

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 1994.²¹⁹ The ILO-IPEC program in Bangladesh has implemented many action programs targeting the worst forms of child labor through awareness raising, education opportunities for children, income generating alternatives for families, and capacity building of partner organizations.²²⁰ These programs include USDOL-funded projects to eliminate child labor in the garment sector and in five hazardous industries, including *bidis*,²²¹ construction, leather tanneries, matches, and domestic service.²²² In 2000, USDOL also provided funding for a second national child labor survey, which will be conducted in 2002 – 2003 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics with technical assistance from ILO-IPEC's SIMPOC.²²³

Bangladesh is one of three countries included in the USDOL-funded ILO-IPEC South Asia Sub-Regional Programme to Combat Trafficking in Children for Exploitative Employment.²²⁴ The Bangladesh Ministry of Labor, with the support of USAID, is implementing projects to combat child labor in selected hazardous industries including printing and bookbinding, welding, weaving, and fisheries.²²⁵ In April 2000, the Government of Bangladesh began a stipend program that

²¹⁹ ILO-IPEC, *All About IPEC: Programme Countries*, [online] [cited October 7, 2002]; available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/about/countries/t_country.htm.

²²⁰ ILO, *The Effective Abolition of Child Labour*, Geneva, 2001, 215 [cited September 5, 2002]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/gb/docs/gb280/pdf/gb-3-2-abol.pdf>.

²²¹ A *bidi* is a type of small, hand-rolled cigarette.

²²² 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 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) aimed at eliminating child labor in the garment industry. ILO-IPEC, *Preventing and Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Selected Formal and Informal Sectors*, project proposal, BGD/00/P50/USA, Geneva, August 2000, front page. See also ILO-IPEC, *Continuing the Child Labour Monitoring and Education Components, and Prepare for the Integration into a Broader Project in the Garment Export Industry in Bangladesh*, project proposal, Geneva, March 2001, 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.

²²³ ILO-IPEC, *Preventing and Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Selected Formal and Informal Sectors in Bangladesh: SIMPOC Status Report No. 7*, BGD/00/P50/USA, Geneva, 2000, Section 2.4.5. The first child labor survey was conducted in 1995 by the Bangladeshi Bureau of Statistics. See Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Report on National Sample Survey of Child Labour in Bangladesh, 1995-1996*, ILO-IPEC, Dhaka, October 1996.

²²⁴ ILO-IPEC, *South-Asian Sub-Regional Programme To Combat Trafficking in Children for Exploitative Employment in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka*, technical progress report, RAS/00/05/010, February 2000.

²²⁵ ILO, *The Effective Abolition of Child Labour*, 216.

provides 20 taka (USD 0.36) per month to mothers of poor households as an incentive to send their children to school.²²⁶

With the support of UNICEF and ILO-IPEC, the government drafted the National Plan of Action on Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children in early 2001.²²⁷ With assistance from the Government of Norway, the Ministry of Women and Children's Welfare is implementing a three-year project to reduce child trafficking in Bangladesh by strengthening local capacity and training law enforcement officers.²²⁸ The Department of Social Services, under the Ministry of Welfare, is also implementing a project for socially disadvantaged women and children that assists victims of commercial sexual exploitation.²²⁹ In January 2002, Bangladesh signed the Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution with other South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation countries.²³⁰

As part of its Country Program 2001–2005, the World Food Program provides fortified snacks to children in state schools in poor areas not serviced by other programs.²³¹ The government also collaborates with UNICEF on the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children's Project that provides two-year basic literacy education to over 350,000 working children living in poor, urban areas.²³² A second National Plan of Action for Children (1997 – 2002) was approved by the cabinet in January 1999 and made public in September that same year. The Plan addresses issues including primary and secondary education, health, nutrition and children in need of special protection.²³³ However, it is reported that the Plan is currently inactive.²³⁴

²²⁶ Delwar Hossain, Deputy Chief of Planning, Primary and Mass Education Division, Ministry of Education, interview with USDOL official, June 25, 2001. For currency conversion see FX Converter, [online] [cited January 29, 2002]; available from <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm>.

²²⁷ ECPAT International, *Bangladesh*, in ECPAT International, [database online] 2002 [cited September 9, 2002]; available from http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/online_database/index.asp. See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2002: Bangladesh*, Washington, D.C., June 5, 2002, 27 [cited November 7, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2002/10679.htm>.

²²⁸ As part of this program, a National Taskforce for Anti-Child Trafficking was formed with public and private participation. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh*, 27. See also ECPAT International, *Bangladesh*.

²²⁹ Murari Mohan Datta, "Trafficking of Children for Labor and Sexual Exploitation- Country Paper: Bangladesh" (paper presented at the ILO-Japan Asian Meeting on the Trafficking of Children for Labor and Sexual Exploitation, Manila, 2001).

