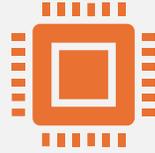# Youth's Perspectives on Reforms: Employment and Technology

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Context

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), characterised by advancements in automation and artificial intelligence, digital literacy has become nearly as essential as traditional literacy

Digital literacy has the potential to empower youth and women by providing access to education, economic opportunities, and social participation, thus fostering a more inclusive society

The question is now: is Bangladesh prepared for this new digital reality, and how can technology be used as a tool to empower women and the youth?

Bangladesh Labour Force Dynamics and Youth Employment

❑ Bangladesh's total unemployment rate **is 4.2 %,** however, the youth unemployment rate **is 7.3%**

Rates of Unemployment and NEET

Indicator	Male	Female	Total
Unemployment rate (%) (19th ICLS)	3.6	6.1	4.2
Unemployment rate (%) (13th ICLS)	3.4	3.2	3.4
Youth unemployment rate (%)	4.9	2.4	7.3
NEET Youth (aged 15-29)	15.4	22.1	18.9

Source: Labour Force Survey 2023

Employment by broad sector (%)

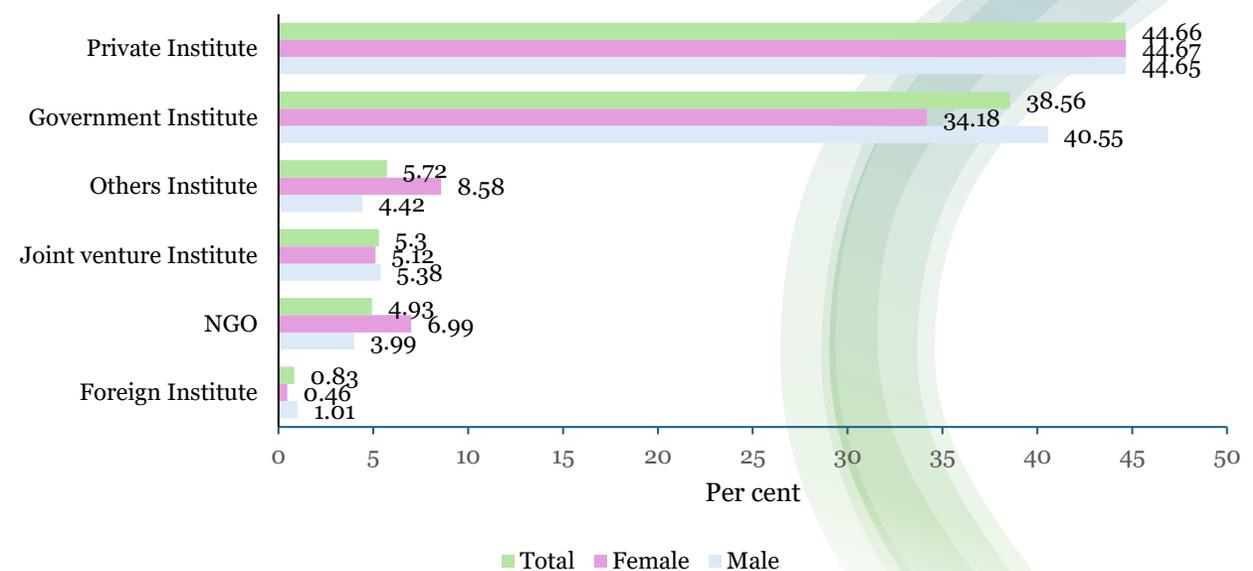| Sector	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	18.8	25.6	44.4
Industry	14.2	3.1	17.3
Service	32.5	5.9	38.2
Total	65.5	34.5	100

Source: Labour Force Survey 2023

Harnessing the Demographic Dividend: Youth Skills and Training in Bangladesh

❑ Bangladesh is currently experiencing a demographic dividend, a critical window of opportunity that is expected to peak in the coming decades

❑ At the heart of this opportunity are the youth—key drivers of innovation and progress. One-fourth (1/4)of the country's total population is in the 15-29 age group

