

In 2021, Bangladesh made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In early 2022, the government ratified International Labor Organization Convention No. 138: Convention Concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and the International Labor Organization Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention. The government also removed 5,088 children in vulnerable situations from 23 districts through labor inspections. However, children in Bangladesh are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor in drying of fish and the production of bricks. Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of garments and leather goods. The Bangladesh Labor Act does not apply to the informal sector, in which most child labor in Bangladesh occurs. In addition, penalties for child labor violations can only be imposed after a lengthy legal process and, when courts do impose them, the fines are too low to deter child labor law violations. Moreover, the government did not publicly release information on its criminal law enforcement efforts related to child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Bangladesh are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor in drying of fish and the production of bricks. (1,2) Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of garments and leather goods. (2,3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Bangladesh. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	9.2 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	88.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	8.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		Unavailable

Primary completion rate was unavailable from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (4)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2019. (5)

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	Harvesting and processing crops, including tobacco and salt, raising poultry, grazing cattle, and harvesting tea leaves (2,6,7)
	Fishing, and drying and processing fish (1,6,8-10)
	Harvesting and processing shrimp (1,2)
Industry	Producing garments, textiles, and jute textiles (1,2,11,12)
	Producing leather,† leather goods, and footwear† (2,13)
	Manufacturing bricks,† glass,† hand-rolled cigarettes (bidis),† matches,† soap,† furniture (steel),† furniture (wood), aluminum products,† and metal products (1,2,8,9,14-19)
	Shipbreaking† and battery recycling† (1-3,9,20)
	Construction† and breaking bricks† and stones† (1,2,6,8,15)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Domestic work (1,2,6,9,21)
	Garbage collecting and sorting, and recycling (2,12,22)
	Working in transportation, including ticket taking, welding, pulling rickshaws, driving, crew members on fishing boats, and repairing automobiles† (2,6,8,13,21-24)
	Working in tea shops and retail shops (2,6,8,9,23)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including smuggling and selling drugs (2,25)
	Forced begging (1,2,25)
	Forced labor in the drying of fish and the production of bricks (1,2,10,14,26)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,27-29)
	Forced domestic work (1,2,6,25,30,31)

† 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.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics estimated that there were 1.28 million children working in hazardous sectors before the COVID-19 pandemic, with 260,000 children working in the government's officially listed hazardous sectors. (2,8) Economic hardships and school closures brought on by the pandemic have forced many school age children to take on temporary jobs in factories, including in the garment and food processing sectors. Reports also indicate an increase in child domestic work. (2) One NGO reported that 75 percent of children had left their education program and estimated that one-third of the children either entered into hazardous work or returned to their villages. Sources further indicate that children engaged in child labor worked longer hours with fewer breaks, earned lower salaries, and faced worse conditions as a result of the pandemic. (2)

Other hazardous sectors in which children work include tanneries, shipbreaking, and the dried fish industry. (14,26,32,33) In the dried fish industry, children work all day without protective gear and are exposed to the insecticide DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane), salt, and the sun. (26,34) In the shipbreaking sector, children are exposed to toxic materials such as asbestos, work in dangerous conditions without personal protective equipment, and often work at night. (20) Children who work in tanneries lack protective equipment and experience continuous exposure to heavy metals, formaldehyde, and other hazardous substances. (35,36) In addition, children working in informal garment production work as many as 16 hours a day and often carry heavy loads, use hazardous machinery, and handle chemicals without protective equipment. (11,37)

Reports of violence against child workers in various sectors, including in domestic work, have also been documented. (14,21,38-40) In 2018, a survey by an international organization found more than 400,000 children in domestic work in Bangladesh. Some girls are forced into domestic work and are abused by their employers. (2,4,30,31) According to reports, from January to November 2021, 28 children were tortured while working as housemaids. (2) Throughout Bangladesh, street children are coerced into criminality or forced to beg, and masters of begging rings sometimes maim children to increase earnings. Children are also forced, especially in border areas, to produce and transport drugs, especially “yaba” tablets (methamphetamine). (1,2)