²³⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh*, 27.

²³¹ The World Food Programme, *World Hunger- Bangladesh*, [online] 2002 [cited September 6, 2002]; available from http://www.wfp.org/country_brief/indexcountry.asp?country=050.

²³² Ruby Noble, "Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children's Project: An Overview" (paper presented at the Child Labor and the Globalizing Economy: Lessons from Asia/Pacific Countries, Stanford University, February 7-9, 2001), [cited November 6, 2001]; available from <http://www.childlabor.org/frames.html>.

²³³ Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, *National Report on Follow-up to the World Summit for Children*, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, December 2000, Section 1.b. [cited September 3, 2002]; available from http://www.unicef.org/specialesession/how_country/edr_bangladesh_en.PDF.

²³⁴ ILO-IPEC, *Preventing and Eliminating Worst Forms of Child Labor in Selected Formal and Informal Sectors: Technical Progress Report #8*, BGD/00/P50/USA, Geneva, September 2002.

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 27.7 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Bangladesh were working.²³⁵ Children are frequently found working in the agricultural sector²³⁶ and in the informal sector.²³⁷ Children are found working in a variety of hazardous occupations and sectors, including *bidi* factories, construction, tanneries, and the seafood and garment industries.²³⁸ There are over 12,000 children working in hazardous conditions throughout the city of Dhaka.²³⁹ Children also work as domestic servants, porters, and street vendors,²⁴⁰ and are sexually exploited as prostitutes.²⁴¹ In addition, many children are also reported to be involved with criminal gangs engaged in arms and drug trading, toll collection and smuggling.²⁴²

Children from Bangladesh are trafficked internationally for purposes of bonded labor, domestic service and sexual exploitation.²⁴³ UNICEF estimates that 4,500 children from Bangladesh are trafficked to Pakistan each year.²⁴⁴ India is another common destination for trafficked children and the lack of enforcement at the border facilitates illegal border crossings.²⁴⁵ Trafficking also takes place from rural areas of Bangladesh to its larger cities, and to countries in the Gulf region and the Middle East.²⁴⁶ Young boys have been trafficked to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar to

²³⁵ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

²³⁶ ILO, *The Effective Abolition of Child Labour*, "Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor" at Education Overview.

²³⁷ Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, *National Report on Follow-up to the World Summit for Children*, 4.d. "Status of Girls and Women".

²³⁸ For the complete list of 47 sectors see Dr. Wahidur Rahman, *Hazardous Child Labor in Bangladesh*, Bangladesh Department of Labor and ILO, Dhaka, 1996, 3, 4.

²³⁹ UN Wire, *Bangladesh: ILO Discovers "Extreme Forms" of Child Labor in Dhaka*, United Nations Foundation, [online] February 11, 2002 [cited September 9, 2002]; available from <http://www.unfoundation.org/unwire/2002/02/11/current.asp#23743>. See also The Independent, *Extreme Forms of Child Labour Prevails in Dhaka City: ILO*, (Internet Edition), February 11, 2002 [cited September 9, 2002]; available from <http://independent-bangladesh.com/news/feb/11/11022002.htm>.

²⁴⁰ Dr. Wahidur Rahman, *Child Labour Situation in Bangladesh: Rapid Assessment*, ILO in collaboration with UNICEF, ix, 23.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xi.

²⁴² Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Bangladesh," in *Child Soldiers Global Report 2001*, 2001, "Related Issues" [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://www.child-soldiers.org/cs/childsoldiers.nsf/3f922f75125fc21980256b20003951fc/2ae11e4be2fe652f80256ae80037e325?OpenDocument>.

²⁴³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh*, 27.

²⁴⁴ ECPAT International, *Bangladesh*.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh*, 27.

work as camel jockeys.²⁴⁷ However, in 2002, the Government of the UAE made progress in stemming the trafficking of children to the country.²⁴⁸

In 1991, the Government of Bangladesh made primary education compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 10.²⁴⁹ Bangladesh has achieved gender parity in primary school enrollment.²⁵⁰ In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 96.5 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 81.4 percent.²⁵¹ 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.²⁵² The quality of primary education in Bangladesh is poor, in part due to inadequate teaching hours, high pupil-to-teacher ratio, and a lack of physical facilities.²⁵³ Basic competency surveys reveal that only one-half of children who complete primary schools in Bangladesh achieve a minimum basic education level.²⁵⁴

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 the tanning, *bidi*, carpet, cloth, cement, and fireworks manufacturing sectors. The Act also prohibits children less than 15 years old from working in railways.²⁵⁵ The Mines Act prohibits children under 15 years old from working in

²⁴⁷ Ibid. See also Dr. Mohamed Y. Mattar, "Trafficking in Persons: The Case of the Middle East" (paper presented at the Conference on Combating Human Trafficking: Key Approaches, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, January 6, 2003); available from <http://www.protectionproject.org/main1.htm>. See also ILO-IPEC, *Combating Child Trafficking for Labor and Sexual Exploitation (TICSA Phase II)*, RAS/02/P51/USA, Geneva, September 26, 2002, 15. See also Mike Wooldridge, *The Seamy Side of Camel Racing*, BBC News, [online] April 17, 1998 [cited November 8, 2001]; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/despatches/79504.stm>.

