

Inclusive Access to Social Protection and Public Services



Advocacy Brief 2026



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AT A GLANCE: COMMITMENTS IN FIGURES

3% of GDP

Target for genuine social protection expenditure under the NSSS 2026–2035

Tk 4,715.45 crore

Disability Allowance and Education Stipend Programme · 39 lakh beneficiaries

Tk 2,535.12 crore

Allowance for Widow and Deserted Women · 30 lakh beneficiaries

Tk 234.62 crore

Underprivileged People's Livelihood Development Programme · 2.79 lakh beneficiaries

Sources: NSSS 2026–2035; Social Security Budget FY2026–27

SECTION 01

Context and Government Commitments

Bangladesh has established an increasingly important policy and programme framework for strengthening social protection and improving access to public services for people experiencing poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. The **Strategic Framework of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2026–2035** provides the most significant current direction for this work, with the objective of developing a more coherent, inclusive and accountable social protection system that prioritises poor, vulnerable and socially excluded populations. The framework moves towards a lifecycle-based and shock-responsive approach, recognises social protection as a legitimate entitlement rather than discretionary assistance, and envisages progressively increasing genuine social protection expenditure towards 3 per cent of GDP. It also acknowledges continuing challenges, including exclusion of eligible households, targeting errors, modest benefit levels, programme fragmentation and insufficient integration of adaptive and climate-responsive social protection.

A particularly important feature of the current framework is its recognition that poverty and social exclusion cannot always be addressed through cash assistance alone. The NSSS provides for complementary measures including education support, skills development, livelihood assistance, access to basic services, legal-identity support and protection from discrimination, while recognising the need for adapted outreach where communities have limited access to administrative systems. It also seeks to improve beneficiary registration and verification, digital delivery, local validation and grievance redress so that eligible people are less likely to remain outside the social protection system.

These commitments are reinforced by the **Social Security Budget FY2026–27** and the **Public Financial Management Reform Strategy 2025–2030**. The latter incorporates gender-responsive, climate-smart and youth-focused approaches to public finance and identifies health, education, social protection and local government as important areas for stronger financial management and service delivery. It also emphasises social inclusion, citizen engagement and participatory approaches, while recognising the importance of connecting national policy intentions with frontline implementation.

The central challenge is therefore not simply the absence of policies or programmes, but whether existing commitments translate into effective access at the local level. For rural youth, women, Hijra and transgender people, Indigenous and other ethnic minority communities, persons with disabilities and populations living in remote or climate-vulnerable areas, access can be affected by limited information, administrative complexity, geographical distance, accessibility barriers, discrimination and weak coordination between institutions. Noboprobhaat Foundation therefore approaches this issue from an implementation perspective. This brief seeks to support Government efforts by identifying how existing national commitments can be translated into more accessible, equitable and accountable services through local government bodies, district and upazila administrations and relevant public institutions.

SECTION 02

From Government Commitments to Inclusive Access

Youth

Bangladesh's current social protection framework provides an important basis for improving economic security and access to opportunities for young people, although the relevant provisions of the **Strategic Framework of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2026–2035** are framed primarily around lifecycle and working-age protection rather than youth as a separate beneficiary category. Under **Section 3.2.2, "Working-Age and Employment-Linked Protection,"** the NSSS proposes reorienting working-age protection away from scattered relief, workfare and livelihood schemes towards a more coherent employment-linked protection system and recognises existing gaps in protection against unemployment, illness, employment injury, maternity-related income loss and vulnerabilities associated with informal employment. These provisions are particularly relevant to young people entering or participating in the labour market, including rural and marginalised youth who may experience additional barriers to skills development, employment and livelihood opportunities.

