

Workshop for Assessing Gaps in the Bangladesh Labour Act Regarding Care Work



Report-sharing Workshop with TU Leaders & Relevant Stakeholders

Policy experts, government officials, and trade union leaders have called for the urgent inclusion of care work within the Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) to address critical legislative gaps. Speaking at a report-sharing workshop titled “An Assessment of Gaps in the BLA regarding Care Work,” held at the Prestige Hall, Asia Hotel and Resort in Dhaka on 28 May 2025, stakeholders highlighted that the current legal framework fails to recognise caregiving as a formal profession, leaving thousands of workers without social protection or decent working conditions.

The study, conducted by the BILS with ILO support, revealed significant deficiencies in the BLA, including the absence of paternity leave, inadequate maternity provisions, and a lack of flexible working hours. Study lead Abu Mehedi Imam noted that the Act remains unaligned with international standards such as ILO Conventions 183, 189, and 190. Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed, Chairman of the Labour Reform Commission at BILS, emphasised that without clear legal definitions of “care work” and “care worker,”

advocacy efforts for the sector's rights will remain fundamentally weakened.

During the open discussion, members of the Labour Reform Commission and trade unionists stressed the need for a cultural shift. Dr Mahfuzul Haque noted that while caregiving is traditionally viewed as a domestic duty, Bangladesh's shifting demographics and the potential for remittance generation through skilled caregiving necessitate a robust “care economy.” Participants urged the government to develop a comprehensive national database in collaboration with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and called for specialised training that includes mental health support for care recipients.

The workshop concluded with a set of strategic recommendations, including the ratification of ILO Conventions 156 and 190, the potential enactment of a dedicated law for domestic workers, and the expansion of social safety nets for elderly caregivers. Badal Khan, Chairman of NCCWE, closed the session by affirming that

any future policies must reflect Bangladesh's unique socio-economic realities while fostering a strong social dialogue between political parties and civil society to ensure sustainable reform for the care sector.

Strategic Roadmap Finalised for a Sustainable Leather Industry



Report-sharing Workshop with TU Leaders & Relevant Stakeholders

The final session of the BILS-led discussion series concluded on 29 April 2025 at Hemayetpur, marking a significant milestone in strengthening industrial relations within the leather sector. Over the course of the three meetings, a total of 174 participants—including 158 men and 16 women—contributed to a comprehensive strategic roadmap. This concluding session successfully integrated labour rights with environmental sustainability, reflecting the global demand for "green" leather production.

Key actionable recommendations finalised during the meeting include providing educational support for the children of sick or skilled workers and a firm commitment to

transitioning towards an environmentally friendly leather industry. By establishing a constructive platform for ongoing social dialogue, these meetings have significantly enhanced mutual understanding between owners and trade unions. The closing remarks reaffirmed that the "way out" of the industry's current challenges lies in a collective commitment to decent work, ensuring that the Hemayetpur Tannery Estate evolves into a hub of industrial harmony and ethical production.

BILS Empowers Youth and Women Leaders to Strengthen Tannery Union Advocacy

BILS organised a day-long training programme on 18 April 2025 at the Tannery Workers' Union Office in Hemayetpur, Savar, aimed at building the capacity of youth and women leaders within the sector. The session was attended by union organisers and leaders representing 14 tanneries, with a specific focus on integrating young workers and women into mainstream trade union activities. The programme was graced by the presence of the Tannery Workers' Union



Report-sharing Workshop with TU Leaders & Relevant Stakeholders

President and General Secretary, alongside senior project personnel, who highlighted the critical need for inclusive leadership to ensure a sustainable and rights-based industrial environment.

The training session served as a platform to share the project's overarching goals, which include enhancing the knowledge of union members regarding workers' rights and enabling them to apply this expertise effectively within their respective workplaces. Experienced resource persons facilitated technical sessions on trade union rights, organising strategies, and the legal framework provided by the Bangladesh Labour Act. Participants engaged in detailed discussions regarding the implementation of the minimum wage for tannery workers and the importance of collective bargaining and negotiation in securing fair working conditions. A significant portion of the workshop was dedicated to workplace safety and Occupational Safety & Health (OSH), emphasizing the identification of hazards and the prevention of industrial accidents.