Children throughout Bangladesh are sexually exploited through the country’s legal and illegal brothels, and child commercial sexual exploitation remained widespread during the reporting period. (1) According to some estimates, 30,000 girls are sexually exploited in Bangladesh, many of whom work in brothels but also at parking lots, bus stations, and online. (2) False promises of work are used to lure poor women and children into exploitation, and oftentimes these women and girls, some as young as age 10, are charged exorbitant and fabricated debts they must work to repay. Reports have indicated that some police accept bribes to not check documentation that workers in registered brothels were older than 18 years and to procure falsified documents for younger workers. (1) Women and children living on the street or struggling economically and children fleeing abusive child marriages are especially vulnerable to being sold to brothels for commercial sexual exploitation. Some children of sex workers are also put to work in brothels and made to take steroids to appear older. (1) In

addition, children are trafficked to India where they are forced into labor or commercial sexual exploitation. (9) Research has found that Internet-based trafficking in persons increased during the pandemic, with human traffickers adapting to technology by using popular apps to connect with victims. (41)

Although the 2010 National Education Policy raised the age of compulsory education from fifth grade (age 10) to eighth grade (age 14), the new compulsory education scheme is not enforceable until the legal framework is changed to reflect the revised policy. (19) Research has found many schools are overcrowded and over 80 percent run double shifts. Further, the Teacher Training Institute cannot keep up with the demand for teachers, particularly in rural areas. (9) Bangladesh has 57 Primary Teacher Training Institutes, each of which is expected to enroll 200 potential teachers to accommodate the higher compulsory education age. However, an average of seven instructors are responsible for training over 400 teachers at a time. (2) Furthermore, to accommodate the larger number of students receiving compulsory education, Bangladesh is building new schools for students in higher grades. In fiscal year 2020–2021, Bangladesh constructed 12,723 new classrooms, established 10,000 sanitation facilities, and installed tube wells in over 6,500 schools. (12)

In 2021, limited access to education as a consequence of the pandemic continued to impact children in Bangladesh. School closures due to new variants of coronavirus increased the risk of school dropouts and child labor. (42) Many children joined the workforce in formal and informal sectors to provide for their families struggling during the pandemic, and are unlikely to return to their studies. (43) While televised and online classes were made available to students in grades 1 through 10, the distance learning program did not adequately reach the most vulnerable children. Reports indicated that 53 percent of children whose parents work in the garment sector did not receive any online classes, and most children opted to work with limited position to return to school. (44) In addition to pandemic-related closures, children in Bangladesh face barriers to education such as high costs for transportation, uniforms, and stationary. (2,42) According to reports, in fiscal year 2020–2021, approximately 367,000 eligible children did not enroll in school for the academic period. (12) Additionally, research has shown that about 2.5 million school-age children remain out of formal education, with the current drop-out rate for primary education at around 18 percent, which is higher than for secondary education. (45)

Over 450,000 Rohingya children are living in refugee camps in Bangladesh following the Burmese military's ethnic cleansing operations. Children residing in the camps are vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. (2,25,46-49) Rohingya girls are trafficked from the refugee camps for commercial sexual exploitation in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. In some cases, girls are promised jobs in domestic service but are instead forced into commercial sexual exploitation. (1) Rohingya children recruited to work outside the refugee camps are reported to be underpaid or unpaid, unable to communicate with their families, and subjected to excessive working hours. (25,50) Rohingya boys typically work in construction, fishing, and shops. (23,31) Rohingya children are also sold by their parents into bonded labor in the fish drying industry, primarily in Cox's Bazar. Bonded laborers—both Bangladeshi children and Rohingya refugee children—work to pay off their parents' debts over a 9-month fishing season. (10,23) There are reports of Bangladeshi officials taking bribes to facilitate the trafficking of Rohingya children, including providing access for human traffickers to refugee camps. (2)

Rohingya refugee children are also not permitted to attend primary and secondary schools in Bangladesh, including private institutions, due to their lack of documentation. (22) In addition, due to the pandemic, the government began restricting humanitarian access, including education and protection programs. As a result, refugee children are more vulnerable to exploitation and less able to access humanitarian assistance. (49) The government had in the past permitted international organizations, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR, to provide some basic education services to primary school-age Rohingya children, and some university-level students who received scholarships. (19,22,49) The government had also agreed to allow international partners to implement the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot in 2020. (19) However, the program was put on hold as a result of the pandemic and in December 2021, the Government of Bangladesh ordered the authorities to shut down all refugee-run learning and coaching centers, further hampering educational accessibility for Rohingya refugees. (2,51,52)