From an implementation perspective, the priority is therefore to ensure that eligible young people can identify and access the opportunities already available through public institutions. District and upazila-level institutions should make information on relevant skills, livelihood, employment and social protection programmes easier to obtain, strengthen referrals between Youth Development and other responsible public institutions, and pay particular attention to young people whose poverty, disability, geographic location or social exclusion creates additional barriers to participation. Where local consultation and planning mechanisms exist, young people should also have meaningful opportunities to communicate the barriers they experience in accessing public programmes and services. These actions would translate the NSSS commitment to more coherent working-age and employment-linked protection into more accessible support for young people at the local level.

Relevant Government Provision: *Strategic Framework of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2026–2035, Section 3.2.2, Working-Age and Employment-Linked Protection.*

Rural and Vulnerable Women

The **NSSS 2026–2035** establishes concrete provisions relevant to the social and economic inclusion of rural and vulnerable women. Under **Section 3.1, "Social Protection Support for the Poor and Vulnerable through the Family Card,"** the Strategy establishes the Family Card as a flagship household-level instrument for identifying and supporting poor and vulnerable families, while **Strategic Priority SP2, "Introduce and scale the Family Card system,"** provides for female household members to be designated as primary beneficiaries as part of the objective of promoting women's economic empowerment. This approach is reinforced by **Section 3.4.1, "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion,"** which integrates gender equality and social inclusion across targeting, enrolment, delivery, grievance redress, monitoring and accountability.

The **Social Security Budget FY2026–27** provides programme-level mechanisms through which support for vulnerable women is already being delivered. The **Allowance for Widow and Deserted Women** targets 30 lakh beneficiaries with an allocation of **Tk 2,535.12 crore**, while the **Rural Mother Centre (RMC) Programme: Revolving Small Loan** seeks to increase income-generating opportunities for landless and poor rural mothers through microcredit and training. The NSSS also proposes reviewing programmes with objectives that substantially overlap with the Family Card, including the **Vulnerable Women Benefit**, for possible consolidation as the Family Card system develops.

These commitments make local implementation particularly important: relevant district, upazila and local offices should ensure that eligible women receive clear information about available programmes, understand eligibility and application procedures and receive appropriate assistance where documentation or administrative requirements create barriers. Local institutions should also ensure that benefits intended for women are effectively accessible to them, that economic-support programmes are connected with relevant livelihood and skills opportunities where available, and that women can use accessible grievance mechanisms when they experience exclusion, delay or other barriers. Particular care will also be necessary during any future programme consolidation to ensure that eligible women are not inadvertently excluded while administrative arrangements change.

Relevant Government Provisions: *Strategic Framework of the NSSS 2026–2035*, Section 3.1, **Social Protection Support for the Poor and Vulnerable through the Family Card**; Strategic Priority SP2, **Introduce and scale the Family Card system**; Section 3.4.1, **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**; *Social Security Budget FY2026–27*, **Allowance for Widow and Deserted Women** and **Rural Mother Centre (RMC) Programme: Revolving Small Loan**.

Hijra, Transgender and Other Socially Excluded Communities

The Government's current social protection framework provides particularly clear provisions relevant to Hijra and transgender people. Under **Section 3.3.1, "Support for Marginalized Communities,"** of the **NSSS 2026–2035**, transgender persons are explicitly identified alongside tea garden communities, Bede communities, ethnic minorities and other socially excluded groups, with poor and vulnerable households from these communities intended to receive Family Card support where they meet the applicable poverty and vulnerability criteria. Importantly, the Strategy recognises that household transfers alone cannot address all dimensions of social exclusion and therefore retains the scope for group-specific interventions where persistent barriers require education support, skills development, access to basic services and other targeted measures. This approach is reinforced by **Section 3.4.1, "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion,"** which explicitly recognises transgender persons among groups facing structural barriers including weak access to services, stigma, exclusion from formal employment and limited visibility in administrative systems.