❑ The country's current youth **population is 45.9 million,** which is approximately **28% of the total population**

❑ The average age of Bangladesh's population is **27 years (**United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2022)

❑ The country must adopt strategies that capitalise on this demographic resource

% of Population Aged 15 and Older Who Has Received Training by Type (Top Five)

Type	Total	Female	Male
Computer	38.79	34.23	40.87
Plumbing / Pipe Fitting	10.48	28.98	2.06
Driving and motor mechanic	7.37	0.29	10.59
Non-crop agricultural activities	6.58	2.7	8.35
Health and paramedical services	5.08	6.71	4.34

Per cent

■ Total ■ Female ■ Male
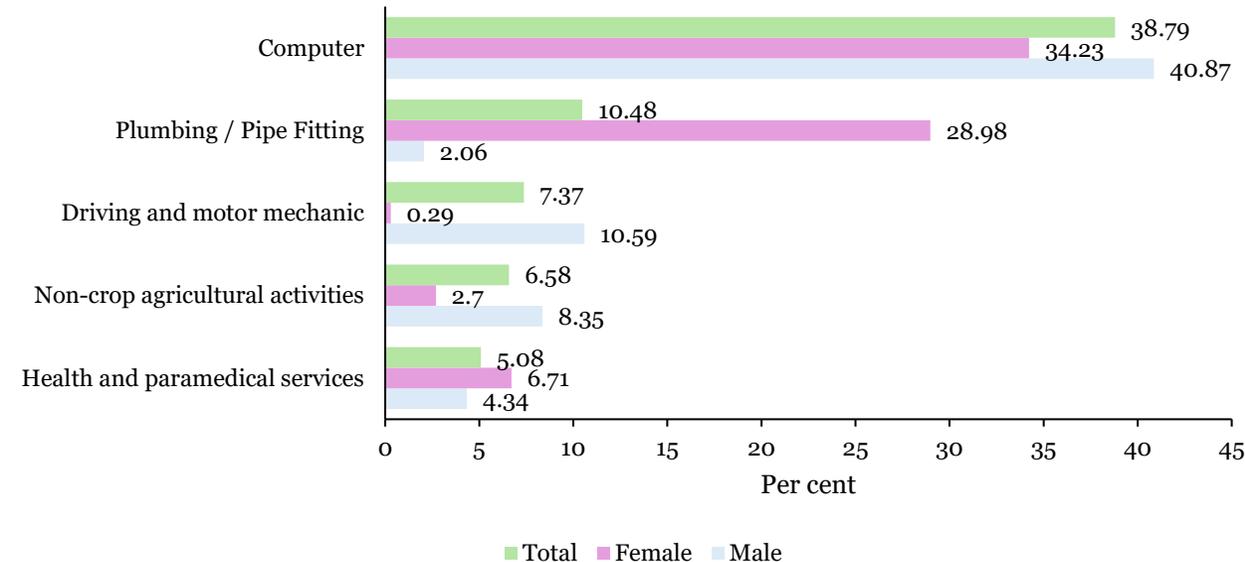
% of Population Aged 15 and Older Who Has Received Training by Sources of Training