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II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Bangladesh has ratified 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	✓

On January 20, 2022, Bangladesh ratified the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention, 1930. (53,54) In March 2022, Bangladesh also ratified the ILO C. 138 on Minimum Age. (55)

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Bangladesh's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Sections 1–2 and 34 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (56)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (56)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act; Statutory Regulatory Order Number 65 (56,57)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 370, 371, and 374 of the Penal Code; Sections 2, 3, 6, and 9 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (58,59)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 2,3, and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 2 and 6 of the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act (59,60)
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 2,3, 6 and 11 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 2 and 8 of the Pornography Control Act (58,59,61,62)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Section 79 of the Children's Act (61)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	16+	Army, Air Force, and Navy Regulations titles unknown (63-66)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		Article 38 of the Constitution (67)
Compulsory Education Age	No	10	Sections 2 and 3 of the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act (68)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 17 of the Constitution (67)

* Country has no conscription (69)

In 2021, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) developed a proposal to update its list of hazardous sectors. If finalized by the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE), these sectors would include drying fish, stone quarries, local tailoring, brick breaking, street-based work for children, stone collection, garbage picking and waste disposal, and informal tailoring in the clothing sector. (2,43,70)

Bangladesh's laws governing the minimum age for work do not protect children engaged in informal work. Regulations defining hazardous work do not include a number of sectors in which children are known to undertake dangerous tasks and work for long hours, including garments, drying fish, or brick manufacturing. (1,2,18,37,57,71) Furthermore, the Bangladesh Labor Act does not cover children working in the informal sector. However, 93 percent of child labor occurs in the informal sector, including domestic work, street work, and work on small agricultural farms. (1,2,56)

Bangladesh prohibits, but does not criminalize, the use of children in pornographic performances and in the production of drugs. (67) Sources indicate that the minimum age for recruitment in the Army is age 17 and requires parental consent and birth documents verifying age. (64) Army recruitment and training take 1 year, ensuring that recruits reach the age of 18 before entering regular duty. (65) However, the minimum age for recruitment in the Air Force is age 16. (63) In addition, the legal framework of the Bangladesh constitution does not criminally prohibit the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups. (67)

The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act only requires guardians to enroll children ages 6 to 10 in primary education where it is compulsory. It does not appear that there are laws providing for compulsory education, though the 2010 National Education Policy provided for compulsory education to eighth grade (age 14). (19,72) The compulsory education age is lower than the minimum age for work, making children ages 10 to 14 vulnerable to child labor, as they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work. (19,72)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5).

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE)	Located within the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE). (72) Enforces labor laws, including those relating to child labor and hazardous work. (73) DIFE manages the "16357" hotline through which workers can report child labor violations in the garment sector. (2,74)
Bangladesh Police	Enforce Penal Code provisions protecting children from forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (14) Through its Trafficking in Persons Monitoring Cell, investigate cases of human trafficking and enforce the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act's anti-human trafficking provisions. (75)
Bangladesh Labor Court	Prosecutes labor law violations, including those related to child labor, and imposes fines or sanctions against employers. (76)
Child Protection Networks	Respond to violations against children, including child labor. Comprising officials from various agencies with mandates to protect children, prosecute violations, monitor interventions, and develop referral mechanisms between law enforcement and social welfare services at the district and sub-district levels. (77)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the DIFE's authority that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including a lack of reciprocal referral mechanism between labor authorities and social services.

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$5,488,943† (66)	\$5,407,000‡ (78)
Number of Labor Inspectors	308 (66)	305‡ (78)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (79)	Yes (79)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (66)	Yes (70)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (66)	Yes (2)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	22,195† (66)	45,832‡ (78)
Number Conducted at Worksite	22,195† (66)	45,832‡ (78)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	3,531‡ (66)	7,025‡ (78)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	27 (19)	135 (78)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	27 (19)	6 (78)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (66)	Yes (70)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (66)	Yes (70)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (56)	Yes (70)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (66)	Yes (70)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (66)	Yes (70)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (66)	No (2)

† Data are from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020.

‡ Data for Labor Inspectorate funding are from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021. Other data are from July 1, 2020, to December 31, 2021.

