



# Tackling Childcare

The Business Benefits and Challenges  
of Employer-Supported Childcare  
in Bangladesh

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## Acronyms

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ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADO	Asian Development Outlook
BACCO	Bangladesh Association of Call Center & Outsourcing
BDT	Bangladesh Taka
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association
BHTPA	Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority
BLFCA	Bangladesh Leasing & Finance Companies Association
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRAC-IED	BRAC Institute of Educational Development
BUILD	Business Initiative Leading Development
DCCI	Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry
DIBs	Development Impact Bonds
DIGNITY	Dhaka low Income area GeNder, Inclusion, and poverTY
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLFP	Female Labor Force Participation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPHOUSE	Grameenphone House
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LFPR	Labor Force Participation Rate
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RMG	Ready-Made Garments
SIBs	Social Impact Bonds
WBL	Women, Business and the Law

## IFC Foreword

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Access to good-quality jobs is a key lever of change for women, the companies they are associated with, and the communities they live in—helping to boost economic growth and reduce poverty. Yet, vast gender gaps persist, hurting companies and economies that depend on acquiring and retaining a skilled workforce. A key barrier to female labor force participation is women’s disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, as well as a lack of access to reliable, affordable, and good-quality childcare.



Several countries, such as Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, India, and Jordan, have unveiled policies requiring companies to provide childcare options—recognizing the impact that childcare provision can have on women’s employment. In Bangladesh, for example, the law requires businesses with more than 40 female employees to offer childcare options to their employees.

A growing body of research, including by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the European Bank for Reconstruction & Development (EBRD), and several other organizations, shows that companies that support childcare can boost profits and productivity by hiring and retaining talented people, while addressing a significant need for employees.

In addition, by offering childcare, companies can enhance their corporate reputation and access higher-value markets that require compliance with certain standards, such as those related to women’s employment and childcare. Moreover, children who have access to early childhood care and education are more likely to perform well in school and lead healthier and more productive lives as adults.

Hence, childcare can result in a win-win-win situation for employees and their children, employers, and economies. Still, employers often do not always understand the business case for and the long-term returns on investments in childcare and often look at it from a compliance or corporate social responsibility perspective.

As the world’s largest global development institution focused on the private sector, IFC is dedicated to closing gaps between women’s and men’s economic participation and addressing barriers to women’s access to more and better jobs, including lack of childcare.

With this Policy Brief, IFC is launching research findings and recommendations for employer-supported childcare in Bangladesh to better understand the opportunities and challenges that companies face. Our aim is to raise awareness about the business case for employer-supported childcare amidst a growing need for companies to offer childcare options to their employees.

On behalf of IFC, I would like to thank all our partners for their commitment toward highlighting the important issue of childcare and exploring how employers, the public sector, and other stakeholders

can play a role to improve childcare options in the country: ILO/IFC Better Work Bangladesh, BRAC-IED, LightCastle Partners, Phulki, UN Global Compact Bangladesh, UNICEF Bangladesh, the World Bank, and the Government of Bangladesh, through consultations with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) and the Bangladesh Shishu Academy.

Thanks also to the industry associations who generously shared their time, knowledge, and networks, so we could complete the research: Bangladesh Association of Call Center & Outsourcing (BACCO), Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority (BHTPA), Bangladesh Leasing and Finance Companies Association (BLFCA), and Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), including Business Initiative Leading Development (BUILD). This childcare research in Bangladesh would not have been possible without the critical support of the Government of Canada.

I hope this research and the recommendations therein will help provide insights on the current state of employer readiness to support childcare and pave the way for greater compliance with the legal mandate and realization of benefits for families, businesses, and the economy of Bangladesh.



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International Finance Corporation (IFC)

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## Our Donor



## Our Partners

### International Organizations



### Public Sector



### Industry Associations



### NGOs



### Non-Profit



### Local Research Partner



# 1 The Business and Development Case for Childcare in Bangladesh

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## Good for Women's Employment

Bangladesh's record Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 7.9% in 2018 and increasing GDP growth rates since 2014 have contributed to local and global optimism about the country's economic prospects.<sup>1</sup>

The economy is on track to graduate from Least Developed Countries (LDC) status in 2024, with the country also making important strides in human capital development.<sup>2</sup> However, Bangladesh faces several challenges that can stagnate its economic growth and make it inequitable.

Bangladesh's young population structure (median age is 27 years) and rising GDP per capita can be a reason for optimism, including for foreign investors. However, high rates of youth unemployment remain a looming threat to the country's long-term growth. The national unemployment rate of women is almost twice the rate of men.<sup>3 4</sup> Although the gap between the unemployment rates of men and women has decreased over the last five years, it is still significantly large. Almost 50% of young women identified as Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in 2017, whilst less than 10% of young men identified as such.<sup>3 5</sup> In addition, Bangladesh has a large gender gap in employment, which is the difference between female and male labor

force participation rate (LFPR). In 2017, the male LFPR was 80% while the female LFPR stood at 36%.<sup>3 4 6</sup> In fact, there has been a decline in urban female labor force participation (FLFP) rates since 2014. Even traditionally women-dominated sectors such as ready-made garments (RMG) have also seen a decline in FLFP in Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup>

Factors such as social norms governing women's work and travel outside the domestic sphere as well as women's unpaid care and household work are often cited as reasons for Bangladesh's declining FLFP.<sup>7</sup> The Dhaka low Income area GeNder, Inclusion, and poverTY (or DIGNITY) survey conducted by the World Bank analyzes data from 1,300 urban households in low-income areas of Dhaka City and shows that on average, women spend 5.16 hours per day on childcare and domestic work whereas men spend 0.34 hours per day on the same activities.<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, results from the survey also state that on average, women, spend four hours per day on employment-related activities while men spend 10 hours per day. The unbalanced distribution of unpaid domestic work and childcare adversely affects women's labor force participation.<sup>7</sup>

1. Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2019). GDP Growth in Asia and the Pacific, Asian Development Outlook (ADO). Accessed October 1, 2019

2. United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Capacity Building. (2018). Leaving the LDC category: Booming Bangladesh prepares to graduate. Accessed August 5, 2019

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/capacity-development/2018/04/10/leaving-the-ldc-category-booming-bangladesh-prepares-to-graduate/>

3. ILO. (2018). Asia-Pacific Employment Social Outlook. Accessed August 5, 2019

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms\\_649885.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_649885.pdf)

4. ILO. (2018). Unemployment rate -- ILO modelled estimates. Accessed November 30, 2018

5. International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2018). Inflation rate, average consumer prices. Accessed January 30, 2019

6. The World Bank. (2019). Bangladesh Development Update. Accessed June 5, 2019

7. Hill, R., Kotikula, A., & Raza, W.A. (2019). What works for working women? Understanding female labor force participation and incomes in urban Bangladesh.