The **Social Security Budget FY2026–27** provides an even more concrete implementation mechanism through the **Underprivileged People's Livelihood Development Programme**, which consolidates four previously separate programmes concerning Hijra people, Bede communities, other underprivileged populations and tea labourers. Implemented by the Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Welfare in accordance with the **Integrated Guideline for the Implementation of Underprivileged People's Livelihood Development Programme, 2025**, the programme combines financial assistance with human-capital and livelihood support through **special grants, educational stipends, training and post-training cash or in-kind assistance**. In FY2026–27, **Tk 234.62 crore** is allocated for **2.79 lakh beneficiaries**.

These provisions provide a direct basis for local advocacy: Social Services Offices and other relevant local institutions should ensure that eligible Hijra and transgender people know that these provisions exist, can complete enrolment without unnecessary or discriminatory barriers and can access education, training, livelihood and other programme components rather than being treated only as recipients of allowances. Accessible grievance mechanisms and respectful, non-discriminatory service delivery are equally important if the Government's stated social-inclusion commitments are to translate into meaningful access at community level.

Relevant Government Provisions: *Strategic Framework of the NSSS 2026–2035*, Section 3.3.1, **Support for Marginalized Communities**, and Section 3.4.1, **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**; *Social Security Budget FY2026–27*, **Underprivileged People's Livelihood Development Programme**; *Integrated Guideline for the Implementation of Underprivileged People's Livelihood Development Programme, 2025*.

Indigenous and Other Ethnic Minority Communities

The **NSSS 2026–2035** expressly includes **ethnic minorities** within its framework for marginalised and socially excluded populations. Under **Section 3.3.1, "Support for Marginalized Communities,"** poor and vulnerable households from ethnic minorities are identified alongside tea garden communities, Bede communities, transgender persons and other socially excluded groups for Family Card coverage where they meet the applicable poverty and vulnerability criteria. The Strategy also recognises that household transfers cannot by themselves address persistent forms of social exclusion and therefore provides for group-specific interventions and complementary support where necessary. This direction is reinforced by **Section 3.4.1, "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion,"** which identifies ethnic minorities among populations facing structural barriers including weak access to services, restricted mobility, stigma, exclusion from formal employment and limited visibility in administrative systems. The same social-inclusion framework provides for measures including education support, legal-identity support, skills training, access to basic services, protection from discrimination and adapted outreach for communities with limited administrative access.

These provisions create a practical basis for ensuring that ethnic minority communities, particularly those living in rural and remote areas, are not excluded from applicable social protection and public services because of geographic isolation, limited information, documentation difficulties or administrative barriers. Local authorities should make programme information accessible, provide appropriate support with registration and application procedures, strengthen referrals to relevant education, health, skills, livelihood and other services and engage community representatives in identifying barriers that may not be visible through routine administrative systems.

At the same time, the terminology of the Government framework should be used carefully: the NSSS provisions reviewed here expressly refer to **"ethnic minorities."** Advocacy concerning Indigenous peoples should therefore also take account of Government policies, programmes and administrative arrangements specifically applicable to the relevant Indigenous community or geographic area rather than assuming that every provision concerning ethnic minorities applies identically to all Indigenous peoples.

Relevant Government Provisions: *Strategic Framework of the NSSS 2026–2035*, Section 3.3.1, **Support for Marginalized Communities**, and Section 3.4.1, **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion**.

Persons with Disabilities

The **NSSS 2026–2035** provides one of the most detailed current Government frameworks for improving social protection and access to public services for persons with disabilities. Under **Section 3.2.5, “Disability-inclusive Social Protection,”** the Strategy explicitly seeks to move beyond an allowance-centred approach towards a more comprehensive system combining **cash support, services, accessibility and institutional coordination**, recognising that persons with disabilities face interconnected barriers relating to income security, education, healthcare, mobility, skills development, employment, accessibility and community participation. The Strategy proposes progressively expanding disability benefits towards eligible persons, improving beneficiary identification through stronger connections between the **Dynamic Social Registry, programme management information systems and local verification systems**, and periodically reviewing benefit adequacy, including the additional costs associated with disability. Crucially, Section 3.2.5 identifies complementary services including **disability-inclusive education, technical and vocational scholarships, skills training, specialised healthcare units at district hospitals, assistive devices, rehabilitation, accessible transport and public infrastructure, employment support and community-based care.**

