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Covid-19 creates 3.24cr new poor

PPRC-BIGD survey finds more people pushed into poverty due to second wave

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The number of new poor in August reached 3.24 crore, which is 19.54 percent of the population, after the second wave of the pandemic, according to a survey.

Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) released the findings at a virtual press conference yesterday.

In March, before the lockdown was announced amid rising numbers of new cases of Covid-19 and deaths from the disease, the percentage of people counted as new poor was 14.75, according to an earlier edition of the study.

Since April last year, PPRC and BIGD released four editions of the study titled Trends in Covid Impact on Livelihood, Coping and Recovery. The first round was conducted in April, 2020, the second one in June, 2020, the third one in June this year, and the latest one between August 21 and September 8 this year.

The latest findings were announced after surveying 4,872 households from August 21-September 8.

"Poverty has risen again from the shock of the second wave of the pandemic," PPRC Executive Chairman Hossain Zillur Rahman told the briefing.

He added that recovery from the impact of last year's shutdown of the economy has been fragile.

While the majority of the people agree that the latest lockdown was needed, almost half of the respondents said it put their livelihoods in crisis, he added.

The survey found that the average income among the surveyed poor was 23 percent below the pre-Covid-level.

Zillur said a large percentage of people have been trapped in poverty throughout the pandemic.

A large number of people who returned to their villages from the cities have not been able to come back.

"These reverse migrants are certainly in distress. Effective policy response will depend on overcoming critical knowledge gaps about their needs," he said.

Urban slum unemployment rate doubled to 15 percent in August. Majority of the respondents said they did not find enough work in the last one month and about 69 per cent said that they did not have enough or expected level of work.

About 49 percent of the respondents said the lockdown was the reason for not getting enough work.

The percentage of households skipping at least one meal on the day before the survey increased significantly between March and August, especially in the urban slums, from 2 percent to 8 percent, and in the Chattogram Hill Tracts, from 2 percent to 16 percent.

It found that the majority of the households did not have any meat, milk, fruits throughout the pandemic. The number of borrowers with outstanding loans also increased among the extremely poor, reaching 34 percent in August.

Most of them took loans from shopkeepers and NGOs.

About 71 percent borrowed for daily consumption.

Four cost drivers contributing to the expenditure burdens on the poor and less well-off sections are: healthcare costs, education costs, transportation costs and utility costs.

Imran Matin, executive director at BIGD also spoke at the event.