



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
15 December 2024

English only

---

## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

10–21 March 2025

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) remain a serious concern, particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. With around 45.9 million people aged 15–29, representing one-fourth of the total population, Bangladesh faces urgent challenges. A staggering 51.4 per cent of girls are married off before the age of 18, severely limiting their ability to exercise their SRHR. Social norms and traditions further hinder the realization of these rights, especially for adolescents and unmarried youth, particularly girls. Despite the existence of favorable policies aimed at promoting young people's health and well-being, significant gaps persist, especially in ensuring access to adolescent-friendly health services and information, including menstrual hygiene facilities in schools. As a signatory to various international agreements on gender equality and women's rights, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Bangladesh has a critical responsibility to safeguard the SRHR of all young people within a gender-just society. Achieving gender equality is essential to fulfilling these commitments and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This statement is submitted on behalf of the Right Here Right Now (RHRN) Bangladesh coalition, consisting of 07 civil society organizations (CSOs), calling for strengthened action to ensure universal access to SRHR and comprehensive sexual health and wellbeing education for all young people.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has long focused on the critical need to advance gender equality, with its mandate aligned with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Bangladesh has made strides in gender equality by reducing under-five mortality and lowering maternal deaths. However, structural and cultural barriers continue to impede the country's progress toward true gender equality. Global challenges like economic inequality, climate change, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have compounded the difficulties in advancing women's and girls' rights, particularly in relation to SRHR.

Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy remain among the most pressing concerns. Despite the Child Marriage Restraint Act, a 2023 BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) survey revealed that over 70 per cent of adolescent girls in Bangladesh are at risk of child marriage, driven by societal norms rather than purely economic factors. With 63.1 per cent of girls aged 16-17 married off, they are deprived of the opportunity to realize their reproductive rights and access the education and services they need to thrive. Ensuring gender equality means addressing these social norms and providing young people, especially girls with the tools they need to assert control and agency over their bodies and futures. The survey findings also emphasized that education plays a pivotal role in reducing child marriage, with higher levels of education correlating with lower rates of early marriage. This underscores the urgent need to implement gender-sensitive education to ensure a teaching and learning environment that promotes gender equality and justice across all schools in Bangladesh.

Additionally, sexual and reproductive health still remains a taboo in Bangladesh, especially for adolescents and unmarried youth. Parents are reluctant to discuss these topics, and schools provide minimal information on SRHR. Only 23 per cent of adolescent girls knew about menstruation before their first period, leading to widespread absenteeism and a lack of menstrual health management. The lack of SRHR education leaves many adolescent girls entering marriage (or even without marriage) without proper knowledge of contraception and with limited autonomy in decision-making about their reproductive health. Gender-based violence (GBV), including physical and sexual violence, also remains pervasive. Among ever-married adolescents, 42.8 per cent have faced physical or sexual violence, and 30.9 per cent have experienced non-partner violence. Marginalized girls – those living in slums,

engaged in child labor, or in refugee camps are even more vulnerable to violence, further restricting their access to SRHR services and information.

Our Demands for achieving gender equality in the 21st Century are:

- Strengthen adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services by expanding access to health information, counselling, and education in schools to meet the needs of adolescents.
- Review, update, and develop relevant laws, acts, and policies to uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights for all population segments, ensuring universal access to SRHR services. Enforce existing laws like the Child Marriage Restraint Act to prevent child marriage, while creating community-led initiatives that change societal norms. Additionally, introduce social safety-net schemes that keep girls in school and delay marriage until at least 18.
- Strengthen the implementation of laws protecting girls and women from violence, and expand access to shelters, counselling, and legal aid for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). Introduce a government-backed social safety-net package to support women survivors and foster community outreach to challenge the normalization of violence i.e. through developing counter-narratives of gender-insensitive content available in media.
- Strengthen multi-sector and inter-ministerial collaboration to ensure effective planning, implementation, and resource utilization for programs related to women's rights, gender-based violence, and SRHR.
- Invest in programs that empower marginalized youth, particularly those living in urban slums, involved in child labor, or refugees, ensuring they have equal access to education (with a special focus on SRHR education), health services, and legal protections.
- Develop a national monitoring framework to track the implementation of national action plans such as the ones to prevent child marriage, violence against women, the National Adolescent Health Strategy, and the National Menstrual Hygiene Management Strategy 2021, ensuring duty bearers are held accountable, and adequate investment to proper implementation of these policies.
- Increase financial investment in gender equality initiatives, including education, health care, and social services, focusing on economic empowerment and leadership development for young girls and women. Allocate resources to scale up interventions that foster equality.
- Ensure that government agencies and other duty bearers meet their obligations under international human rights instruments and follow through on commitments made in periodic reports, prioritizing gender equality. Strengthen mechanisms to track progress and ensure accountability for achieving gender equality, with transparent reporting on commitments aligned with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and the Commission on Population and Development (CPD). Civil society and youth organizations must be actively involved in this process to ensure inclusive and sustained progress.
- The government should enhance its partnerships with civil society and business organizations to mobilize communities and raise awareness about SRHR, comprehensive sexuality education, child marriage, adolescent fertility, and gender-based violence through both online and offline platforms.
- The government should facilitate a meaningful engagement of youth and youth-led entities in the development of sexual and reproductive health and gender

equality strategies at local, national, regional, and global levels to ensure policies reflect the needs of young people.

- Leverage technology and digital platforms to disseminate SRHR information and engage youth in conversations on gender equality, SRHR, and related topics, ensuring widespread access to critical information.
- Address intersectional discrimination by implementing targeted strategies to support adolescents and youth who face compounded vulnerabilities due to disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
- Design and implement programs that actively involve boys and men in addressing cultural and structural gender inequalities, ensuring their participation in efforts toward gender justice through a result-oriented approach.

We, the Right Here Right Now Coalition in Bangladesh, strongly urge Member States to fully implement all previously agreed resolutions that provide the essential social protection floors necessary to enable women and girls to break free from all forms of discrimination and vulnerability. By doing so, we can create a society where women and girls can lead well-educated, dignified lives as empowered and contributing members of their communities.

---