During the open discussion, participants emphasised the need for more active field-level engagement for youth and women to bridge the gap between union leadership and general workers. They recommended the expansion of capacity-building initiatives, focusing specifically on leadership development and the nuances of labour law to empower the next generation of unionists. The programme concluded with a commitment to foster a more inclusive union structure where youth and women can take a leading role in advocating for decent work and social protection.

Strategic Leadership Training Concludes to Drive Reform in the Tannery Sector

Continuing its mission to professionalise labour representation, BILS conducted the final session of its three-part leadership training series for youth and women trade unionists on 27 June 2025 in Hemayetpur, Savar. Across the entire series, a total of 74 participants (57 men and 17 women) from 14 tanneries have been equipped with advanced leadership and advocacy skills. This concluding event was designed to consolidate the knowledge gained in previous sessions and to develop a concrete action plan for field-level implementation within the Savar Tannery Estate.

The workshop highlighted that for trade unions to remain effective, they must adapt to the evolving industrial landscape by empowering young leaders who are well-versed in modern



Strategic Leadership Training

negotiation techniques. Key topics revisited included the strategic use of collective bargaining to resolve disputes and the rigorous application of OSH standards to protect workers handling hazardous chemicals. The trainers provided a comprehensive overview of project

activities and the roles of various stakeholders, ensuring that the union organisers understand the broader support system available to them through BILS and its partners.

The participants highlighted the necessity of organising more frequent training programmes at the grassroots level to maintain momentum. They gave emphasis on the fact that leadership development should not be a one-off event but a continuous process of mentoring. By the end of the session, the attendees identified specific strategies to increase women's involvement in union decision-making processes. It is expected that these newly capacitated leaders will now act as catalysts for change, promoting a safer, more equitable, and legally compliant working environment across the leather industry.

Study Circle Strengthens Tannery Workers' Capacity on Labour Rights and Workplace Safety

BILS organised a specialized Study Circle meeting on 23 May 2025 at the Tannery Workers' Union Office in Hemayetpur, Savar, to enhance the technical knowledge of union leaders and organisers. This event was the second in a series designed to empower the workforce across 13 tanneries with essential knowledge regarding basic labour rights and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). The programme was conducted by a joint facilitation team comprising the Tannery Workers' Union Trainers and the BILS Project Coordinator, ensuring a practical and grassroots-oriented approach to industrial advocacy.

The session served as a platform to share the project's strategic goals and the specific roles of various stakeholders in improving the lives of

tannery workers. Detailed discussions were held on the legal requirements for appointment contracts and identity cards, the implementation of the national minimum wage, and the regulation of working hours and other welfare facilities. A significant portion of the workshop was dedicated to OSH, covering critical topics such as fire and electrical safety, chemical management, ergonomics, and the life-saving importance of using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The trainers also provided insights into the formation of unions and the art of collective bargaining and negotiation to secure overtime pay and leave entitlements.

The participants highlighted the need for more intensive, issue-based training sessions to tackle the unique challenges of the leather sector. They gave emphasis on increasing the number of training participants and launching wider campaign activities to reach a broader segment of the workforce. A key recommendation from the session was the necessity of increasing women's participation at the factory level to ensure their specific rights are addressed within the union's agenda. The programme concluded with a call for long-term capacity building to bridge the gap between existing labour laws and their practical application on the factory floor, ensuring a safer and more equitable environment for all tannery workers.



Study circles to strengthen tannery workers

Care Workers Demand Legal Recognition at May Day Rally in Dhaka



May Day Rally 2025

On International Labour Day, BILS supported by the ILO, led a powerful rally and human chain at the National Press Club in Dhaka on 1 May 2025 to launch the agenda of the newly proposed Care Workers' Rights Protection Forum. The demonstration brought together 91 participants—including 64 women and 27 men—uniting frontline care workers, youth organisers, and trade union leaders to demand an end to the systemic invisibility of care work in Bangladesh.

During the three-hour mobilisation, protesters voiced urgent demands for the formal recognition of care work as essential labour. Holding festoons and distributing leaflets, they called for the inclusion of care workers in the Bangladesh Labour Act, the ratification of ILO Conventions 156 and 183, and the implementation of a national minimum wage. Speakers emphasised that care work is the backbone of the economy and requires immediate policy reform, legal inclusion, and social protection.