Moreover, lack of access to good quality, affordable childcare further compounds this problem and often locks women, who are usually the primary caregivers, out of the formal workforce. Conveniently-located formal childcare that is aligned with parents' work hours, values, and needs is often not readily available in Bangladesh. UNICEF's work with the RMG sector in Bangladesh reveals that a large number of workers do not live with any or with all of their children. Key reasons cited are not having anyone to care for children when the worker is at work as well as a better quality of life for children back home in villages.<sup>8</sup> Hence, working women often rely on their family members and/or domestic help for childcare or quit their jobs to stay at home and provide unpaid care. Almost 30% of the women interviewed in the DIGNITY study rely on other household members or relatives for childcare. Only 1% of working women interviewed reported using formal arrangements, which may suggest that lack of access to formal childcare arrangements is an obstacle for parents.<sup>9</sup> Low level of awareness and trust among parents with respect to formal childcare arrangements and the benefits of such arrangements might also contribute to the problem.

### Good for Children's Outcomes

A 2019 field frame analysis by BRAC-IED in Bangladesh shows that early childhood development is essential for a child's holistic development. The research further implies a child's environment is key to his/her proper development. Factors such as healthy development in the mother's womb and,

after birth, being surrounded by nurturing and loving caregivers in a supportive family environment contribute to the child's holistic development.<sup>10</sup> However, according to a 2017 UNICEF Early Moments Matter Report, in Bangladesh over 80% of children aged between 36-59 months do not have access to Early Childhood Education (ECD).<sup>11</sup> UNICEF's ECD guideline defines ECD as a continuous process of acquiring skills and abilities during the age of 6 months to 6 years across the domains of cognition, language, motor, social, and emotional development, which helps a child to think, solve problems, communicate, express emotions, and form relationships. The key aspect of this development is "nurturing care", which consists of a core set of interrelated components, including behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge about caregiving (e.g., health, hygiene care, and feeding); stimulation (e.g., talking, singing, and playing); responsiveness (e.g., early bonding, secure attachment, trust, and sensitive communication); and safety (e.g., routines, protection from violence, abuse, neglect, harm, and environmental pollution).<sup>12</sup>

Investments which support the realization of a nourished, healthier, and more educated nation are key to supporting Bangladesh to ensure that children growing up now will be much more productive than current averages.<sup>8</sup> According to UNICEF's research, support for maternal nutrition and infant feeding (breastfeeding) during the first 1,000 days of children's lives should be a crucial aspect of family-friendly work environments, especially in a country such as Bangladesh

8. Research conducted by UNICEF Bangladesh

9. Hill, R., Kotikula, A., & Raza, W.A. (2019). What works for working women? Understanding female labor force participation and incomes in urban Bangladesh. Data from DIGNITY (Dhaka low Income area Gender, Inclusion and poverty) Survey, consisting of 1300 households (2378 individuals). Individuals from low-income areas and slums of the Dhaka City Corporations and Greater Dhaka Statistical Metropolitan Area are represented

10. BRAC-IED. (2019). Narratives of Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh. Accessed October 30, 2019 <http://frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/Bangladesh/bangladesh-field-frame-analysis-2019.pdf>

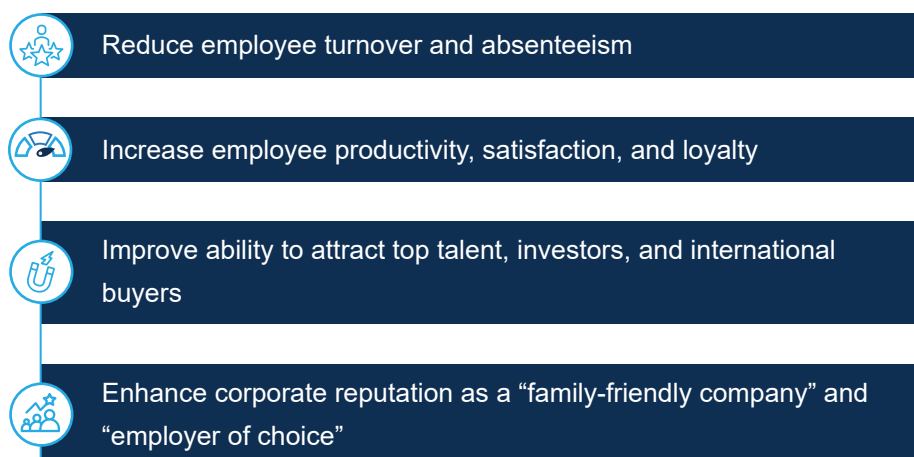
11. UNICEF. (2017). Early Moments Matter [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF\\_Early\\_Moments\\_Matter\\_for\\_Every\\_Child\\_report.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF_Early_Moments_Matter_for_Every_Child_report.pdf)

12. UNICEF. (2017). UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development [https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/FINAL\\_ECD\\_Programme\\_Guidance\\_September\\_2017.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/FINAL_ECD_Programme_Guidance_September_2017.pdf)

with a significant population of stunted children.<sup>8 11</sup> As per the current maternity leave policy (16 weeks of paid leave with eight weeks commencing before the birth of the child), women are expected to return to the workplace just eight weeks after the birth of their children and as such, within the exclusive breastfeeding window (0-6 months). Daycare centers equipped with breastfeeding and lactation rooms, especially those that are on-site, can enable working mothers to breastfeed their children and express milk, which has proven benefits for families, businesses, and society as a whole. UNICEF's Mothers@Work program in Bangladesh supports appropriate breastfeeding support policies and practices in RMG factories which enable women to nourish their children whilst continuing to work.

## Good for Business

In addition to government and private childcare providers, employers in Bangladesh can also play an important role in addressing childcare challenges. IFC's Tackling Childcare Research,<sup>13</sup> covering several countries including Fiji, India, Jordan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, shows there is a strong business case for employer-supported childcare. Employers can support the care needs of their employees through childcare and family-friendly policies and as a result



## Policies to Enhance Family-Friendly Work Environments

Recognizing the challenges associated with the lack of good quality, affordable childcare, and the benefits that accrue over time if access is enabled, the Government of Bangladesh has instituted a set of policies to enhance family-friendly work environments.



Source: Honey Bees Daycare Center

13. IFC. (2019). Tackling Childcare. [www.ifc.org/tacklingchildcare](http://www.ifc.org/tacklingchildcare). Also see [www.ifc.org/ifcpcbgender](http://www.ifc.org/ifcpcbgender)

## The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006<sup>14</sup>

The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006, sec. 94, states:

“In every establishment, where 40 (forty) or more female workers are ordinarily employed, one or more suitable rooms shall be provided and maintained for the use of their children who are under the age of 6 (six) years. These rooms will provide adequate accommodation, must have adequate lighting, ventilated and maintained in a clean and sanitary condition, and will be under the charge of women trained or experienced in childcare.”

