

Bangladesh

Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Bangladesh has been a member of ILO-IPEC since 1994.¹²² Soon after, a child labor survey was conducted in 1995 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics with technical assistance from the ILO's statistical agency.¹²³ The ILO-IPEC program in Bangladesh has implemented 75 action programs targeting the worst forms of child labor through awareness raising, non-formal education, income generating alternatives for families, and capacity building of partner organizations.¹²⁴ These programs include USDOL-funded projects to eliminate child labor in the garment sector and in five hazardous industries, including *bidis*,¹²⁵ construction, leather tanneries, matches, and child domestic services.¹²⁶ In 2000, USDOL also provided funding for a follow-up national child labor survey to be conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics with technical assistance from ILO-IPEC's SIMPOC.¹²⁷

Bangladesh is one of three countries that participate in the ILO-IPEC South Asia Sub-Regional Programme to Combat Trafficking in Children for Exploitative Employment (funded by USDOL).¹²⁸ The Bangladesh Ministry of Labor, with the support of USAID, is implementing projects to combat child labor in selected hazardous industries.¹²⁹ To combat trafficking, the Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Welfare is implementing a project for socially

¹²² ILO-IPEC, *Project Proposal: Preventing and Eliminating Worst Forms of Child Labor in Selected Formal and Informal Sectors* (Geneva, August 2000) [hereinafter *Preventing and Eliminating Worst Forms of Child Labour*], 10, 12. See also ILO-IPEC, *Project Document: Continuing the Child Labour Monitoring and Education Components, and Prepare for the Integration into a Broader Project in the Garment Export Industry in Bangladesh* (Geneva, April 2001), 2 [hereinafter *Continuing the Child Labour Monitoring*].

¹²³ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Report on National Sample Survey of Child Labour in Bangladesh, 1995-1996* (Dhaka: ILO-IPEC, October 1996).

¹²⁴ *Preventing and Eliminating Worst Forms of Child Labor* at 10, 12. See also *Continuing the Child Labour Monitoring* at 2.

¹²⁵ A *bidi* is a type of small, hand-rolled cigarette.

¹²⁶ In 2000, IPEC initiated a project targeting child labor in five hazardous industries. In addition in 1995 and again in 2000, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers' Association, the ILO, and UNICEF signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) aimed at eliminating child labor in the garment industry. See *Preventing and Eliminating Worst Forms of Child Labor* at 10, 12 and *Continuing the Child Labour Monitoring* at 2. See also the Second Memorandum of Understanding (MOU-2) Between the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association (BGMEA), ILO, and UNICEF Regarding the Monitoring To Keep Garment Factories Child Labour Free, the Education Programme for Child Workers, and the Elimination of Child Labour (Geneva, June 16, 2000).

¹²⁷ *Preventing and Eliminating Worst Forms of Child Labor*.

¹²⁸ USDOL-Funded IPEC Projects/Programs, *Technical Progress Report: South-Asian Sub-Regional Programme To Combat Trafficking in Children for Exploitative Employment in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka*, February 2000.

¹²⁹ ILO, *Country Paper—Bangladesh: Trafficking of Children for Labor and Sexual Exploitation*, by

disadvantaged women and children, that specifically assists sex workers. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has a child trafficking project to rescue and rehabilitate trafficked children and to raise awareness about the issue.¹³⁰

In order to promote education and increase enrollment, the Government of Bangladesh and the WFP implemented a Food for Education Program in 1993, which gives families wheat or rice in exchange for sending their children to school.¹³¹ In April 2000, the government began a stipend program that provides 20 taka (USD 0.36) per month to mothers of poor households as an incentive to send their children to school.¹³² The government collaborates with UNICEF on the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children's Project (BEHTRUC) that provides two-year basic literacy education to working children living in poor, urban areas.¹³³

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 1999, the ILO estimated that 28.2 percent of children between ages 10 and 14 in Bangladesh were working.¹³⁴ According to child labor survey conducted in 1995 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, in cooperation with ILO's statistical agency 1995, the majority of working children were boys; most working children did not participate in schooling; and child labor was predominantly found in rural areas.¹³⁵ Children are found working in a variety of hazard-

Murari Mohan Datta, The ILO-Japan Asian Meeting on the Trafficking of Children for Labor and Sexual Exploitation, Manila, 2001 [hereinafter Datta, *Trafficking of Children*] [CD-ROM].

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ More than 2.2 million children from 17,000 schools have benefited from this program. See *Preventing and Eliminating Worst Forms of Child Labor at 9*. See also Government of Bangladesh, Directorate of Primary Education, Primary and Mass Education Division, *Education for All: Primary Education in Bangladesh* (Dhaka, November 1999), 17.

¹³² Delwar Hossain, Deputy Chief of Planning, Primary and Mass Education Division, Ministry of Education, Government of Bangladesh, interview by USDOL official, June 25, 2001. Currency conversion at <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm> on 1/29/02.

¹³³ Ruby Noble, "Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children's Project: An Overview," a presentation at the symposium "Child Labor and the Globalizing Economy: Lessons from Asia/Pacific Countries," Stanford University, February 7-9, 2001, at http://www.childlabor.org/events/Ruby_Noble.htm on 11/6/01.

¹³⁴ *World Development Indicators 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001) [CD-ROM].