The platform presented a comprehensive list of demands aimed at professionalising the industry. Key priorities include the formal registration of care institutions, the mandatory issuance of

appointment letters and ID cards, and the creation of a national database for workers. Furthermore, the demonstrators highlighted the need for an eight-hour workday, safe environments, and modern training programmes to enhance skills and support entrepreneurship within the sector.

The rally concluded with a firm appeal to the government to simplify trade union registration for care workers and remove barriers to collective bargaining. By advocating for these structural changes, the BILS-ILO initiative marks a significant milestone in the fight for the dignity and legal standing of Bangladesh's care sector.



May Day 2025

Ashulia Workshop Empowers Factory Workers with Vital Labour Rights Training



Labour Rights Training in Ashulia

BILS supported by FEMNET e.V., conducted a capacity development workshop at the CCDB HOPE Foundation in Ashulia. The session, titled “*Guidelines of Labour Law for Decent Work and Industrial Relations*,” addressed the awareness gap among the industrial workforce, bringing together 21 factory workers (12 women and 9 men) and three trade union leaders to foster industrial dialogue.

The programme opened with messages from BILS leadership, including Director Nazma Yesmin and Executive Director Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, who emphasised the need for the labour movement to adopt thematic and environmental standards within the RMG sector. Facilitated by Ahsan Habib Bulbul, General Secretary of the Socialist Labour Forum (SLF), the workshop provided a platform for workers to discuss real-world challenges, such as long

working hours, lack of leave, and workplace harassment.

The methodology combined structured presentations with interactive group work and audio-visual screenings. During a preliminary assessment, participants expressed a keen interest in learning about legal recourse for common factory grievances. The curriculum covered the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, the Labour Policy 2012, and the Labour Rules 2015, which form the backbone of the nation's legal framework. A specialised group session focused on harassment and gender-based violence, allowing workers to contextualise legal knowledge through real-life scenarios and peer learning.

To ensure practical impact, BILS Senior Officer Md. Syaduzzaman underscored the importance of applying legal knowledge to safeguard workers' dignity. As the session concluded, workers made personal commitments to protect their rights, including a firm resolve never to sign blank documents, a refusal to submit written apologies without legal understanding, and a newfound awareness of leave entitlements—specifically the right to one day of leave for every 18 days worked.



Labour Rights Training

BILS and Trade Union Leaders Move to Formalise National Platform for Care Workers



National Platform for Care Workers

In a landmark step toward securing legal recognition for the care sector, BILS convened a strategic meeting with national trade union federation leaders to finalise the formation of a dedicated platform for care workers. Held at the BILS Seminar Hall in Dhanmondi on 20 April 2025, the session brought together 15 key representatives, including 11 men and 4 women from various national federations, to approve the Terms of Reference (ToR) and governance structure for what is set to be a pioneering advocacy body in Bangladesh.

The initiative follows an intensive grassroots mobilisation phase under the BILS-ILO Care Work Project. Organisers reported that a core group of 26 youth leaders, previously trained on care workers' rights, successfully Cascaded their knowledge to 260 additional youth organisers. This network subsequently engaged 373 field-level care workers through awareness sessions. From this outreach, a robust database has been established, with 169 care workers and 26 youth leaders officially expressing their commitment

to join the proposed platform, providing a strong foundation for its formal launch.

During the discussions, leadership reached a consensus on the platform's identity, proposing names such as the "Care Workers' Rights Protection Forum". The forum's primary goal is to ensure the recognition and protection of care work within the legal framework of Bangladesh. Key objectives include continuous advocacy for the inclusion of care workers under the Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) 2006, promoting the right to collective bargaining, and establishing area-based networks to provide legal aid and counseling for workers facing harassment or rights violations.

The organisational structure of the platform will be deeply integrated with existing labor movements. It was decided that the platform will be composed of federations associated with Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP). An Advisory Council will be formed featuring senior leadership from each SKOP federation,

while active representation will be ensured through a total of 28 youth leaders—one male and one female from each federation. The management will follow a joint coordination structure with a one-year term, and the BILS office will serve as the permanent Secretariat.

