

In 2016, Bangladesh made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Education Act of 2016, which makes education compulsory through eighth grade (age 14), was drafted and endorsed by the Prime Minister's cabinet but has not yet been adopted by Parliament. However, children in Bangladesh perform dangerous tasks in garment production. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor in the production of dried fish and bricks. The labor law does not prohibit children from working in informal economic sectors, including in domestic work, on the streets, and in small-scale agriculture. The law also does not specify the activities and number of hours per week of light work that are permitted for children ages 12 and 13. In addition, the number of labor inspectors is insufficient for the size of Bangladesh's workforce, and fines are inadequate to deter child labor law violations.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Bangladesh perform dangerous tasks in garment production. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor in the production of dried fish and bricks. (1-3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Bangladesh.

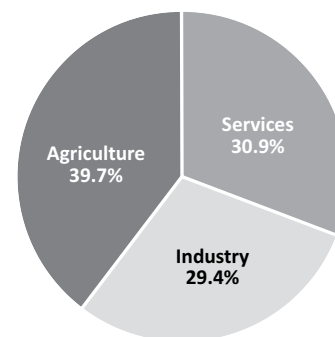
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	4.3 (1,326,411)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	89.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	1.9
Primary Completion Rate (%)		98.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016.(4)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Labour Force Survey, 2013.(5)

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 harvesting and processing crops, including tobacco, raising poultry, grazing cattle, gathering honey, and harvesting tea leaves (6-10)
	Drying and processing fish (7, 8, 10)
	Harvesting and processing shrimp (11-13)
Industry	Quarrying and mining, including salt† (8, 14)
	Producing garments, textiles (jute), leather,† footwear,† and imitation jewelry† (1, 7, 15-23)
	Manufacturing bricks,† glass,† hand-rolled cigarettes (<i>bidis</i>),† matches,† soap,† furniture (steel),† aluminum products,† metal utensils, plastic products,† and melamine products (7, 8, 18, 24-29)
	Ship breaking† (13, 30, 31)
	Carpentry, welding,† construction,† and breaking bricks† and stones† (1, 8, 13, 32, 33)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Domestic work (1, 34-36)
	Working in transportation, pulling rickshaws, and street work, including garbage picking, recycling,† vending, begging, shoe repairing, and portering (1, 8, 10, 13, 14, 37)
	Working in hotels, restaurants, bakeries,† and retail and grocery shops (1, 8, 10, 14, 18, 32)
	Repairing automobiles† (10, 14, 32)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in the drying of fish and the production of bricks (2, 3, 7, 28, 38)
	Forced begging (3, 10)
	Use in illicit activities, including smuggling and selling drugs (7, 10, 39)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3, 40, 41)
	Forced domestic work (3, 7, 10, 42)

† 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.

According to the National Education Policy, education is free and compulsory in Bangladesh through eighth grade (age 14). However, several factors contribute to children not attending school, such as inadequate access to water and sanitation facilities and the costs associated with education, including books and uniforms.(8, 43)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Bangladesh has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (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). However, gaps exist in Bangladesh’s legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Section 34 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (44)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (44)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act; Statutory Regulatory Order Number 65 (44, 45)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 370 and 374 of the Penal Code; Sections 3, 6, and 9 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (46, 47)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 3 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 6 of the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act (47, 48)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (cont)

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 372 and 373 of the Penal Code; Sections 78 and 80 of the Children's Act; Sections 3 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 8 of the Pornography Control Act (46, 47, 49, 50)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Section 79 of the Children's Act (49)
Minimum Age for Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	N/A*		
State Voluntary	Yes	16, 17	Air Force and Army regulation titles unknown (51, 52)
Non-state Compulsory	No		
Compulsory Education Age	No	11	Section 2 of the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act (53)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 17 of the Constitution (54)

* No conscription (55)

In 2016, the Education Act was drafted and endorsed by the Prime Minister's cabinet. After it is adopted by Parliament, this law will make education compulsory through eighth grade (age 14) and bring Bangladesh into compliance with international standards.(43) The 2010 National Education Policy raised the age of compulsory education from fifth grade (age 10) through eighth grade (age 14); however, until the legal framework is amended to reflect the new compulsory education age, the policy is not enforceable.(13, 56)

The Bangladesh Labor Act does not cover the informal economic sectors in which child labor is most prevalent, including domestic work, street work, and work on small agricultural farms with fewer than five employees.(44, 57, 58) Also, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not cover garment production and fish drying; both are areas of work in which there is evidence that children work in unsafe and unhealthy environments for long periods of time.(45)

Although the labor law stipulates that children older than 12 may engage in light work that does not endanger their health or interfere with their education, the law does not specify the activities or the number of hours per week that light work is permitted.(44)

In addition, the use of children in pornographic performances is not criminally prohibited.(47, 59) The use of children in the production of drugs is also not criminally prohibited.(49) The legal framework also does not prohibit the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.(60)

Research did not uncover a public version of the military regulations that set the minimum age for voluntary military recruitment.