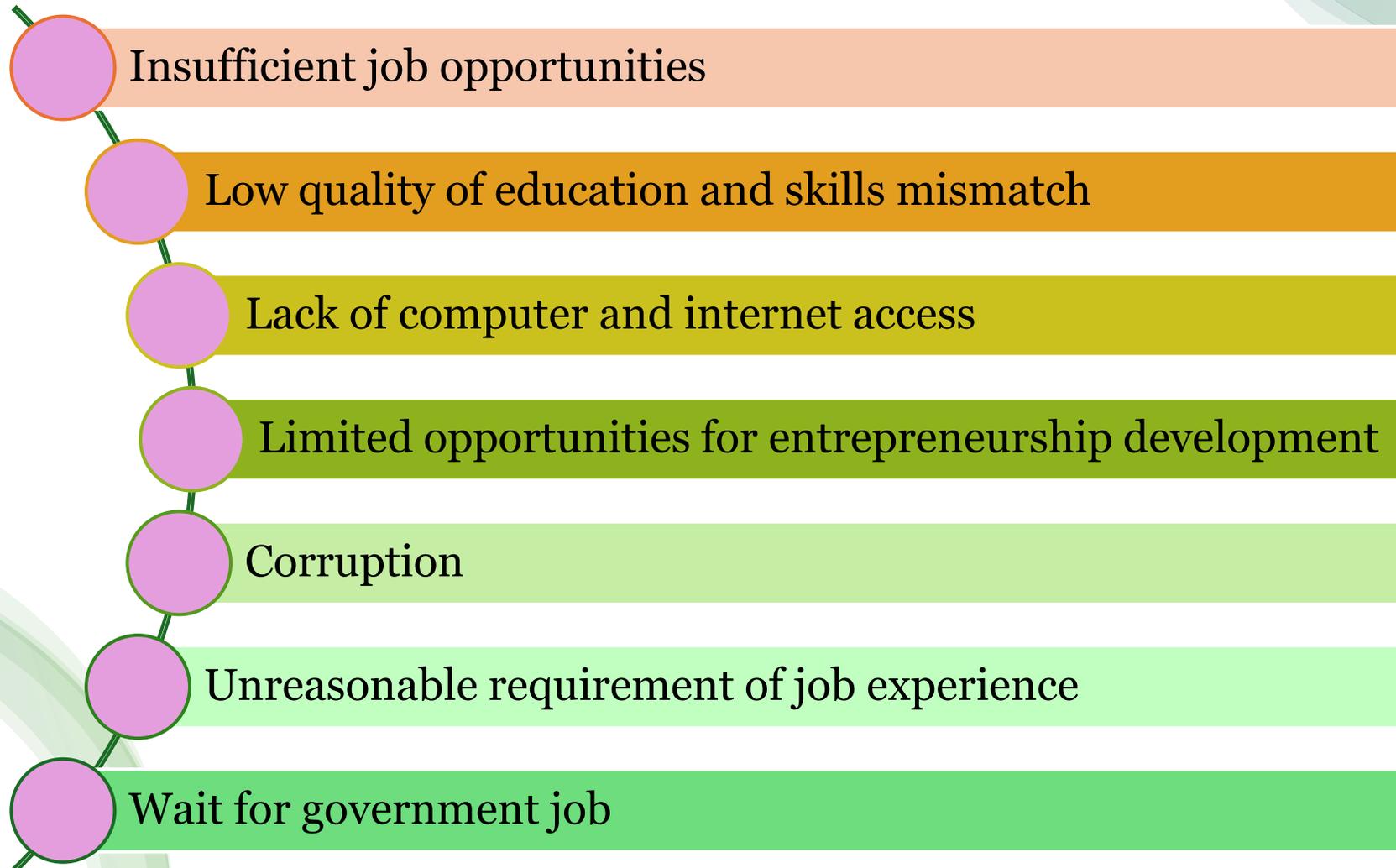| Source	Total	Female	Male
Private Institute	44.66	44.67	44.65
Government Institute	38.56	34.18	40.55
Others Institute	5.72	8.58	4.42
Joint venture Institute	5.3	5.12	5.38
NGO	4.93	6.99	3.99
Foreign Institute	0.83	0.46	1.01

Per cent

■ Total ■ Female ■ Male

Source: Labour Force Survey 2023

Source: Labour Force Survey 2023

Reasons Behind High Youth Unemployment in Bangladesh

- A previous study by CPD (Khatun and Saadat, 2020) reveals the reasons behind youth unemployment-

Insufficient job opportunities

Low quality of education and skills mismatch

Lack of computer and internet access

Limited opportunities for entrepreneurship development

Corruption

Unreasonable requirement of job experience

Wait for government job

Bangladesh's Access to Technology: Falling Behind in South Asia

❑Various indicators of access to technology show that Bangladesh is still lagging behind in technology access, compared to other South Asian Countries

