

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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BANGLADESH: SITUATION AND TREATMENT OF SINGLE WOMEN AND WOMEN WHO HEAD THEIR OWN HOUSEHOLDS, INCLUDING AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT SERVICES AND ABILITY TO ACCESS HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT, INCLUDING IN DHAKA AND CHITTAGONG (2017-JANUARY 2020) [BGD200087.E]

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1. Overview

Information was scarce on the situation and treatment of single women and women who head their own households in Bangladesh.

A report by the World Bank Group on the situation of widowed, deserted and destitute women in Bangladesh indicates that "[p]atriarchy is prominent" in Bangladesh, and that "the majority of women continue to depend on the fathers, and husbands following marriage, for decision making and financial and social welfare" (World Bank Group 1 Jan. 2019, 2). A UK Home Office report on a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh in May 2017 indicates that "[t]o live without male support is almost impossible. Bangladesh is a very family-orientated society" (UK Sept. 2017, p. 66). An op-ed article written by Zafar Sobhan, the Editor of the *Dakha Tribune* who has also written for *TIME*, *The Independent*, and *The Sunday Guardian* (IID n.d.), and published in the *Dhaka Tribune*, a Bangladesh-based newspaper, similarly notes that single women who live without a partner face "endless difficulty and condemnation" and that "[t]here is scant space for single women in [Bangladeshi] society, and even less respect" (Sobhan 29 May 2015).

A country report on Bangladesh by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) notes that "[m]ost Bangladeshi women are married very young, and being single by choice is virtually unheard of" (Australia 22 Aug. 2019, para. 3.127). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s 2019 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) additionally quotes an academic article by Robert E. Emery, a professor of psychology and Director of the Center for Children, Families and the Law at the University of Virginia who researches family conflicts and their impact on children (University of Virginia n.d.), as indicating that "[d]ivorced women tend to be stigmatized and looked down in Bangladeshi society. Most of the time, they go back to their parent's house out of necessity" (OECD 7 Dec. 2018, 4).

2. Access to Housing

The UK Home Office fact-finding mission report cites a human rights organization as stating that it is "difficult" for single women to rent property, adding that "[l]and owners will say that [a single woman] cannot live alone in a house" (UK Sept. 2017, 99). The same report quotes Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a Bangladesh-based human rights organization that provides legal and social assistance to women, working children and workers (ASK n.d.), as indicating that "[i]t is difficult for single women to rent a place to live in Dhaka or anywhere since society does not accept [it] and the state fails to assure security" (UK Sept. 2017, 66). The UK Home Office report also indicates that according to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Bangladesh, affluent and educated single women have more ability to relocate in comparison to poor, single women (UK Sept. 2017, 90).

3. Access to Employment and Financial Resources

The UK Home Office fact-finding mission report indicates that several sources note that it is "very difficult" for a single woman to get a job in Bangladesh (UK Sept. 2017, 43). The UK Home Office report cites the NHRC as indicating that "[e]mployment would be accessible to single women but mostly available to those from middle classes with access to family support" (UK Sept. 2017, 90). The World Bank Group report indicates that

[a]ccording to local custom, when a woman's husband dies, she has the optio[n] of staying with her in-laws or returning to her parents' family. The choice however is not easy for women in poor families that are unable to support an additional non-earning member. The financial hardship on the families significantly increases when the widow has children who are either too young to earn and are financially dependent on their mother; has children who are older but do not earn enough or are not willing to provide support to the mother. Many widows resort to very low paid menial jobs, begging or charity especially as their access to dignified jobs is limited by their poor literacy, lack of marketable skills and in many cases conservative social norms that dictate their mobility, lifestyle and choice of livelihood. Also, there are social insecurities associated with living alone without [a] male guardian. (World Bank Group 1 Jan. 2019, 2)

4. Support Services

The UK Home Office fact-finding mission report quotes the Executive Director of the UK Bangladesh Education Trust (UKBET), an international NGO registered in Bangladesh and the UK that provides training and learning development projects for teachers in Bangladesh (UKBET n.d.), as saying, without providing further details, that "[t]here are a lot of financial support" services for divorcees and single mothers but that these services are "inadequate" (UK Sept. 2017, 86). The World Bank Group report indicates that, since the 1970s, the government of Bangladesh has been implementing "important social safety nets focused on women" such as the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and the Allowances for the Widow, Deserted and Destitute Women [also called Allowance for Widow and Husband's Deserted Destitute Women] programs (World Bank Group 1 Jan. 2019, 2). The website of the Ministry of Social Welfare indicates that the Allowance for Widow, Deserted and Destitute Women program provides grants to receive mental health, medical care and nutrition support (Bangladesh 11 July 2019). The same source provides the following eligibility criteria for the program:

- a. Age: Among the applicants according to older person will get preference.
- b. Physical Condition: Physically disabled, completely physically incapable and sick will get utmost priority[.]
- c. Marital status: Widow, Husband's Deserted women are only eligible.
- d. Socio-Economic Condition:
In case of economically distressed families, asset less, migrated and landless will get priority[;]
In case of social condition, person having no issues, persons separated from family will get priority accordingly[;]
Distressed, landless and have two children below 16 years will get priority.
- e. Ownership of land property:
Landless person will get priority. In this context a person is defined landless if the land other than homestead amounts 0.50 acre or less.
- f. Non Eligibility:
Government Servants and pension holders will not be eligible;
VGD (Vulnerable Group Development program) [c]ard holders are not eligible;
Regular [r]ecipients of government grants from other sources;
Regular [r]ecipients of grants from any [NGO] or [s]ocial welfare agency.
- g. Others: Concern committee selects the applicants. (Bangladesh 11 July 2019)

The same source indicates that, during the fiscal year 2019-2020, the program benefited 1,700,000 persons with 500 Bangladeshi Takas (BDT) [approximately C\$8] per month for each beneficiary (Bangladesh 11 July 2019). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED

Oral sources: Al Ihsan Women's Vocational Center of Bangladesh; Alliance for Cooperation and Legal Aid Bangladesh; Amnesty International; Asian Human Rights Commission; Bangladesh – National Human Rights Commission; Centre for Policy Dialogue; HOPE Foundation for Women and Children of Bangladesh; professors who study social issues at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology Research Initiatives, Bangladesh.

Internet sites, including: Action contre la faim; Al-Falah Bangladesh; Amnesty International; The Asia Foundation; AsiaNews; Asian Human Rights Commission; Bertelsmann Stiftung; Canada – International Development Research Centre; CARE; Centre for Policy Dialogue; Chr. Michelsen Institute; *The Daily Star*, ecoi.net; EU – European Asylum Support Office; *The Financial Express*; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; *The Guardian*; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; International Growth Centre; International Institute for Environment and Development; International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*; National Public Radio; Odhikar; Oxfam; Reuters; Trading Economics; UK – Foreign and Commonwealth Office; UN – Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; US – Department of Justice, Department of State, Humanitarian Response, International Labour Organization; Voice of America.