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). However, gaps in labor law and criminal law enforcement remain and some enforcement information is not available.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments	Enforce labor laws, including those relating to child labor and hazardous child labor.(61)
Bangladesh Police	Enforce Penal Code provisions protecting children from forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (57, 62) In the case of the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Monitoring Cell, investigate cases of human trafficking and enforce anti-trafficking provisions of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act.(63)
Bangladesh Labor Court	Prosecute labor law violations, including those related to child labor, and impose fines or sanctions against employers.(64)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (cont)

Organization/Agency	Role
Child Protection Networks	Respond to violations against children, including child labor. Comprises officials from various 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.(10)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2016, labor law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$4.1 million (7)	\$3.9 million (61)
Number of Labor Inspectors	284 (7)	267 (61)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (64)	No
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (7)	Yes (65)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (7)	Yes (65)
Number of Labor Inspections	31,836 (59)	30,421 (61)
Number Conducted at Worksite	31,836 (59)	30,421 (61)
Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown	Unknown (61)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	46 (61)	45 (61)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (64)	0 (61)
Number of Penalties Imposed That Were Collected	Unknown (64)	0 (61)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (61)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (7)	Yes (61)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (7)	Yes (61)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (65)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (65)	Yes (61)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (65)	No (61)

The number of labor inspectors is insufficient for the size of Bangladesh's workforce, which includes more than 83 million workers. According to the ILO recommendation of 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Bangladesh should employ 2,090 inspectors.(66-68) Reports indicate that inspections rarely occur at unregistered factories and establishments, where children are more likely to be employed.(11, 43, 69)

In addition, the penalty of a \$62 fine for a child labor law violation is an insufficient deterrent.(70, 71) According to the Ministry of Labor and Employment, information on penalties imposed and fines collected resides with the labor courts.(64) Although research did not reveal information about penalties for cases in 2015, the Government reported that the cases in 2016 are under trial, and penalties have not yet been imposed.(61)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2016, criminal law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Unknown
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (72)	Yes (73)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor (cont)

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Violations Found	178 (74)	5 (73)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Convictions	Unknown	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (63)	Yes (63)

The Government reported that in 2016 it initiated investigations for 168 cases related to forced labor and 122 cases related to sex trafficking. Five children were identified as human trafficking victims, but the nature of the crimes was not provided.(73) The Government also reported that two child trafficking victims were rescued, repatriated, and rehabilitated.(73) However, the TIP Monitoring Cell reportedly lacked the necessary funds and staff to sufficiently address cases of child trafficking.(75) In addition, there is a report that the Child Protection Networks are not operating 2 years after their launch due to a lack of funds.(76)

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 8).

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	
National Child Labor Welfare Council	Coordinate efforts undertaken by various government agencies to eliminate child labor and assess and provide advice on the implementation of the National Child Labor Elimination Policy. Chaired by the Ministry of Labor and Employment, comprises officials representing relevant government ministries, international organizations, child advocacy groups, and employer and worker organizations.(77) Two divisional level councils met for the first time in January 2016.(7)
Counter-Trafficking National Coordination Committee, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)	Coordinate the work of government agencies and international and local NGOs on international and domestic human trafficking, including child trafficking, through bimonthly meetings.(63) Oversee district counter-trafficking committees, which manage counter-trafficking committees for sub-districts and smaller administrative units.(63, 78, 79)
Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration Task Force, MHA	Coordinate Bangladesh and India efforts to rescue, recover, repatriate, and reintegrate victims of human trafficking, particularly children. Liaise with various ministries, government departments, NGOs, and international organizations that assist trafficked children.(79, 80)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 9).

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor[‡]

Policy	Description
Child Labor National Plan of Action (2012–2016)	Identified strategies for developing institutional capacity, increasing access to education and health services, raising social awareness, strengthening law enforcement, and creating prevention and reintegration programs.(81)
Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy	Sets the minimum age for domestic work at 14 years; however, children between ages 12 and 13 can work as domestic workers with parental permission.(82) However, is not legally enforceable.(59)
National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking (2015–2017)	Establishes goals to meet international standards and best practices for anti-human-trafficking initiatives, including prevention of human trafficking; protection and legal justice for victims of human trafficking; development of advocacy networks; and establishment of an effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanism.(63)
National Education Policy	Specifies the Government's education policy, including pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational and technical, higher, and non-formal education policies. Sets the compulsory age for free education through eighth grade (age 14).(56)
Seventh Five Year Plan (2016–2020)	Includes the elimination of the worst forms of child labor, with a focus on child domestic workers and other vulnerable groups. Sets out actions to be taken by the Government, including forming a policy for children working in the formal sector, providing assistance to street children to protect them from exploitation, coordinating the Government and other stakeholders for effective rehabilitation, increasing working children's access to formal and non-formal learning, and providing livelihood support to poor households with children. Approved in 2015 and launched in 2016.(83)

[‡] The Government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.(84, 85)

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The Government has not included child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy.(56)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2016, the Government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 10).