The **Social Security Budget FY2026–27** provides a corresponding programme-level commitment through the **Disability Allowance and Education Stipend Programme**, which targets **39 lakh beneficiaries** with an allocation of **Tk 4,715.45 crore.**

The Government framework therefore provides a basis for assessing disability inclusion at local level by more than the number of allowances distributed. Relevant district, upazila and local institutions should identify eligible persons who remain outside existing systems, make information and application procedures accessible, facilitate enrolment and strengthen connections with available education, healthcare, rehabilitation, assistive-device, skills and employment services. Physical accessibility of public institutions and accessibility of Government information and communication should likewise be considered part of effective implementation, consistent with the Strategy’s shift from an allowance-centred model towards broader disability-inclusive social protection.

Relevant Government Provisions: *Strategic Framework of the NSSS 2026–2035, Section 3.2.5, Disability-inclusive Social Protection; Social Security Budget FY2026–27, Disability Allowance and Education Stipend Programme.*

Rural, Remote and Climate-Vulnerable Communities

The **NSSS 2026–2035** establishes a specific policy direction for strengthening protection of populations affected by climate, disaster and other large-scale shocks through **Section 3.3.6, “Adaptive and Shock-Responsive Social Protection.”** The Strategy recognises that many existing responses remain reactive, short-term and insufficiently connected with wider risk-management systems and therefore proposes stronger links between social protection, **disaster risk management, climate adaptation, early-warning systems and contingency financing.** It envisages major social protection programmes becoming capable of **vertical expansion**, through temporary additional support to existing beneficiaries affected by shocks, and **horizontal expansion**, through temporary inclusion of newly affected households. Updated registries, early-warning triggers, scalable payment systems, contingency funds and stronger coordination among relevant ministries, local government institutions and climate-adaptation agencies are identified as important elements of this transition.

Significantly for local advocacy, the Strategy identifies particular populations and geographic areas requiring attention, including women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, informal workers, urban poor households and communities living in **chars, haors, coastal areas, drought-prone areas, river-erosion areas and climate-displaced settings**.

These provisions create a strong basis for incorporating geographic vulnerability into local social protection and service delivery. District, upazila and local government institutions should identify difficult-to-reach and highly exposed communities, connect vulnerable households with relevant Government programmes and communicate emerging needs through social protection and disaster-response systems. Local implementation should also support the identification of households newly pushed into vulnerability by climate, disaster or economic shocks so that lack of previous enrolment in a social protection programme does not itself become a barrier to receiving time-sensitive support.

Relevant Government Provision: *Strategic Framework of the NSSS 2026–2035*, Section 3.3.6, **Adaptive and Shock-Responsive Social Protection**.

KEY MESSAGE

Across these population groups, the Government's current framework establishes a common direction while recognising that different forms of vulnerability and exclusion require different responses. The NSSS connects household poverty support with lifecycle protection, employment-linked measures, targeted support for marginalised communities, gender and social inclusion, disability-inclusive services and adaptive social protection, while the Social Security Budget translates several of these commitments into identifiable programmes and allocations. The implementation priority is therefore not to create a single approach for all marginalised populations, but to apply the Government provisions relevant to each population and locality, identify eligible people who remain excluded, remove administrative, geographic, accessibility and discriminatory barriers, strengthen connections between social protection and complementary public services and ensure that national commitments result in practical and equitable access at community level.

SECTION 03

Priorities for Local Action

The Government's current policy direction provides a substantial foundation for more inclusive social protection and public services. The immediate priority is to strengthen the connection between national commitments and the institutions through which people actually obtain services. Local implementation should therefore concentrate on a limited number of practical measures that can improve access without unnecessarily creating parallel programmes or structures.

01

Make information accessible at community level.