### Other Provisions in the Law<sup>14</sup>



#### Working Hours of Female Workers

A female worker must sign a consent form in order to work from 10:00 PM to 06:00 AM which will remain valid for 12 months unless she plans a withdrawal or change.



#### Maternity Leave

Every woman employed in an establishment shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for, the payment of maternity benefit in respect of the period of 8 (eight) weeks preceding the expected day of her delivery and 8 (eight) weeks immediately following the day of her delivery. Provided that a woman shall not be entitled to such maternity benefits unless she has worked under the employer, for a period of not less than 6 (six) months



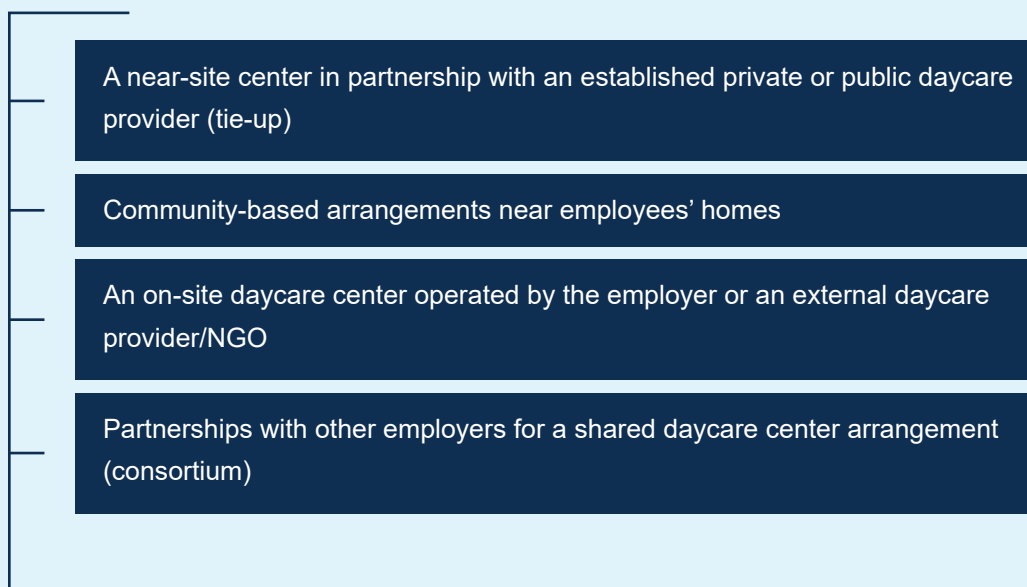
#### Pregnancy Welfare Benefits

A pregnant worker should not be engaged in work declared hazardous by the government or any work hazardous for her health. Additionally, after the delivery, the organization must provide an opportunity for lactation and ensure a congenial atmosphere for mothers and children.

14. Bangladesh Labour Act 2006. Available at [https://betterwork.org/dev/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2.-Bangladesh\\_Labor\\_Law\\_2006\\_Eng-1.pdf](https://betterwork.org/dev/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2.-Bangladesh_Labor_Law_2006_Eng-1.pdf)

## What is Employer-Supported Childcare?

Employer-supported childcare, within the context of this research and in light of the Labour Act, is defined as good-quality, affordable early childhood care and education services provided or supported by employers for their employees' children who are in the preschool age group (6 months to 6 years) through:



Employer-supported childcare can be fee-based, including sliding scale fees, or fully or partially subsidized by employers, and complemented by family-friendly policies such as



flexible work



lactation support



paid parental leave  
(maternity and paternity)



safe transport



on-site nurse

While employer-sponsored childcare may not resolve all the issues related to early childhood care and education in Bangladesh nor should it replace public provision, by increasing the availability of formal, affordable, and good-quality childcare arrangements for working parents (and for those who would like to work), it can contribute to improving urban female labor force participation as well as child development and business outcomes.



Source: BRAC HQ Daycare Center (Dolna)

## 2 Tackling Childcare in Bangladesh

IFC, in partnership with LightCastle Partners as well as BACCO, Better Work Bangladesh, BGMEA, BHTPA, BLFCA, BRAC-IED, BUILD, DCCI, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)'s Bangladesh Shishu Academy, Phulki, UNICEF Bangladesh, UN Global Compact Bangladesh, and the World Bank surveyed more than 300 companies and interviewed more than 75 parents and 40 stakeholders, including care providers, government representatives, and investors, to better understand the benefits, challenges, and opportunities associated with offering childcare as an employer in Bangladesh.

### Study Objective



Collect evidence and initiate a multi-stakeholder dialogue on the business case as well as potential solutions for advancing employer-supported childcare in Bangladesh, in line with the legal mandate and in an effort to boost female labor force participation.

The results show that only 23% of companies surveyed offer some form of childcare to their employees. In addition, employers that offer childcare support to their employees, report a clear business case for employer-supported childcare, especially with respect to improving organizational profitability. The analysis also revealed major challenges cited by companies that hinder their ability to offer childcare and complementary family-friendly policies. In the process, the companies also highlighted the types of support they would need to address these challenges. The results show that there is significant demand for employer-supported childcare solutions from working parents across different income levels.



Source: Honey Bees Daycare Center

The research has resulted in a set of recommendations for private sector employers as well as the government and civil society in terms of actions they can take on their own and jointly to meet the care needs of working parents.

# 3 Methodology

A total of 306 employers, each employing more than 40 women hence legally mandated to support childcare, were surveyed in-person and online between May and July 2019. In addition, nine focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with more than 75 blue- and white-collar employees to gather their perspective on the issue. Parents were asked questions about their childcare needs, challenges, existing childcare arrangements, solutions offered by their employers, and their preferences for and experiences with different types of childcare services.



## 306 Employer Surveys

- 179 in-person surveys
- 127 online survey



## 9 Focus Group Discussions

- 6 with white-collar employees
- 3 with blue-collar employees



## 40 Consultation Sessions

- 33 with private and public sector stakeholders
- 7 with project partners including public sector

Additionally, 40 stakeholders, including project partners listed above, were consulted to weigh in on the results and the recommendations for the private, public, and development sectors to advance employer-supported childcare.

Most of the companies surveyed were domestic companies with multiple work locations.