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor†

Program	Description
Urban Social Protection Initiative to Reach the Unreachable and Invisible and Ending Child Labor (2012–2016)	UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Work (MSW), and the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MWCA) 5-year project that provided conditional cash transfers and employment training, outreach and referral services, and social protection services for 500,000 children and 30,000 adolescents.(13, 86)
Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce (CLEAR) Child Labor Project	USDOL-funded, capacity-building project implemented by the ILO in 11 countries to build the capacity of local and national governments to address child labor.(87) In 2016, a draft report on the legal review of child labor-related laws and policies was prepared by the National Human Rights Commission.(87) Additional information is available on the USDOL Web site.
Reaching Out of School Children II (2012–2017)	\$130 million World Bank-funded, 6-year program that provides out-of-school children with non-formal education, school stipends, free books, and school uniforms. Helps students attend learning centers called Ananda Schools until the students are ready to join mainstream secondary schools.(88) As of June 2016, has provided education to 690,000 poor children in 20,400 learning centers.(89)
Child Sensitive Social Protection Project (2012–2016)	MSW program, funded by UNICEF, to reduce abuse, violence, and exploitation of children and youth by improving access to social protection services.(65) Provided conditional cash transfers of \$26 each month for 18 months to underprivileged children to prevent them from working in child labor.(42) Also includes a stipend program for out-of-school adolescents.(90)
Enabling Environment for Child Rights†	MWCA program, supported by UNICEF, that rehabilitates street children engaged in risky work by withdrawing them from child labor and enrolling them in school. Supports 16,000 children in 20 districts through cash transfers.(91, 92)
Child Help Line 1098†	MSW-implemented and UNICEF-supported 24-hour emergency telephone line. Connects children vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation with social protection services.(93) In 2016, was expanded nationwide.(94)

† Program is funded by the Government of Bangladesh.

‡ The Government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms.(7, 65)

Although the Government has implemented child protection and non-formal education programs, research found no evidence that it has carried out programs specifically designed to assist children working in the informal garment sector.(23)

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 11).

Table 11. 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 – 2016
	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 – 2016
	Ensure that the types of hazardous work prohibited for children are comprehensive, in particular by including garment production and fish drying.	2016
	Ensure that the law specifies the activities and the number of hours per week that children between ages 12 and 13 are permitted to perform light work.	2015 – 2016
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits all offenses related to the sexual exploitation of children for pornographic performances.	2015 – 2016
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, particularly in the production of drugs.	2015 – 2016

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups	2016
	Ensure that the legal framework reflects the policy that education is compulsory through eighth grade and is consistent with the minimum age for work.	2012 – 2016
	Publish the military regulations that set the minimum age for voluntary military recruitment.	2016
Enforcement	Ensure effective enforcement of citations and penalties for labor law violations, including authorizing the inspectorate to assess penalties for child labor law violations and increasing penalties for child labor law violations to ensure an effective deterrent.	2014 – 2016
	Create referral mechanisms among relevant agencies to facilitate the provision of legal and social services to child laborers, including those engaged in the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2016
	Hire a sufficient number of labor inspectors for the size of the Bangladesh workforce.	2009 – 2016
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted with sufficient frequency at unregistered factories and small businesses.	2013 – 2016
	Publish information relating to labor law enforcement, including the number of penalties that were issued and collected for child labor law violations.	2012 – 2016
	Publish information on the enforcement of laws on the worst forms of child labor, including the number of investigators, the number of investigations, the number of prosecutions, and the number of convictions.	2012 – 2016
	Provide police with sufficient resources to enforce violations involving human trafficking, forced labor, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2014 – 2016
	Ensure that Child Protection Networks are adequately funded to provide a functional referral mechanism between law enforcement and social services.	2016
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy.	2014 – 2016
Social Programs	Implement programs that seek to address inadequate access to water and sanitation facilities and prohibitive fees associated with education.	2013 – 2016
	Develop and implement programs to address child labor in the informal garment industry.	2016

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