

In 2014, Bangladesh made a moderate advancement in its efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government formed the National Child Labor Welfare Council to coordinate its efforts to eliminate child labor, including its worst forms, but the Council did not meet during the reporting period. The Ministry of Labor and Employment also hired 152 new labor inspectors and provided training to new and existing inspectors. However, children in Bangladesh are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and domestic work. The legal framework does not protect children working in informal economic sectors, including small farms, street work, and domestic work, where child labor is most prevalent.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Bangladesh are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and domestic work. (1, 2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Bangladesh.

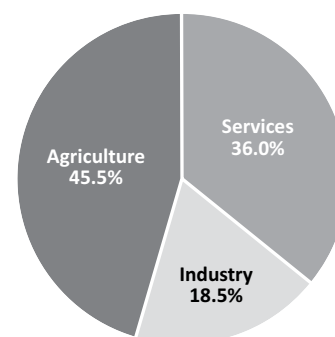
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	10.1 (3,717,540)
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	81.2
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	6.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		74.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2011, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(3)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Labor Force Survey, 2005 – 2006.(4)

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, including gathering honey,* harvesting tea leaves,* and poultry farming (2, 5-8)
	Fishing* and drying fish (6, 7, 9)
	Harvesting and processing shrimp (2, 6, 10, 11)
	Mining salt† (5, 7)
Industry	Production of hand-rolled cigarettes (<i>bidis</i>),† bricks,† footwear,† garments, textiles, glass,† jute textiles, leather,† matches,† soap,† and steel furniture† (2, 5, 7, 12-18)
	Ship breaking† (2, 19, 20)
	Carpentry,* welding,*† and construction,* activities unknown (6, 7, 21)
	Domestic work (2, 5, 17)
Services	Pulling rickshaws* and street work, including garbage picking, recycling, vending, begging, and portering (2, 5, 6, 17)
	Working in hotels and restaurants* (2, 5, 21)
	Repairing automobiles*† (2, 5, 21)

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Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in the drying of fish and the production of bricks* (22-25)
	Forced begging* (26, 27)
	Used in drug dealing* (28)
	Commercial sexual exploitation,* sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (2, 29, 30)
	Street work and domestic work, each as a result of human trafficking* (27, 29)

* Evidence of this activity is limited and/or the extent of the problem is unknown.

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a) – (c) of ILO C. 182.







Some children in Bangladesh work under forced labor conditions in the dried fish sector and in brick kilns to help pay off family debts to local moneylenders.(23, 31) Some Bangladeshi children are trafficked internally, and others are trafficked to India and Pakistan for commercial sexual exploitation. Bangladeshi children are also trafficked internally for street work and domestic work. (29) Gangs kidnap and force children to beg on the streets.(27)

By law, education is free and compulsory in Bangladesh through fifth grade, but several factors contribute to children not completing primary school, such as high student-teacher ratios and short school days of only 2 to 3 hours. The associated costs of teacher fees, books, and uniforms also prevent many children from attending school.(28)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Bangladesh has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor, including its worst forms (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	
 ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
 UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
 UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	

The Government has established laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Section 34 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (32)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 39 and 40 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (32)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	Yes		Section 40.3 of the Bangladesh Labor Act; Statutory Regulatory Order Number 65 (32, 33)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 370 and 374 of the Penal Code; Section 34 of the Constitution; Sections 2.15 and 9 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (34-36)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Section 12 of the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act; Section 3 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (36, 37)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor (cont)

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 372 and 373 of the Penal Code; Section 12 of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act; Sections 5 and 6 of the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act; Sections 78 and 80 of the Children's Act (34, 37-41)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Sections 2.15 and 3 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 79 of the Children's Act (36, 38, 40)
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	N/A*		
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	16, 17	Air Force and Army regulation titles unknown (42, 43)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	10	Section 2 of the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act (44)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 17 of the Constitution (35)

* No conscription (45)

The Bangladesh Labor Act excludes the informal economic sectors in which child labor is most prevalent, including domestic work, street work and small-scale agriculture.(32, 46)

The 2010 National Education Policy raised the age of compulsory education from grade 5 (age 10) to grade 8 (age 14); however, until the legal framework is amended to reflect the new compulsory education age, the policy is not enforceable.(2, 47-49)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5).

