusive employment.

OVER TO YOU

What we would like from this table.

- 1 What opportunities are there to integrate these (missing) recommendations into future policy approaches?
- 2 How can we ensure timely implementation? Where is the coordination failing in practice — and who can fix it?
- 3 What would make employers invest in workforce transition, rather than wait?
- 4 **Are we missing something?**

The study is towards completion. Your input strengthens it.

Thank you

The full policy brief is with you.

Life after Life: Exploring the Future of Work in Bangladesh

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