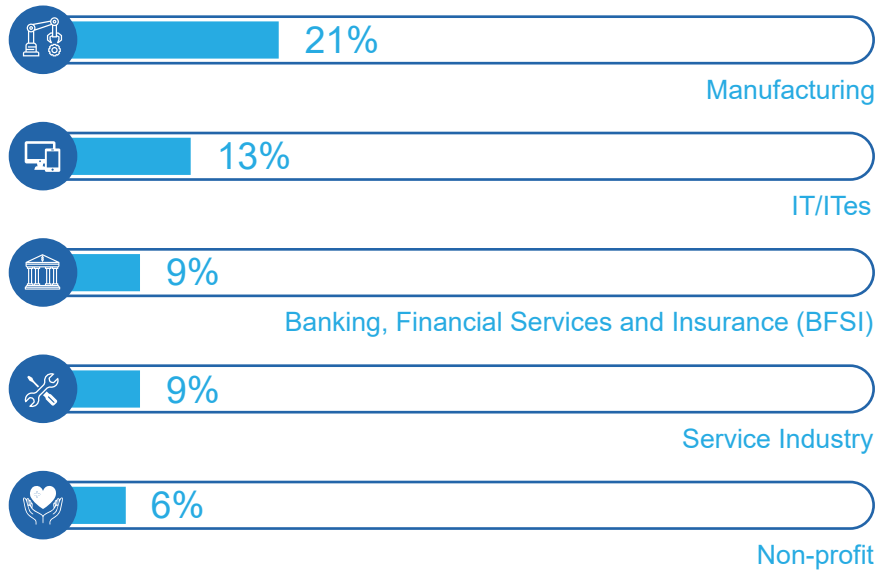
of the company representatives who responded to the survey were women



of the respondents were from the companies' Human Resources (HR) departments

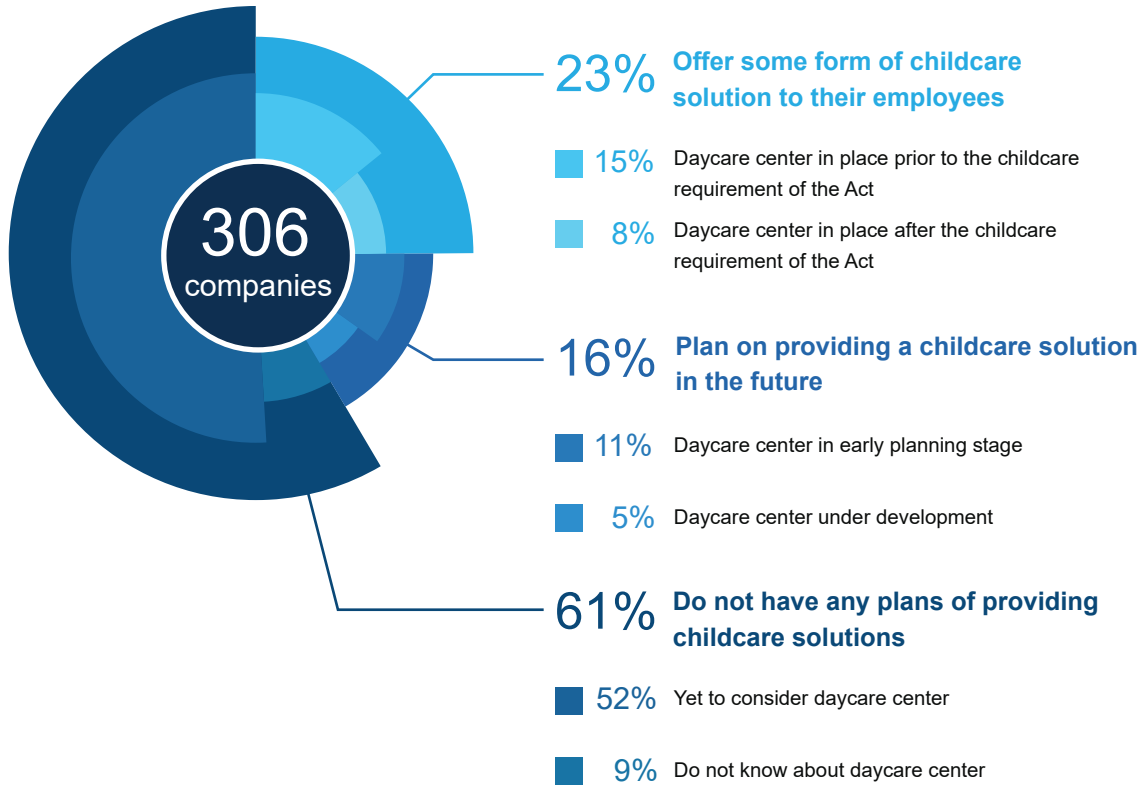


The top five sectors responding to the survey include



# 4 Key Findings

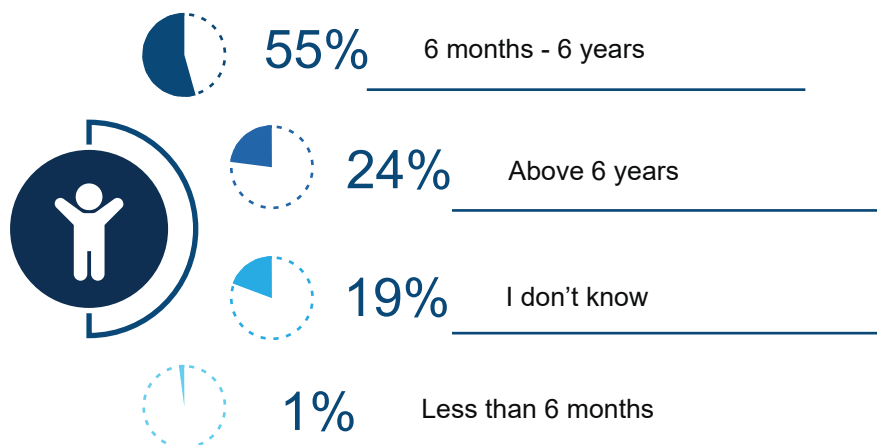
## Status of Childcare Provision



Out of the 306 companies surveyed in the study, 23% offer some form of childcare solution to their employees. An additional 16% of surveyed companies plan on providing a childcare solution in the future, while 61% do not have any plans of providing childcare solutions.

Out of the 306 companies surveyed, more than 50% of the companies said that their employees' children are mostly in the 6 months to 6 years age range, thus eligible for childcare.

## Percentage of employers that reported their employees have children in the preschool age range

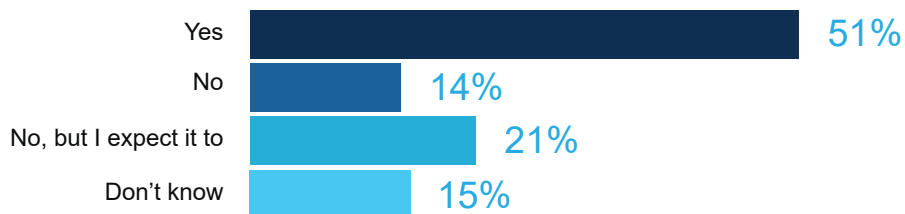


The median cost of providing childcare services to one child per month is BDT 5,000 or approximately 60 USD. Additionally, 41% of companies surveyed are moderately familiar with the childcare requirement of the Labour Act.