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments	Enforce labor laws, including those on child labor.(50)
Bangladesh Police	Enforce Penal Code provisions protecting children from forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation.(2, 46, 51)
Bangladesh Labor Court	Prosecute labor law cases, including child labor law violations. Impose fines or sanctions against employers that violate labor laws.(52)
Anti-Human Trafficking Police Unit	Investigate cases of human trafficking, forced labor, and commercial sexual exploitation, including those involving children. Enforce anti-trafficking provisions of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act.(2)
Child Protection Networks	Respond to a broad spectrum of violations against children, including child labor. Composed of officials from a variety of agencies with mandates to protect children, prosecute violations, monitor interventions, and develop referral mechanisms at the district and sub-district levels between law enforcement and social welfare services.(2, 6, 51)

Law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms.

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2014, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) hired 152 additional labor inspectors, bringing the total number of labor inspectors to 335, with 575 inspector positions authorized.(28) While the number of labor inspectors is insufficient for the size of Bangladesh's workforce, DIFE received approval to hire an additional 189 candidates.(53, 54) The Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE) provided labor law and inspection training to new and existing labor inspectors during the reporting period.(54) While labor inspectors received training on the Bangladesh Labor Act, which included child labor issues, inspectors did not receive training exclusively on child labor law enforcement.(52) The DIFE budget was increased from \$970,000 in 2013 to \$3 million for 2014 – 2015.(55)

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During the reporting period, DIFE filed six cases of child labor violations with the Bangladesh Labor Court.(52) Information on the number of labor inspections and number of child labor law violations and penalties issued conducted is not available. DIFE conducts unannounced onsite inspections of factories and small businesses to investigate various labor issues, including child labor. (56) However, there are reports that inspections rarely occur at unregistered factories and establishments, where children are more likely to be employed.(10, 57)

Child labor complaints can be reported to the National Helpline Center for Violence Against Women and Children.(58) Research did not find information on the number of calls related to child labor. The penalty of a \$62 fine for a child labor law violation is an insufficient deterrent, and inspectors do not have the authority to directly issue citations or assess penalties.(6, 56) Research did not find whether a mechanism exists through which DIFE can refer children to a child protection network or refer cases involving child labor law violations to the Bangladesh Police.

In March 2014, MOLE, with support from the ILO, launched a publicly accessible database for labor inspections in all export factories in the ready-made garment sector. Currently the database includes synthesis reports from safety inspections conducted by the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.(7)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2014, the Ministry of Home Affairs and UNICEF provided child interviewing training to 269 police officers, 267 Border Guard Bangladesh personnel, and 6 Coast Guard officers.(59) Information regarding the number of investigators responsible for enforcing laws against the worst forms of child labor is unavailable. Information on the number of investigations, the number of prosecutions, the number of convictions, and penalties implemented is unavailable. The anti-human trafficking police unit reportedly has insufficient funds and staff, and therefore lacks the resources to adequately address cases of child trafficking, forced child labor, and commercial sexual exploitation of children.(59)

The Bangladesh Police report that there were 592 cases of human trafficking and 8 convictions for crimes involving human trafficking during 2014. Disaggregated data for investigations and convictions involving child victims is not provided.(60) The police also report that 220 children were victims of human trafficking, and 156 children were recovered from human trafficking during 2014.(60) Information on the implementation of penalties for perpetrators of child human trafficking is not available for the reporting period.