❑While more than 78% of youth use the internet worldwide in 2023, only around 54% of youth in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have internet access
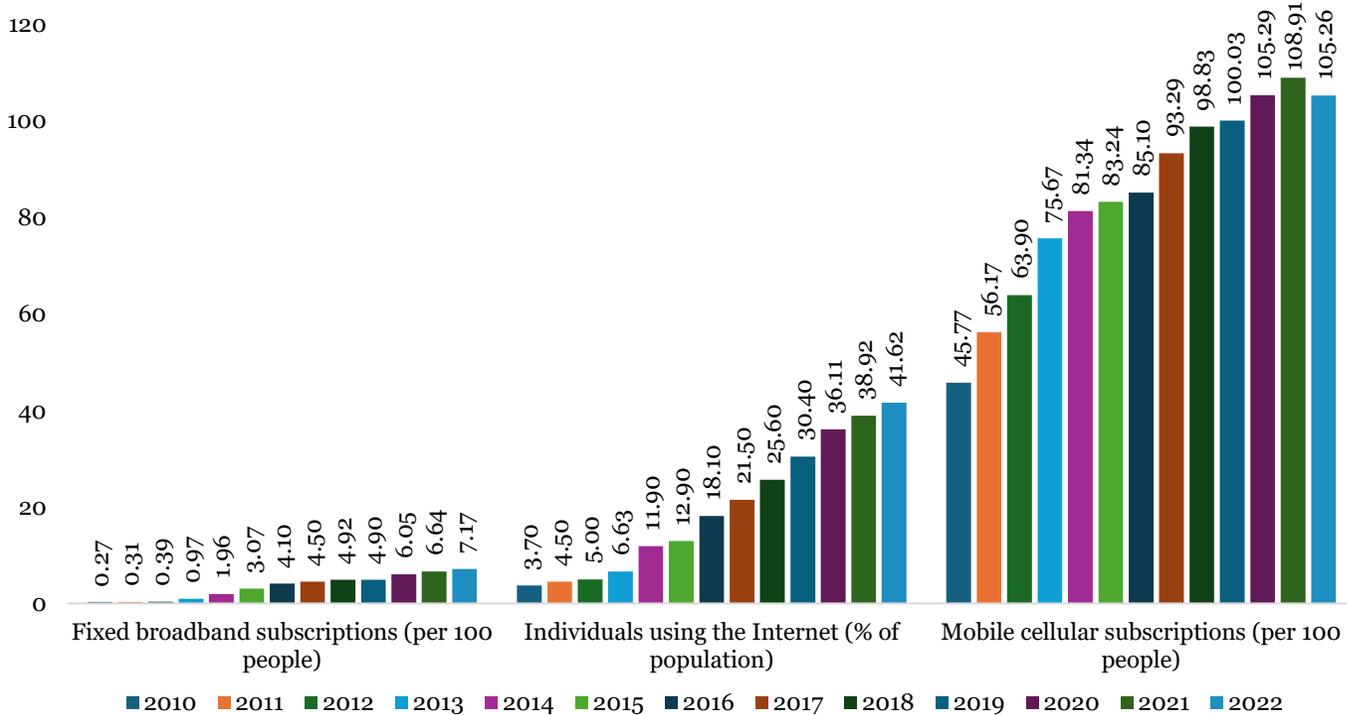
Access to Technology (Using Various Indicators) in 2022

Country	Individuals using the internet (% of population)	Fixed broadband subscriptions (per 100 people)	Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)
World	64.40	18.43	108.10
Bhutan	86.84	0.63	94.89
Maldives	83.91	17.40	136.54
Sri Lanka	50.11	9.64	143.08
Nepal	49.56	4.83	-
Bangladesh	41.62	7.17	105.26
Pakistan	32.95	1.28	81.75
India	-	2.35	80.65

Source: World Development Indicators.