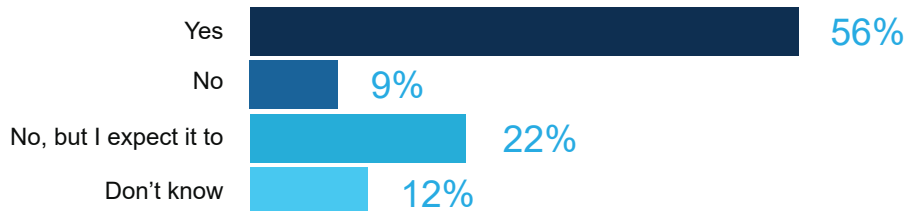
Majority of the companies surveyed believe that there is a strong business case for providing childcare solutions to their employees, noting positive impacts on workplace culture, employee productivity, employee retention, employee morale, talent acquisition, position as an employer of choice, and women’s career advancement. However, many of these companies cannot provide childcare solutions to their employees due to several challenges such as lack of funding, space restrictions, constricted supply of caregivers, etc.

### Impact of Providing Childcare Solutions<sup>15</sup>

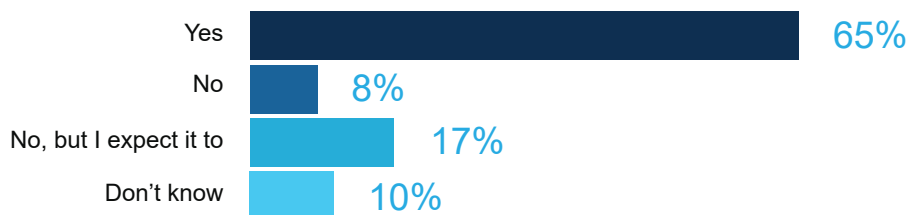
#### Organizational profitability



#### Women’s career advancement

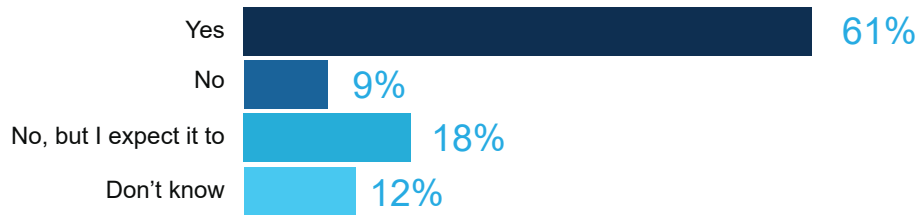


#### Talent acquisition

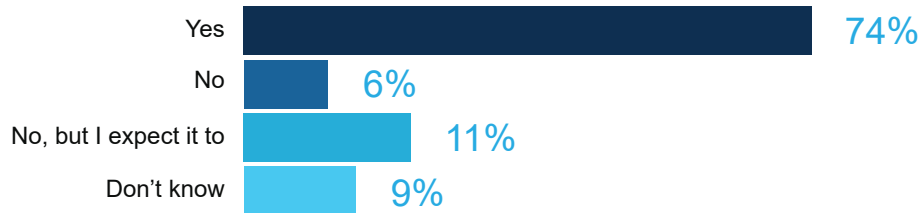


15. Data from 68 out of 306 companies surveyed who provide childcare solutions

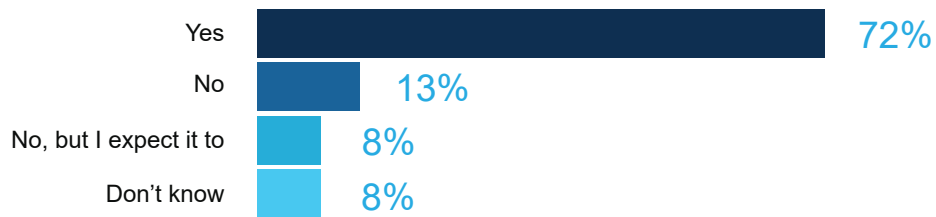
### Position/branding as employer of choice



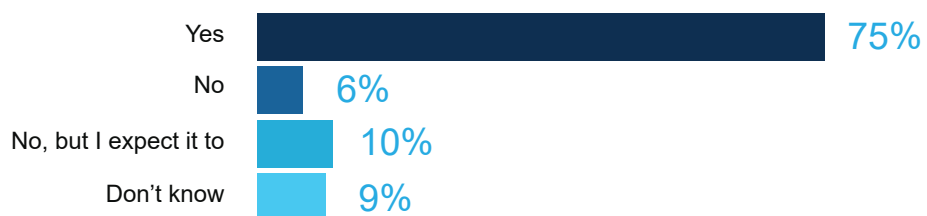
### Employee productivity



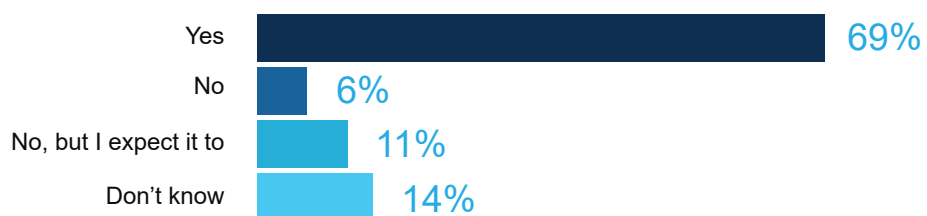
### Employee retention



### Workplace culture



### Improved morale



## Quick Statistics about Childcare in Bangladesh



5,000 BDT ~ 60 USD

Median Monthly Cost of Providing Childcare for One Child

Out of the **306** companies surveyed,



**55%**  
reported that  
their  
employees'  
children are  
eligible for  
childcare



**51%**  
of 68 companies providing childcare  
report positive impact of childcare solutions  
on business profitability

## Types of formal childcare solutions

Government-run centers operated by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA); BRAC-IED's affordable and community-based Play Lab Model; upscale daycare centers operated by providers such as Wee Learn and Bromley Bee in urban centers; mid-range daycare centers operated by Phulki, including on factory premises, among others.

**94** Number of Childcare centers run (or in the process of being set up) by  
**MoWCA**<sup>16</sup>

16. MoWCA. (2017). Father of the nation dreamt Children will be our strength: Information booklet on Children Affairs  
[https://mowca.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/afb026d\\_7c2c\\_4af5\\_ad22\\_2c7857b6f345/CHILDREN.pdf](https://mowca.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/afb026d_7c2c_4af5_ad22_2c7857b6f345/CHILDREN.pdf)

## Companies Providing Childcare

Companies providing daycare solutions reported that they have observed positive impacts across eight business indicators: organizational profitability and workplace culture, employee productivity, employee retention, employee morale, talent acquisition, position as an employer of choice, and women's career advancement.