Bangladesh employs 305 labor inspectors for a workforce of over 69.8 million workers. (70,80) According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Bangladesh would need to employ about 1,745 labor inspectors for Bangladesh's workforce. (80) The shortage in human resources and high turnovers at the DIFE have led the agency to exclude around 95 percent of industrial and commercial establishments from its inspection list. (2) Sources also indicate that DIFE is insufficiently funded and inspectors are reluctant to enforce labor laws. (9)

The DIFE is only authorized to conduct unannounced inspections outside the export processing zones and special economic zones. (9,81,82) The lack of routine unannounced inspections in all sectors allows employers to hide child laborers. (23) Sources report that garment factories producing for local markets are rarely inspected despite a high prevalence of child labor. (9) Some employers move children to night shifts to evade inspectors, as night inspections are only conducted until 8 p.m. (9,20) In addition, the penalty for a child labor law violation carries a maximum fine of approximately \$59 (5,000 taka), which is insufficient to deter violations. (9,56,81,83)

The government reported that in fiscal year July 2020–June 2021, labor inspections helped remove 5,088 children in vulnerable situations from 23 districts. (2) In addition, 1,937 children have been removed from the automobile, bricks and stone crushing, engineering workshops, bakeries, hotel and restaurants, and plastics sectors, among others, in fiscal year 2021–2022 until December 2021. (78) According to the MOLE, out of the 1,421 cases filed for criminal labor infractions, 98 were child labor violations. (70) While a previous reciprocal referral mechanism existed between labor authorities and social services, DIFE lacks an active referral and rehabilitation system for children. Employers of children get off with a warning and the rescued children are found in the same factory or nearby a few days after the inspection. (2)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including the lack of publicly released criminal law enforcement information.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (22)	Yes (2)

The government constituted and funded seven anti-trafficking in persons tribunals to handle human trafficking cases that were functioning and hearing cases as of August 2021. (41) During the reporting period, UNODC in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh organized special training for investigating officers and prosecutors from the anti-trafficking tribunals to increase cooperation and center victim voices. (84)

In 2021, a small number of high-profile cases in which police arrested factory owners for alleged abuse of child workers made international headlines. Bangladesh police filed a criminal complaint against 8 factory management team members, including the owner, after a factory fire killed at least 52 people, including 19 children between the ages of 12 and 18. (2, 11, 85, 86) Abdul Hashem, the factory owner, was required to pay \$2,334 to each of the victims' families. However, in order to receive the compensation, survivors and their families were required to forgo any future claims against the company and its executives. (86) In addition, in January 2021, police arrested a brick kiln owner for torturing and confining children in chains. (86) Police rescued 2 children ages 8 and 9, whom the owner had bought through brokers and forced them to work against their will. The suspect remains in custody while under prosecution. (85) In addition, in the reporting period, 43 individual defendants were prosecuted in cases related to child trafficking for labor exploitation. (86)