²⁴⁸ Efforts include a decision to ban jockeys below 15 years of age and weighing less than 45 kg (99 lbs.); a requirement that youth undergo various forms of medical testing to determine if they are of age to race; and humane repatriation initiatives. See Xinhua News Agency, *UAE: UAE Decision to Help Stop Smuggling of Bangladeshi Children*, The Protection Project Daily News Archives, [online] August 1, 2002 [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://www.protectionproject.org/main1.htm>. See also IOM, *Bangladesh- Child Camel Jockey Repatriation*, August 20, 2002. See also U.S. Department of State official, electronic communication to USDOL official, March 5, 2003. There is limited information on the efforts by the Government of Qatar to combat trafficking.

²⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Bangladesh*, Washington, D.C., 2002, 2387-92, Section 5 [cited December 12, 002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/sa/8224.htm>.

²⁵⁰ UNICEF, *Country Profiles: Bangladesh*, [online] [cited September 9, 2002]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/programme/countryprog/rosa/bangladesh/mainmenu.htm>.

²⁵¹ UNESCO, *Education for All: Year 2000 Assessment* [CD-ROM], Paris, 2000.

²⁵² For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

²⁵³ Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, *National Report on Follow-up to the World Summit for Children*, 4.f. (vi). "Early Childhood Care and Development, Basic and Vocational Training" at Proximate Determinants.

²⁵⁴ UNICEF, *Country Profiles: Bangladesh*.

²⁵⁵ Government of Bangladesh, *The Employment of Children Act No. XXVI (as modified by Act LIII of 1974)*, (1938), [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://natlex.ilo.org/txt/E38BGD01.htm>.

mines.²⁵⁶ The Factories Act and Factories Rules establish 14 years as the minimum age for employment in factories,²⁵⁷ and the Children's Act of 1974 prohibits the employment of children less than 16 years as beggars and in brothels.²⁵⁸ 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.²⁵⁹ The Constitution forbids all forms of forced labor.²⁶⁰ The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act prohibits importing females 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.²⁶¹ The legal definition of prostitution does not account for males, so the government does not address the growing problem of boy child prostitution.²⁶²

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.²⁶³ The National Children's Council monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child²⁶⁴ and is the highest authority for overall policy guidance on child development.²⁶⁵ Government officials have arrested, prosecuted and assigned prison sentences to some traffickers.²⁶⁶

The Government of Bangladesh has not ratified ILO Convention 138, but ratified ILO Convention 182 on March 12, 2001.²⁶⁷

²⁵⁶ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *unclassified telegram no. 2999*, December 2000.

²⁵⁷ Government of Bangladesh, *The Factories Rules*, Article 76, (1979), [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://natlex.ilo.org/scripts/natlexcgi.exe?lang=E>. See also Government of Bangladesh, *Factories Act, 1965 (No. 4 of 1965)*, (1965), [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://natlex.ilo.org/scripts/natlexcgi.exe?lang=E>.

²⁵⁸ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *unclassified telegram no. 2999*. See also ILO-IPEC, *South-Asian Sub-Regional Programme, technical progress report*.

²⁵⁹ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *unclassified telegram no. 2999*.

²⁶⁰ *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*, Article 34, (November 1972), [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://www.bangladeshgov.org/pmo/constitution/>.

²⁶¹ Selling a minor for the purposes of prostitution can carry a life sentence in prison. See Government of Bangladesh, *Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1933 (Act No. VI of 1933)*, Section 12, (1933), [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://209.190.246.239/protectionproject/statutesPDF/BANGLADESHf.pdf>. See also Government of Bangladesh, *Oppression of Women and Children Act of 1995 (Act. No. XVIII of 1995)*, (1995), [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://209.190.246.239/protectionproject/statutesPDF/BANGLADESHf.pdf>.

²⁶² ECPAT International, *Bangladesh*.

²⁶³ 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 U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *unclassified telegram no. 2999*. See also Latifur Rahman, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Labor and Employment, interview with USDOL official, June 29, 2000.

²⁶⁴ ECPAT International, *Bangladesh*.

²⁶⁵ Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, *National Report on Follow-up to the World Summit for Children*, 1.e. "Renewed Commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child".

²⁶⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh*.

²⁶⁷ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited September 9, 2002]; available from <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.