Challenge of Digital Divide: The Exclusion of Women and Girls from This Digital Transformation

Access to Technology Over the Years in Bangladesh (Using Various Indicators)

Fixed broadband subscriptions (per 100 people)
- 0.27, 0.31, 0.39, 0.97, 1.96, 3.07, 4.10, 4.50, 4.92, 4.90, 6.05, 6.64, 7.17

Individuals using the Internet (% of population)
- 3.70, 4.50, 5.00, 6.63, 11.90, 12.90, 18.10, 21.50, 25.60, 30.40, 36.11, 38.92, 41.62

Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)
- 45.77, 56.17, 63.90, 75.67, 81.34, 83.24, 85.10, 93.29, 98.83, 100.03, 105.29, 108.91, 105.26

Legend: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Source: World Development Indicators

Male and female mobile ownership and mobile internet use (% of Total Adult Population

Country	Gender	Mobile Owners (%)	Mobile Internet Users (%)
Bangladesh	Male	86	33
	Female	61	16
India	Male	79	42
	Female	63	21
Indonesia	Male	80	49
	Female	72	42
Myanmar	Male	78	58
	Female	68	41
Pakistan	Male	81	37
	Female	50	19

Source: The Mobile Gender Gap Report (2020)

Selected Policies and Initiatives by the Government

❑ National ICT Policy 2018 was formulated to create an enabling environment for the ICT industry, focusing on skills development and employment opportunities for youth and women

➢ Challenges of infrastructure gaps, digital literacy issues, gender inequality, inconsistent implementation, and slow adoption of advanced technologies hinder the implementation of the policy

❑ Women ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI) in Bangladesh was launched in 2017 with an aim to close the gender gap in the digital economy by providing women with the tools, skills, and support they need to succeed

➢ Challenges remain in accessing high-quality ICT infrastructure in remote areas, societal barriers related to gender roles, and a lack of awareness about the benefits of ICT for women

❑ National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) 2020 was formulated to develop the country's human capital and align workforce skills with the demands of the rapidly evolving economy

➢ Raising awareness among the target population regarding the programme and gender disparities are two main challenges in implementing the programme

Relevant SDG Targets

Target 4.4 states, "By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship".

Target: Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill.

Target 5.b states, "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women".

Target: Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex

What are the measures proposed for reform?

❑ The existing National Employment Policy 2022 will be comprehensively revised and regularly updated to pursue an active labour market policy and to take into account the changes, prospects, needs, and constraints of the current labour market and the future nature of work.

❑ Following the dynamics of the labour market, all government institutions in the country will be brought under one umbrella, and skill development activities will be conducted by increasing the participation of employers, Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) will be signed to expand the international labour market, and initiatives will be taken to reduce inequality by adopting a national plan to meet the needs of the 4IR.

❑ To prepare for the 4IR, the government will launch a national skills development programme to prepare workers in key technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, digital technology, cloud computing, 3D printing, and biotechnology, and align the private sector with the needs of the global labour market and emerging industries.

❑ The government will create 100 district-based and university-based innovation and entrepreneurship hubs to support technology-based startups and enterprises, which will play a critical role in decent employment.

Way Forward

Addressing the digital gender divide requires removing barriers to connectivity and equipping women and girls with the skills needed to succeed in the digital age

The broader digital divide must be addressed to ensure all youth benefit from technology by facilitating digital inclusion for marginalised groups through affordable internet access, digital literacy initiatives, and meaningful opportunities in the digital economy

Providing young people with the tools to participate in the digital world is essential for decreasing unemployment, fostering innovation, driving economic growth, and promoting social inclusion

Questions for Discussion

1. Are current education and training systems adequately preparing youth for the emerging tech-based job markets? If not, what reforms are needed?

2. What is the role of ICT skills in improving the employability of women and youth, and how can this be better integrated into the education system?

3. In what ways can technology bridge the gap between formal and informal employment?

4. How can the government facilitate easier access to finance and regulatory support for youth-led digital startups?

5. How can better coordination among ministries and agencies be ensured in implementing ICT and youth-related policies to avoid duplication and inefficiencies?

6. What mechanisms can be introduced to involve youth and women directly in policy formulation for education, employment, digital innovation, and social welfare?