District, upazila and relevant local offices should regularly provide clear and accessible information on available social protection, education, health, skills, livelihood and employment programmes, including eligibility criteria, application procedures, required documentation, available benefits and the responsible public institution. Outreach should extend beyond government offices to communities that may have limited access to administrative information, particularly remote populations and groups experiencing social exclusion.

02

Identify and enrol eligible people who are being left behind.

Beneficiary identification and local verification should be used to reduce exclusion rather than functioning only as administrative procedures. Particular attention should be given to vulnerable rural women, persons with disabilities, Hijra and transgender people, ethnic minority communities, poor and marginalised youth and households living in remote or climate-vulnerable locations. Where documentation, geographic isolation, accessibility or limited administrative visibility prevents eligible people from entering existing systems, relevant institutions should provide appropriate assistance consistent with applicable programme rules.

03

Connect social protection with relevant public services and economic opportunities.

The NSSS increasingly treats social protection as more than the distribution of cash benefits. Local implementation should reflect this approach by connecting eligible beneficiaries, where applicable, with education, healthcare, skills development, employment, livelihood support, financial inclusion, rehabilitation, assistive devices and other complementary services already provided through Government institutions. Practical referral arrangements can reduce the burden on individuals who would otherwise have to navigate multiple disconnected institutions independently.

04

Ensure accessible and non-discriminatory service delivery.

Local public institutions should identify and address physical, administrative, informational and discriminatory barriers that prevent eligible people from using public services. Accessibility should be strengthened for persons with disabilities, while Hijra and transgender people, ethnic minority communities and other socially excluded populations should be able to approach relevant institutions and access applicable programmes without discriminatory treatment. Equal access should be assessed through actual service experience, not only through formal eligibility.

05

Strengthen coordination and referral among local institutions.

Many of the needs addressed in this brief fall across several Government mandates. Social Services Offices, Youth Development Offices, Women Affairs Offices, health and education authorities, local government institutions and other relevant agencies should strengthen practical coordination and referral so that an individual approaching one institution can be directed to other applicable programmes and services. Stronger local coordination is particularly important where social protection is intended to operate alongside skills, livelihoods, healthcare, education or rehabilitation.

06

Make grievance and feedback mechanisms usable in practice.

People should know where and how to raise concerns when they experience exclusion, delays, administrative difficulties or discriminatory treatment. Grievance procedures should be accessible and capable of producing timely responses, with confidentiality where appropriate. Local institutions should also analyse recurring complaints and feedback to identify implementation problems affecting particular communities or locations rather than treating every complaint solely as an individual case.

07

Include affected communities in implementation and monitoring.

Rural youth, women, persons with disabilities, Hijra and transgender people, Indigenous and ethnic minority communities and other marginalised populations should have meaningful opportunities to communicate barriers and contribute to local consultation, implementation and monitoring processes. Community participation can help public institutions identify people and problems that administrative data may overlook, but participation should lead to practical improvements rather than functioning only as evidence that consultation has taken place.

THE WAY FORWARD

Bangladesh has already established important policy commitments, programmes and institutional mechanisms for expanding social protection and improving public services. The next priority is to ensure that these commitments are experienced in practice by the people they are intended to reach. Stronger local implementation does not necessarily require the creation of new programmes. In many cases, significant progress can be achieved by making existing programmes easier to understand and access, identifying eligible people who remain excluded, removing administrative and discriminatory barriers, strengthening coordination and referrals between institutions, connecting social protection with complementary services and ensuring meaningful accountability to communities. These measures provide a practical basis for constructive engagement between civil society and Government institutions and can help translate existing national commitments into more equitable outcomes for rural and marginalised populations.

SECTION 04

Key Government Documents

- Strategic Framework of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2026–2035
 - Social Security Budget FY2026–27
 - Public Financial Management Reform Strategy 2025–2030
 - Integrated Guideline for the Implementation of Underprivileged People’s Livelihood Development Programme, 2025
-