The Bangladesh Police refer cases involving the worst forms of child labor to the District Magistrate to determine whether the case should be prosecuted. However, there is no formal mechanism by which the police refer children in the worst forms of child labor to the Child Protection Network or other child welfare service providers.(26) The Bangladesh Police may refer human trafficking victims to NGOs for protection and social services through informal mechanisms.(59)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Child Labor Welfare Council*	Coordinate efforts undertaken by various Government agencies to eliminate child labor, and advise on and assess the implementation of the National Child Labor Eradication Policy (NCLEP). Chaired by the Ministry of Labor and Employment, and composed of officials representing relevant Government ministries, international organizations, child advocacy groups, and employer and worker organizations.(61)
Counter-Trafficking National Coordination Committee, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)	Coordinate Government ministries involved in countering international and domestic trafficking in persons, including child trafficking.(62) Integrate the work of Government agencies and international and local NGOs on human trafficking through bimonthly coordination meetings. Oversee district counter-trafficking committees, which oversee anti-trafficking committees for sub-districts and for smaller administrative units.(26, 29, 62)

Table 6. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor (cont)

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration Task Force, MHA and UNICEF	Coordinate Bangladesh and India's efforts to rescue, recover, repatriate, and reintegrate trafficked persons, particularly children. Liaise with a variety of ministries, Government departments, NGOs, and international organizations that assist trafficked children.(26, 63)

* Mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor was created during the reporting period.

In February 2014, the Government formally announced the formation of the National Child Labor Welfare Council; however, the Council did not meet during the reporting period.(64)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Bangladesh has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 7).

Table 7. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
NCLEP (2010 – 2015)	Guides law-making and policy-making to eliminate the worst forms of child labor through interventions that will remove children from the worst forms of child labor and provide them with viable work alternatives.(47, 50, 65)
Child Labor National Plan of Action (NPA) (2012 – 2016)	Identifies strategies for implementing and mainstreaming the NCLEP, including developing institutional capacity, increasing access to education and health services, raising social awareness, strengthening law enforcement, and creating prevention and reintegration programs.(66)
Sixth Five-Year Plan (2011 – 2015)	Includes the elimination of child labor as a Government priority and identifies the NCLEP and its NPA as the Government's central strategy to eliminate child labor.(67)
National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking (2012 – 2014)	Establishes a consolidated framework for the national response to internal and cross-border human trafficking. Outlines a timeline for anti-human trafficking activities; specifies roles of different ministries and organizations to implement activities; sets out mechanisms for interagency coordination; and proposes a centralized system for monitoring, reporting, and evaluating.(62)
National Labor Policy	Includes provisions on the prohibition of child labor in the informal and formal employment sectors in urban and rural areas. States that the Government will take necessary actions to ensure that children do not engage in hazardous labor and aims to create opportunities for children to access primary education.(68)
National Education Policy*	Specifies the Government's education policy, including pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational and technical, higher, and non-formal education policies. Increases the compulsory age for free education to grade 8 (age 14).(49)
National Plan of Action for Education for All (2003 – 2015)	Includes provisions that target child laborers for non-formal basic education programs.(69)
National Skills Development Policy	Outlines a skills development program for legally working-age children as a means of contributing to a workplace free from child labor.(70)
National Policy for Children	Aims to mitigate child labor by implementing steps set out in the NCLEP's strategies for eliminating child labor.(71)

* Child labor elimination and prevention strategies do not appear to have been integrated into this policy.

In 2014, the Government drafted the National Corporate Social Responsibility Policy for Children, which will provide guidance to businesses in the formal and non-formal sector on how to respect and protect the rights of children.(28, 72) The Government is in the process of approving the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, which was drafted in 2010. The policy would help protect the rights of child domestic workers and would make domestic work a hazardous occupation prohibited for children.(28, 73)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2014, the Government of Bangladesh funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms. The Government has other programs that may have an impact on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