## Companies Not Providing or Planning to Provide Childcare

Companies surveyed that are not providing or planning to provide childcare solutions to their employees cite various financial, legal, provision-related, and organizational challenges, such as:

-  **Financial challenge**  
The perceived high costs of building the infrastructure for an on-site daycare center and operating it.
-  **Legal/regulatory challenge**  
Lack of clarity on (minimum) guidelines/standards of daycare.
-  **Provision-related challenge**  
Lack of space to build an on-site daycare center.
-  **Organizational challenge**  
Understanding employee needs.



Source: Honey Bees Daycare Center

These companies highlighted that a better understanding of employee needs will allow them to plan next steps. However, only 29% of the respondents had an employee feedback system in place. If the practice of receiving feedback from employees on this and similar topics is improved, for example through anonymous surveys, interviews, and focus groups, employers will be much more likely to understand their employees' demands and therefore meet them.

# 5 Summaries from Focus Group Discussions

## What are Employees Saying?

Number of Focus Group Discussions

9

Number of Participating Employees

75+

Number of Sectors Covered

10+

### Sectors covered



Digital marketing



Technology



Telecommunication



Education



Service industry



Healthcare



Hospitality



Banking



Manufacturing



Logistics



Development

### Key findings



Childcare services are in high demand by all working parents consulted. However, the type of childcare services demanded differs by income group.



Blue-collar employees prioritize nutritious meals and basic education services at low-or free-of-cost (understood here to mean basic literacy and numeracy skills).



White-collar employees are willing to pay a premium price for high quality, conveniently-located childcare centers with advanced early education programs.



Both blue- and white-collar employees believe the childcare requirement of the Bangladesh Labour Act should be adjusted to benefit all working parents instead of just working women.



Employees also said that awareness of the law among both parents and employers should be increased.

Consultations with employees across different industries and income levels revealed that there is high demand for employer-sponsored childcare solutions. A wide range of childcare arrangements are used by employees, including care by family members/neighbors, community-based daycare, etc. Some women respondents, for example, shared that they had to sacrifice their careers due to lack of childcare support. Both white- and blue-collar employees are aware of the importance of employer-sponsored childcare. However, the perspectives of white- and blue-collar employees differ when it comes to the reasons cited for enrolling their children in a childcare center, and also the type of amenities they value the most.

Many blue-collar employees consulted cite safety and basic education as the most important factors for them, in addition to the provision of low-cost or free-of-cost nutritious meals. Blue-collar employees also said they feel safe putting their children in a childcare center and thus can work stress-free and more efficiently. White-collar employees seek employer-provided childcare centers that provide high quality, conveniently-located solutions. Parents generally expressed a positive attitude toward and acceptance of formal childcare solutions, especially if they were convinced of the quality and skills of caregivers.

White-collar employees are more vocal about the need for high quality childcare solutions. Many white-collar employees say they will only enroll their children in childcare centers once they are assured of the quality of the program in terms of hygiene, curriculum, the physical space, etc. Additionally, many of these employees feel all working parents regardless of their gender and income status should receive employer-sponsored childcare solutions.



Source: Honey Bees Daycare Center



## A Community-Based Daycare for Factory Employees

Ayesha Khatoon<sup>17</sup>, a 34-year old woman originally from Barisal in Southern Bangladesh, has been working at a denim factory on the outskirts of Dhaka for the last 12 years. She and her husband Mizan moved to the bustling capital almost 15 years ago in hopes of higher wages and varied employment opportunities. According to Ayesha, she and her husband, who works as a delivery truck driver in Dhaka, earn enough to send money to Mizan's elderly parents in Barisal.

The road to prosperity, however, has been filled with obstacles. Ayesha and her husband have two children, Asma, aged 10, and Masud, aged four. Ayesha's mother had moved from Barisal to take care of Asma when she was born so that Ayesha could go back to work at the denim factory. However, when her youngest child was born, her mother fell ill and could no longer provide childcare. Ayesha contemplated leaving her job, but her family could not survive without her income. A coworker suggested Phulki's daycare center located a few kilometers south of the denim factory. Phulki, a non-profit organization based in Dhaka, runs several community-based daycare centers in the Dhaka district for blue-collar factory employees. For a monthly fee of less than US\$10, parents are assured of their children's safety, well-being, and early childhood education.

Given that the center is community-based, parents feel that they have a voice in advocating what is the best for their children. The teachers and care providers are community residents who have been trained in childcare by Phulki. Phulki also provides the children with regular health checkups and teaching health and cleaning habits is central to the curriculum.

Ayesha states that Phulki's daycare has been instrumental in maintaining her income and salvaging her career. "I drop Masud on my way to work, and I can concentrate on my work because I know he is safe, happy, and ready for school. My husband and I did not finish high school but we want our children to do so. I was skeptical about this daycare center when I heard about it, but my coworker highly recommended it. Thanks to this daycare center, my husband and I can perform our jobs with peace of mind."

## Story of Working Parents at a Healthcare Center in Dhaka

Tanvir Hossain<sup>17</sup>, a 37-year-old nurse came to Dhaka seven years ago from Chittagong to look for a job. Four years ago, he got married to Nasima Hossain, a primary school teacher, and she gave birth to their daughter Mukta, who is now three years old.

Mukta's parents leave her with her maternal grandparents every morning before they leave for work. Although they are satisfied with this arrangement for now, they feel that it might take a toll on the grandparent-parent-child relationship. Tanvir's coworkers suggested enrolling Mukta at a private childcare center but Tanvir and his wife are apprehensive. The entire concept of a private childcare service is new to them. However, they know that many companies in Dhaka provide on-site daycare centers for their employees. Tanvir believes that an employer-sponsored daycare would be an ideal solution for them.

17. All names have been changed to maintain privacy

“A high-quality on-site daycare center at work would be ideal...my wife would be very grateful.”

Tanvir has visited several private childcare centers in Dhaka in his quest to identify the right care solution for his family. He observed in one childcare center that at times children from different income-level groups were treated differently. He believes this should not be the norm. He is still searching.

## 6 Examples of Employer-Supported Childcare Solutions in Bangladesh

### Grameenphone's Daycare Center: Happy Hearts

Grameenphone is one of the first corporate bodies in Bangladesh to open a daycare center for its employees. "Happy Hearts" started its journey back in 2006. The daycare center situated in GPHOUSE has a capacity of 96 children, and operates during the office hours (8 am – 7 pm).