Scheduled to begin full operations in July 2025, the platform has already outlined a comprehensive scope of work. This includes conducting situational research, developing a legislative action plan for BLA inclusion, and organising dialogues to promote a gender-sensitive work environment. The forum also plans to maintain high visibility through the celebration of key dates, such as International Women’s Day and Domestic Workers’ Day on June 16, alongside issuing media statements and organising local actions in response to rights violations. This unified front marks a significant shift toward professionalising and protecting one of the most essential yet undervalued sectors of the national economy.

Bridging the Awareness Gap and Interactive Problem-Solving Training

On April 18, 2025, BILS and FEMNET e.V. conducted a second day-long capacity development workshop at the same venue, the CCDB HOPE Foundation in Ashulia. This session, titled “Guidelines of Labour Law for Decent Work, Workplace, and Industrial Relations Improvement,” featured a slightly different cohort consisting of 20 factory workers with an equal gender split of 10 women and 10 men, alongside five trade union leaders.



Day-Long Capacity Development Workshop

The workshop was formally inaugurated by Consultant Md. Meem Nur Hosain Turzo, who highlighted legal knowledge as the foundation of worker empowerment. Video messages from BILS Executive Director Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed and Nazma Yesmin again reinforced the need for modern social and environmental standards in the RMG sector. Facilitated by Labour Law Expert Advocate Nazrul Islam, this session moved beyond theory by having participants use flashcards to raise 20 unique, real-world factory questions, which were then answered directly by experienced trade union leaders.

The curriculum expanded upon human rights history alongside the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, Labour Policy 2012, and Labour Rules 2015. A dedicated group activity tackled the prevention of sexual harassment both inside and outside factory walls.

To ensure actionable outcomes, BILS Senior Officer Md. Syaduzzaman Mithu distributed critical hotline numbers and a checklist of documents required to file formal complaints, using visual aids to illustrate legal solutions. The interactive methodology proved to vastly improve peer-to-peer engagement compared to lecture formats. The session wrapped up with identical worker commitments regarding blank documents, written apologies, and leave/maternity benefits.

Capacity Development Workshop Empowers Ashulia Factory Workers on Decent Work and Labour Rights

BILS with the support of FEMNET e.V., organised a comprehensive capacity development workshop on 25 April 2025 at the CCDB HOPE Foundation in Ashulia. The day-long event, which ran from 10:30 AM to 5:30 PM, focused on the "Guidelines of Labour Law for Decent Work, Workplace and Industrial Relations Improvement," seeking to bridge the persistent knowledge gap regarding legal entitlements amongst the industrial workforce. The workshop was attended by 20 factory workers (7 women and 13 men) and 5 local trade union leaders, fostering a vital platform for direct dialogue and rapport building.



Capacity Development Workshop on Decent Work and Labour Rights

The programme was inaugurated by BILS Senior Officer Md. Syaduzzaman (Mithu), who underscored that true empowerment stems from the possession and effective application of legal knowledge. The session featured video messages from BILS Director Nazma Yesmin and Executive Director Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, both of whom emphasised the necessity of integrating environmental issues and decent work principles into the mainstream labour movement, particularly within the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector. Facilitated by Labour Law Expert Advocate Nazrul Islam, the

workshop provided an in-depth exploration of the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, the Labour Policy 2012, and the Labour Rules 2015, alongside a historical overview of human rights and key ILO conventions.

The methodology employed interactive sessions, including video documentaries, presentation slides, and issue-specific Q&A segments. An initial assessment revealed that while most workers face daily challenges regarding working hours and workplace conditions, their understanding of specific legal recourse was previously limited. Through these interactive modules, participants gained clarity on complex issues such as lawful termination, maternity benefits, layoff procedures, and protections against sexual harassment. The facilitators, joined by trade union leaders, also guided workers on the correct procedures for seeking legal assistance and the strategic benefits of union membership.

The workshop concluded with participants sharing personal commitments to apply their new-found knowledge. Many pledged to consult union leaders before signing legal documents or accepting fault in workplace disputes, while others committed to disseminating information regarding leave entitlements—such as the right to one day of leave for every 18 days worked—amongst their colleagues. Following the success of this intervention, BILS plans to organise a follow-up session with the same cohort to track workplace improvements and formalise a future workplan for sustained networking with trade union bodies.

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