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Table 8. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Eradication of Hazardous Child Labor, Phase III‡	Three-year Government program that targets 50,000 children between ages 10 and 14 for withdrawal from hazardous labor through non-formal education and skills development training.(47, 74)
Initiative to Eliminate Child Labor from Urban Slums and Rural Areas	UNICEF, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, and the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) four-year project that provides conditional cash transfers and employment training, outreach and referral services, and social protection services for 500,000 children and 30,000 adolescents.(2)
Services for Children at Risk Project	MSW five-year program that provides integrated child protection services to children engaged in child labor, including its worst forms.(58)
Child Sensitive Social Protection Project	UNICEF-funded MSW program to reduce abuse, violence, and exploitation of children and youth by improving access to social protection services.(58)
Enabling Environment for Child Rights	Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs program, supported by UNICEF, that rehabilitates street children engaged in risky work.(28)
Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce (CLEAR) Child Labor Project†	USDOL-funded, capacity-building project implemented by the ILO in at least 10 countries to build local and national capacity of the Government to address child labor. Aims to improve legislation addressing child labor issues, including by bringing local or national laws into compliance with international standards; improve monitoring and enforcement of laws and policies related to child labor; develop, validate, adopt, and implement a National Action Plan on the elimination of child labor; and enhance the implementation of national and local policies and programs aimed at the reduction and prevention of child labor in Bangladesh.(75)
Global Action Program (GAP) on Child Labor Issues Project	USDOL-funded project implemented by the ILO in approximately 40 countries to support the priorities of the Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor by 2016, established by the Hague Global Child Labor Conference in 2010. In Bangladesh, aims to improve the evidence base on child labor and forced labor through data collection and research.(76)
Expanding the Evidence Base and Reinforcing Policy Research for Scaling Up and Accelerating Action Against Child Labor	USDOL-funded, 3-year project implemented by the ILO-IPEC to provide technical assistance to develop a national child labor survey. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics collected data from January 1 to December 31, 2014, for a National Child Labor Survey as part of the Labor Force Survey.(77, 78)
Shelter Project‡	Nine shelters that provide services to women and children who have experienced violence, including human trafficking.(2)
National Helpline Center*	National Helpline Center for Violence Against Women and Children—operated 24/7, toll-free hotline. Provides support and guidance to children involved in violent and hazardous situations.(58)
Community-Based Working Child Protection Project‡	MHA project that aims to combat human trafficking in Dhaka. Objectives include enhancing preventive and protective measures, improving victim care, and strengthening the Government's capacity to prosecute human trafficking-related crimes.(40, 50, 79)
Actions for Combating Trafficking in Persons	USAID-funded and IOM-implemented project that aims to combat human trafficking, enhance preventive and protective measures, improve victim care, and strengthen the Government's capacity to prosecute human trafficking-related crimes.(2, 40, 50)
Employment Generation for the Ultra Poor, Phase II*‡	Government program, implemented by the Ministry of Disaster Management providing short-term employment for the rural poor.(80-82)
Vulnerable Group Development Program*‡	Government program that provides vulnerable families with food assistance and training in alternative income-generating opportunities.(50, 83, 84)

* The impact of this program on child labor does not appear to have been studied.

† Program was launched during the reporting period.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Bangladesh.

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor, including its worst forms, in Bangladesh (Table 9).

Table 9. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ratify the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.	2013 – 2014
	Ensure that the law's minimum age protections apply to children working in the informal sector, including in domestic work, on the streets and in small-scale agriculture.	2009 – 2014
	Ensure that the legal framework reflects the policy that education is compulsory through grade eight and is consistent with the minimum age for work.	2012 – 2014
Enforcement	Hire and train a sufficient number of labor inspectors for the size of Bangladesh's workforce.	2009 – 2014
	Publish information on the number of labor inspections, the number of child labor law violations and penalties issued, and the number of child labor complaints reported to the child protection helpline. Publish information on the worst forms of child labor, including the number of investigators, number of investigations, the number of prosecutions, the number of convictions, and penalties implemented.	2012 – 2014
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted at unregistered factories and small businesses with sufficient frequency.	2013 – 2014
	Ensure effective enforcement of citations and penalties for labor law violations.	2014
	Provide police with the sufficient resources to enforce violations involving human trafficking, forced labor, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2014
	Create referral mechanisms between relevant agencies to facilitate the provision of legal and social services to working children, including in the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2014
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy.	2014
Social Programs	Implement programs to overcome the prohibitive fees associated with education.	2013 – 2014
	Assess the impact that existing social protection programs may have on reducing child labor.	2010 – 2014

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