The center started its journey with the motto of helping women employees to pursue their careers in a comfortable environment, and soon began reaping several business benefits including attracting, and retaining top talent for Grameenphone. The amenities that the daycare center provides are:

- Special zone for lactation
- Health & Hygiene Standards
- Extracurricular activities along with educational toys, mini outdoor activity area, library etc.
- International-standard interior play area for children of different age groups

The payment scheme is also convenient for working parents. In fact, there are two types of payment schemes: for working parents who regularly use the daycare center and another for working parents who occasionally use it. Both schemes are highly subsidized.



Source: Happy Hearts Daycare Center

“Grameenphone’s daycare center provides world class childcare facilities to the children of Grameenphone employees. It not only contributes positively towards the emotional and intellectual wellbeing of the children, but also enables working parents to realize their full potential at work every day.”

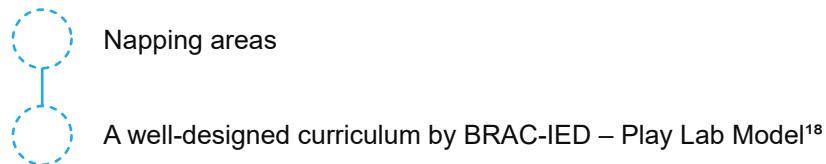
**Shaharear Sayeed**

Head of Employee Experiences  
People & Organization Division  
Grameenphone Ltd.

## BRAC HQ Daycare Center: Dolna

BRAC, the largest NGO in the world, started providing daycare facilities to their employees back in 1997. The daycare center was established to support women’s labor force participation in Bangladesh. The journey of “Dolna” started with two children and one caregiver, with currently 97 children enrolled in the center.

“Dolna” has a capacity of 100 children and can expand capacity based on incremental demand. The variety of facilities provided include:



The payment scheme for “Dolna” is flexible and varies with employees’ monthly salary. The center charge ranges between BDT 1,100 to BDT 4,500 (~ USD 13 – USD 53).



“At BRAC, our daycare centre allows new mothers to come back to work. Mothers can pursue their careers, knowing that their children are taken care of in a safe space. They are also able to continue the crucial practice of breastfeeding their infants.”

**Jinath Tasmin**

Senior Sector Specialist

Dolna, HRD (Human Resource and Learning Division)

BRAC

## UNICEF Mothers@Work Program

Mothers@Work is a national program to strengthen maternity rights and support breastfeeding in the workplace. It was initiated by UNICEF in response to the national nutrition program to support breastfeeding in the workplace. The program was designed through a national consultation in partnership with ILO/IFC Better Work Bangladesh, RMG factories, BRAC, and other development partners, under the leadership of multiple departments of the government of Bangladesh including the National Nutrition Service, Institute of Public Health and Nutrition, Ministry of Health and Family

18. The Play Lab Model promotes early years’ learning for children (aged 3-5 years) coming from socio-economically challenged backgrounds and uses age-appropriate play activities as a learning tool.

Welfare. Mothers@Work was jointly launched with Ministry of Labour and Employment in August 2017.

Mothers@Work recommends seven minimum standards that uphold maternity rights protection and breastfeeding support in the workplace.



### **Breastfeeding spaces**

All organizations shall provide a private space for mothers to breastfeed and/or express and store breastmilk.



### **Breastfeeding breaks**

Nursing mothers shall be allowed to reduce their working hours or take breaks to breastfeed their babies or express their breastmilk. All nursing mothers should be given the option of flexible working arrangements.



### **Childcare provision**

Childcare facilities shall be provided in all private organizations with more than 40 women employees of reproductive age.



### **Paid maternity leave**

Paid maternity leave as per national law shall be provided to women employees.



### **Cash and medical benefits**

Cash and medical benefits shall be provided to women on maternity leave to support the health and well-being of both mother and child.



### **Employment protection and non-discrimination**

All women shall have the right to return to a job of the same grade or an equivalent pay after maternity leave and shall not be subject to discrimination in accessing employment.



### **Safe-work provision**

Women who are pregnant or nursing shall not perform work that is potentially dangerous to their health or to the health of their fetus or young children.


## **Key Interventions**



Orient company's senior management or owner on the 7 (seven) minimum standards and resources required to implement the program.




Support the company to develop a workplace policy to upholding exclusive breastfeeding, especially among working mothers.

- 
- Support company to establish and maintain a breastfeeding space.
  - Capacity building of company's staff including HR manager/officer, Health Workers, and Social Welfare Officers.
  - Establish mothers support groups, mentored by the experienced working mothers.
  - Knowledge management, communications, and PR for advocacy.
  - Monitor and track the implementation of 7 (seven) minimum standards.

### Mothers@Work: Business Case Data

Starting with five factories in Bangladesh, Mothers@Work has now expanded to 92 factories, reaching around 160,000 working women and their young children. Assessments<sup>19</sup> that were conducted before and after two years of program implementation in two RMG companies (a total of five factories), revealed encouraging results:

- 
- Factories established breastfeeding spaces according to the minimum standards promoted by Mothers@Work.
  - Factories ensured two 30-minute breastfeeding breaks during work hours and also established childcare.
  - As a result, exclusive breastfeeding improved from 12% to 17%.
  - Preliminary findings related to the productivity of lactating working mothers suggest a positive shift from 73% to 79%.
  - These results demonstrate benefits not only for children and women, but for employers as well.


19. Baseline and endline assessments were implemented independently by icddr between November to December 2016 and December 2018 to January 2019 respectively (preliminary report to be published by UNICEF Bangladesh)

# 7 Recommendations

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Wider implementation of childcare and other family-friendly workplace policies has the potential to enhance women's employment, children's learning and health outcomes, and business and economic growth in Bangladesh. Results from analyses of employer-level data and insights from employee discussions confirm the need for and opportunities associated with childcare solutions. Furthermore, a comprehensive childcare ecosystem that engages key stakeholders in the public, private, and development sectors is needed so that more families and children can benefit from childcare and businesses can reap greater benefits. Below are a set of recommendations for a variety of stakeholders, private sector employers, public sector policy-makers, as well as civil society actors.

## Recommendations for Private Sector Employers:

- 
- Assess Needs:**

Gather feedback from employees on their childcare needs, challenges, preferences, and motivations through anonymous surveys, in-depth interviews, and/or focus groups. In addition, review business goals and resources. Explore different childcare and complementary family-friendly solutions accordingly. UNICEF, for example, has developed a child foot-printing tool for the RMG sector to use in understanding worker's family profiles, key child rights indicators, and daycare preferences.
  - Develop a Stronger Understanding of Potential Childcare Solutions**
    - Learn more about the benefits, strategies, and costs of employer-supported childcare from existing resources such as IFC's Tackling Childcare Research and the upcoming Guide for Employer-Supported Childcare (November 2019) as well as from care providers and other companies in Bangladesh already implementing childcare solutions.
    - Consider the different solutions that might work for your particular company, whether it is on-site, near-site, or community-based care, or another option.
  - Consider Partnering with Other Stakeholders**
    - Local care providers, the government, international organizations, and local and international experts can provide childcare guidance and services.