The Government of Bangladesh did not provide specific information on criminal law enforcement efforts against child labor crimes for inclusion in this report. Reports have suggested that investigation coordination between agencies and authorities is lacking. (2) Many cases are resolved through mediation and settlement rather than prosecution, resulting in low conviction rates for violence against child workers. (2) Cases resulting in convictions usually have fines that are minimal and perpetrators are not regularly sentenced to jail for employing children. (19) Reports also suggest that criminal investigators do not receive sufficient training on addressing child labor. (2)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including a lack of capacity to assist citizens abroad who are victims of labor exploitation.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Child Labor Welfare Council	Coordinates efforts undertaken by the government to guide and monitor the implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor. Chaired by MOLE, comprising officials representing relevant government ministries, international organizations, child advocacy groups, and employer and worker organizations. (87) During the reporting period, the Council held several meetings of district commissioners and secretaries of MOLE to raise awareness about child labor. (2) MOLE ensured better coordination for the implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor. (2)
Counter-Trafficking National Coordination Committee, Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA)	Coordinates the work of government agencies and international and local NGOs on international and domestic human trafficking, including child trafficking, through bi-monthly meetings. Oversees district counter-trafficking committees, which manage counter-trafficking committees for sub-districts and smaller administrative units. (75) In the reporting period, the agency held meetings at the district level and conducted site visits to raise awareness regarding child labor. (2)
Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration Task Force	Coordinates efforts by the Governments of Bangladesh and India to rescue, recover, repatriate, and reintegrate survivors of human trafficking, particularly women and children, between the two countries. Liaises with various ministries, government departments, NGOs, and international organizations that assist trafficked children. (50,88,89) However, the government lacks the capacity to assist its citizens abroad who are victims of labor exploitation, case management systems have not been developed, and the process to repatriate human trafficking victims is lengthy. (89,90) The Task Force was active during the reporting period, and met bimonthly to coordinate Task Force members and their Indian counterparts. (43)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including lack of implementation.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor (2021–2025)	Identifies strategies for developing institutional capacity, increasing access to education and health services, raising social awareness, strengthening law enforcement, and creating prevention and reintegration programs. (91) During the reporting period, the Child Labor Central Monitoring Committee submitted a new draft plan of action to MOLE, and the government extended implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor from 2021 to 2025. (9)
Eighth Five-Year Plan, "Promoting Prosperity and Fostering Inclusiveness" (2021–2025)†	Includes provisions and budget to eliminate child labor. Sets out actions to initiate registration of all child births, as well as enforce and harmonize laws against human trafficking and exploitation. (2) In March 2021, the National Economic Council approved the country's Eighth Five-Year Plan. (92)
Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2015	Sets the minimum age at 12 years for light domestic work. All children under age 18 require parental permission to engage in domestic work. (93) However, the policy is not legally enforceable until the legal framework is changed to reflect the revised policy and DIFE still has no authority to inspect households to see the working condition of domestic workers. The Central Monitoring Cell designated for the implementation of the policy has made little progress in coordinating with various required government entities. (12) In 2021, MOLE attended events organized by NGOs and printed the policy in a brochure and distributed promotional materials to create mass awareness through DIFE's 23 District offices. (2,43)
National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (2018–2025)	Establishes a plan to build government capacity to address trafficking in persons and provide economic and social safety nets for victims and vulnerable populations, particularly children. (94,95) Led by MOHA. The national plan has been extended to 2025 due to the slow progress made during 2020 and 2021 pandemic lockdowns. (12) During the reporting period, MOHA monitored and implemented the action plan through the GO-NGO coordination committee. MOHA also conducted consultative meetings with domestic and international organization to collect feedback on the implementation process. (43)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (96)

The National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor faces coordination and implementation challenges and research has found that MOLE is not effectively coordinating the implementation of the policy. (2,41) The government has a National Education Policy that sets the compulsory age for free education through eighth grade (age 14). However, the government has yet to include child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy. (96)

Sources reported that the National Authority, an institution that would serve as a supervisory body on addressing human trafficking, was not active or funded. (41)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10).

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Elimination of Hazardous Child Labor, Phase IV (2021–2023)†*	\$33 million Government of Bangladesh-funded, 3-year project implemented by MOLE. (78) Removed 90,000 children from hazardous labor in Phases I-III by providing informal and technical education, stipends, and awareness raising for employers and families. (22,97,98) Phase IV of the Elimination of Hazardous Child Labor program was implemented in October 2021. (2,19) MOLE has signed agreements with 112 selected NGOs to remove 100,000 children from all hazardous work by providing informal education and vocational training to child laborers most at risk. (78) During the reporting period, NGOs conducted surveys to identify the most hazardous occupations. (78)
School Programs	Second Chance Education is funded by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and provides informal schooling for children from 8 to 14 years old who have dropped out of formal schools. (43) The program had aimed to reach 1,000 children in 48 centers in 2021; however, due to COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures, teachers visited students in their homes for 30 minutes per week. (2) The School Feeding Program provides fortified biscuits and mid-day meals to pre-primary and primary school children in high-poverty areas to encourage school attendance, as hunger and poverty are both drivers of child labor. This initiative has increased the school attendance rate from 5 to 13 percent. (43) In 2021, the UN World Food Program worked with the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education to scale up the school feeding program to serve more than 3 million school children at 15,788 schools in 35 districts of Bangladesh. (43)
Accelerating Protection for Children (2017–2021)†	Project funded by the government and UNICEF and implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to provide life skills education, awareness, and self-protection techniques to adolescent girls and boys ages 10 to 19, and empower them as agents of social change to address risks and protection issues like child marriage, child labor, reproductive health, and adolescent nutrition. (19) In 2021, conducted awareness program related to child labor among 118,000 parents and 70,325 adolescents. (78) Approximately 800,000 Bangladeshis became aware of hazardous child labor through the project's radio programs. (78)
Child Sensitive Social Protection in Bangladesh (CSPB) II†	Project implemented by the Ministry of Social Welfare's Department of Social Services with support by UNICEF to strengthen social services for street children engaged in child labor including protection from violence, abuse, and exploitation; safe accommodation; food; and education (non-formal and life skills). (19) The project offers case management services to identify vulnerable children and provide intervention plans, psychological counseling through the Child Friendly Services hub, and conditional cash support to reduce child labor. (78) During the reporting period, CSPB supported 160 families to reduce child labor, prevent early marriages, and reduce school dropouts. (78) The project also offers a 24-hour emergency hotline service through Child Helpline 1098. In 2021, the helpline received 241,712 complaints and referred 13,624 calls to different services regarding child protection, rescue, and referrals are provided. (43)