¹³⁵ The 1995 child labor survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics estimated that 19 percent (6.6 million) of children between the ages of 5 and 14 in Bangladesh were working. Out of the total number of working children, boys account for 60 percent (3.9 million) and girls for 40 percent (2.7 million). Nearly 89 percent of these working children do not participate in schooling. Eighty-three percent of working children are in rural areas as compared to 17 percent in urban areas. Of the total number of working children, 5.4 million were between ages 10 and 14. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Report on National Sample Survey of Child Labour in Bangladesh, 1995-1996* (Dhaka: ILO-IPEC, October 1996), xv, 44-47.

ous occupations and sectors, including *bidi* factories, construction, tanneries, and the seafood and garment industries.¹³⁶ Children also work as domestic servants, porters, and street vendors, and are found working on commercial tea farms.¹³⁷ Children are reported to be sexually exploited as prostitutes.¹³⁸

It is estimated that over 20,000 women and children are trafficked from Bangladesh each year, often for forced labor or prostitution.¹³⁹ Trafficking takes place from rural areas of Bangladesh to its capital, Dhaka, and to India, Pakistan, and countries in the Gulf region and the Middle East.¹⁴⁰ UNICEF estimates that 40,000 children from Bangladesh are involved in commercial sex work in Pakistan alone.¹⁴¹ Boys as young as 4 and 5 years old are also trafficked to the United Arab Emirates to work as camel jockeys.¹⁴²

In 1991, the Government of Bangladesh made primary education compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 10.¹⁴³ In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 96.5 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 81.4 percent.¹⁴⁴ Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Bangladesh. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁶ An ILO study identified and investigated 47 economic activities that were considered hazardous for children in Bangladesh. In addition, it was found that approximately 65 percent of children work between 9 and 14 hours per day. See Government of Bangladesh, Department of Labour, *Hazardous Child Labor in Bangladesh*, study by Dr. Wahidur Rahman (Dhaka: ILO and the Government of Bangladesh, 1996), 3, 4. See also ILO, *Child Labour Situation in Bangladesh: A Rapid Assessment*, study by Dr. Wahidur Rahman (Dhaka: ILO and UNICEF, 1997) [hereinafter Rahman, *Child Labour Situation*].

¹³⁷ Rahman, *Child Labour Situation*, at ix, 23.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2000—Bangladesh* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2001) [hereinafter *Country Reports 2000*], Section 6f, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/sa/index.cfm?docid=692>. See also U.S. Embassy—Abu Dhabi, unclassified telegram no. 3162, May 2000.

¹⁴⁰ Datta, *Trafficking of Children*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Unclassified telegram 3162. See also “The Seamy Side of Camel Racing,” *BBC News*, April 17, 1998, at news1.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/despatches/newsid_79000/79504.stm on 11/8/01.

¹⁴³ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

¹⁴⁴ UNESCO, *Education for All: Year 2000 Assessment* (Paris, 2000) [CD-ROM].

¹⁴⁵ For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see *Introduction* to this report.

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The minimum age for employment varies according to sector. The Employment of Children Act prohibits children less than 12 years of age from working in areas such as tanning as well as *bidi*, carpet, cloth, cement, and fireworks manufacturing, and it prohibits children less than 15 years old from working in railways.¹⁴⁶ The Mines Act prohibits children under 15 years old from working in mines.¹⁴⁷ The Factories Act and Rules establishes 14 years as the minimum age for employment in factories,¹⁴⁸ and the Children Act of 1974 prohibits the employment of children less than 16 years as beggars and in brothels.¹⁴⁹ There are no specific laws covering the informal sectors, such as agriculture and domestic work, although the majority of child workers fall under these categories.¹⁵⁰ The Constitution forbids all forms of forced labor.¹⁵¹ The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act prohibits importing women for the purposes of prostitution. The Oppression of Women and Children Act of 1995 prohibits the trafficking of women and girls, and the selling or hiring of girls less than 18 years for prostitution.¹⁵²

The Ministry of Labor and Employment is designated to enforce labor legislation; however, there are no penalties for breaking child labor laws. Due to a lack of manpower, child labor laws are seldom enforced outside of the garment export industry.¹⁵³ The Government of Bangladesh has not ratified ILO Convention 138, but ratified ILO Convention 182 on March 12, 2001.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Embassy— Dhaka, unclassified telegram no. 2999, December 2000 [hereinafter unclassified telegram 2999].

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ The Factories Rule, 1979, Article 76, at <http://www.natlex.ilo.org/txt/E79BGD01.htm#c7> on 11/2/01. See also Factories Act (No. 4 of 1965), Section 66, at <http://www.natlex.ilo.org/txt/E79BGD01.htm#c7> on 11/2/01.

¹⁴⁹ Unclassified telegram 2999. See also Datta, *Trafficking of Children*.

¹⁵⁰ Unclassified telegram 2999.

¹⁵¹ Constitution of Bangladesh, November 1972, Article 34, at <http://www.bangladeshgov.org/pmo/constitution/consti2.htm#8> on 11/5/01.

¹⁵² Selling a minor for the purposes of prostitution can carry a life sentence in prison. See Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1933 (Act No. VI of 1933), Section 12, and Oppression of Women and Children Act of 1995 (Act No. XVIII of 1995), as cited in The Protection Project Database at <http://www.protectionproject.org> on 12/20/01.

¹⁵³ The Ministry has only 110 inspectors to monitor about 180,000 registered factories and establishments. According to a Ministry official, there have been no prosecutions for violations of child labor laws. U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, unclassified telegram no. 2156, October 2001. See also unclassified telegram 2999 and Latifur Rahman, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Bangladesh, interview by USDOL official, June 29, 2000.

¹⁵⁴ ILOLEX database: Bangladesh at <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm> on 11/5/01.

NOTE: Hard copies of all Web citations are on file.