- Partner with other employers (through a consortium) to pool resources and maximize impact through shared solutions, especially in certain sectors and areas like banking as well as high-tech parks and economic zones.
- Industry associations can provide their members with workshops on the topic of employer-supported childcare, where experts, providers, and other companies can share their experience on the topic and members can ask questions and access resources.
- Actively liaise with the government, for example MoLE, MoWCA, and the Shishu Academy, to advocate for adjustments in legislation as well as for greater support for teacher training, funding, standards and guidelines, learning curricula, etc.

### **Start Small**

Consider selecting a business unit or location, pilot customized programs, match operating hours with work hours, and offer benefits to working parents. Learn as you go and make adjustments when needed before scaling up. Integrate the childcare strategy into broader corporate objectives, such as (gender) diversity and inclusion for business growth.

### **Measure & Communicate the Business Case**

Set baselines and establish metrics to regularly assess the impact of family-friendly solutions on employee performance, retention, productivity, satisfaction, and other business metrics over time. Through this, employers can identify the costs and benefits of providing childcare solutions.

UNICEF, for example, is working in partnership with the RMG sector to measure the value of business investments on children's rights in terms of both outcomes for children and for business.

### **Raise Awareness**

As a pioneer, publicly endorse the importance of employer-supported childcare and share the business case and good practices to inspire other companies to follow suit.



## Recommendations for the Public and Development Sectors:

### Consider Adjusting the Law

Evidence shows that childcare requirements based on the number of women employees might deter employers from hiring women employees or transfer the cost of childcare to women employees through lower wages. A gender neutral approach could lead to better results in Bangladesh. In addition, childcare requirements mandating on-site solutions might crowd out community-based solutions that are often preferred by parents who face long commutes.

### Establish Standards

Coordinate with local and if needed international experts to develop and disseminate guidelines and standards related to quality, safety, and other aspects of childcare and provide implementation support to employers.

### Invest in Quality Early Childhood Care and Education (as part of a long-term human capital development strategy):

#### Caregivers

Provide national-level training and certification opportunities to caregivers and providers to increase quality of care in Bangladesh and raise parents' trust in the formal childcare system (e.g., through a national certification system).

#### Learning

Coordinate with experts to develop play-based learning curricula and teacher guides to enhance the child development component of childcare. Focus on, for example, teacher-pupil ratios and safe, hygienic, and nurturing environments.

### Monitor Quality

Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the quality of public, private, employer-supported, and community-based childcare solutions. Licensing, registration, accreditation, and regular inspections by trained professionals can support this process.

### Raise Awareness

Help educate employers about the childcare requirements of the Labour Act and how it can lead to benefits beyond compliance. Inform parents (white- and blue-collar employees) of their rights as well.



## Explore Financing Options:

- Establish a national or provincial scheme to help companies meet their family-friendly goals. For example, in Singapore, the [Early Childhood Development Agency \(ECDA\)](#) was set up to focus on teacher training, daycare center licensing and certification, quality audits, the nation-wide childcare subsidy for parents to stimulate demand, and a public-private partnership with local childcare operators to expand supply via two approaches:
  - **Anchor Operator (AOP):** Childcare operator manages and operates a government-owned space in public low-cost housing. Since rent and fit-outs are paid by ECDA, monthly childcare fees are capped.
  - **Partner Operator (POP):** Childcare operator rents a space of their choosing and gets a per child or CAPEX subsidy from ECDA. Because of subsidies received by operators, monthly childcare fees are capped, making them more affordable for parents.
- Provide tax and non-tax incentives, such as credits and subsidies to parents and employers. [See the 2019 Women, Business and the Law childcare policy note.](#)
- Facilitate impact and commercial investments in this space for e.g. through social and development impact bonds (SIBs/DIBs) and regulatory changes to facilitate investments in childcare. [Also see Peritus Childcare Sales in Australia.](#)
- Partner, cost-share, and/or match funds invested by companies in childcare. See, for example, Germany<sup>20</sup>, Jordan<sup>21</sup> and Turkey<sup>22</sup>.

20. IFC. (2017). Tackling Childcare: Case Study, Schön Klinik, Healthcare, Germany

[https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/79f35e56-d3a0-481a-81eb-c3bae1602496/SchonKlinik\\_Layout+2.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu8H8l](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/79f35e56-d3a0-481a-81eb-c3bae1602496/SchonKlinik_Layout+2.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu8H8l)

21. IFC. (2017). Tackling Childcare: Case Study, MAS Kreeda Al Safi-Madaba, Garment Manufacturing, Jordan

[https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/c4932977-263e-45d4-9da4-f936694ee13c/MASKreeda\\_Layout+3.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu8BzS](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/c4932977-263e-45d4-9da4-f936694ee13c/MASKreeda_Layout+3.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu8BzS)

22. IFC. (2017). Tackling Childcare: Case Study, Borusan, Industry/Heavy Manufacturing, Turkey

[https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/f608ce9f-bdb7-4a4f-9d6f-30ccab4b05ce/Borusan\\_Layout+2.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu8vbH](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/f608ce9f-bdb7-4a4f-9d6f-30ccab4b05ce/Borusan_Layout+2.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu8vbH)

## Suggested Actions Applicable to both Public and Private Sectors that can be Jointly Undertaken:

### Enhance Parent-Child Connection

As highlighted in focus group discussions, assurance of children's well-being enhances the parents' peace of mind and productivity and consequently the company's productivity and profitability. Childcare solutions are beneficial if designed to maintain the parent-child connection by, for example, being easily accessible to parents and engaging with the family about the child's development.

### Prioritize the Child's Development

In addition to meeting basic custodial needs, quality childcare provides opportunities for children to develop physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively. Training of childcare providers, a well-designed, play-based curriculum, and a safe, hygienic, and age-appropriate environment are key components of a quality childcare center.

### Customize Solutions

Parents' childcare preferences and needs vary across income levels, location, values, and working conditions. Thus, childcare solutions must be customized to cater to the varying needs of working parents, without compromising on childcare quality and child outcomes. Low cost solutions need not be low quality solutions.

### Maintain High Quality

Childcare solutions must be rigorously and regularly monitored to ensure the quality of services and encourage uptake from parents, building their trust and peace of mind.

#### ● Involve Experts

Health and education specialists as well as experts from organizations such as BRAC-IED and Phulki can play a vital role in maintaining and improving the quality of childcare solutions.

#### ● Screen and Train Caregivers

An effective screening and training process for selecting caregivers and daycare staff can ensure quality and minimize risks. Educational qualifications, certifications, soft skills, background checks, and previous experience of the caregivers, teachers, and staff must be taken into consideration during the recruitment process.

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