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

† 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. (41)

The MOLE was expected to conduct a national survey on child labor by 2021. (14) The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics started the survey in 2022 with the support of the ILO. Research shows that survey results are expected after June 2022. (43)

Research has found that the government's social programs often align with the priorities of various funders and lack coordination among relevant ministries to address the cross-cutting nature of child labor issues. (9) In addition, DIFE maintains the 16357 hotline to receive labor law violations. During the reporting period, the 16357 hotline received 831 complaints; however, the complaints were not related to child labor. (66) Ministry of Women and Children Affairs also developed a “Joy” mobile app which provides the opportunity to record dialogue and images of child labor victims and perpetrators and send the information, including GPS location, to the National Helpline Center 109 and nearby police station. (43)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Bangladesh (Table 11).

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure the minimum age for work applies to all children, including those engaged in informal work in the domestic service sector.	2009 – 2021
	Ensure that the types of hazardous work prohibited for children are comprehensive, in particular by including garment production and fish drying.	2016 – 2021
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use of a child for pornographic performances.	2015 – 2021
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use, procuring, and offering of children for both the production and trafficking of drugs.	2015 – 2021
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2021
	Ensure that the 2010 National Education Policy, which raised the age of compulsory education from fifth grade (age 10) to eighth grade (age 14), is enforced.	2012 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure enforcement of citations and penalties and reduce the length of time to assess penalties for labor law violations. Make certain that penalties for child labor law violations are an adequate deterrent.	2014 – 2021
	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2009 – 2021
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate has enough resources, including resources to address high turnover of inspectors.	2021
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted unannounced and during overnight shifts as well as in the export processing and special economic zones.	2013 – 2021
	Create mechanisms for labor and criminal law enforcement to refer children involved in child labor to appropriate legal and social services.	2013 – 2021
	Ensure that public officials who facilitate or participate in the worst forms of child labor are held accountable, including officials who accept bribes in exchange for protection from the law.	2019 – 2021
	Collect and publish national-level data on the enforcement of criminal laws relevant to child labor, including information on the training for investigators, and the number of investigations conducted, violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions attained, and penalties imposed.	2012 – 2021
	Provide law enforcement with sufficient financial and technological resources to enforce violations involving human trafficking, forced labor, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2014 – 2021
Coordination	Ensure that the Ministry of Labor and Employment is effectively coordinating implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor	2020 – 2021
	Ensure that the National Authority institution is active and funded to addresses human trafficking cases.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that the Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration Task Force has the necessary authority and tools to perform its coordination functions by establishing tools to track citizens abroad, developing case management systems, and streamlining the process of repatriating human trafficking survivors.	2018 – 2021
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy.	2014 – 2021
	Publish activities undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor during the reporting period.	2020 – 2021
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children by removing barriers to school attendance, including increasing the capacity of the Teacher Training Institute, ensuring that there is a well-developed distance learning mechanism, and eliminating high costs for transportation and school materials.	2021
	Provide sufficient education services for Rohingya refugee children, remove barriers to their school attendance, and implement programs to decrease their engagement in and subjection to child labor activities.	2017 – 2021
	Expand programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, including developing and implementing programs to address child labor in the informal garment, leather, and fish drying industries.	2016 – 2021
	Ensure that the Child Help Line and other hotlines report data on child labor complaints.	2020 – 2021

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