

Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh approved its National Child Labor Eradication Policy which aims to develop and harmonize programs and policies to combat the worst forms of child labor. However, gaps remain in child labor legislation and enforcement. Children continue to perform dangerous work in agriculture and domestic service.

Statistics on Working Children and School Attendance

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	13.6
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	76.9
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs.	10.1



Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Children in Bangladesh are engaged in the worst forms of child labor,³⁹⁹ primarily in agriculture, domestic service and manufacturing.⁴⁰⁰ Children working in agriculture perform a variety of tasks and may be exposed to risks such as dangerous machinery and tools, harmful pesticides and heavy loads. Among other things, children are found harvesting jute and may also be found cultivating rice in rural areas.⁴⁰¹

According to a survey by the ILO in 2006, more than 421,000 children, mostly girls, work as domestic servants in private households in Bangladesh.⁴⁰² Some child domestics work in exploitative conditions⁴⁰³ and are vulnerable to abuse, including sexual abuse.⁴⁰⁴

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, children engage in dangerous work that includes welding, carpentry, rickshaw pulling and automobile repair.⁴⁰⁵ Children work drying fish and milling spices which exposes them to harmful chemicals, dangerous machines that can cut off

their fingers and long hours of work in the hot sun.⁴⁰⁶

Children are also involved in the production of salt, soap, matches, bricks, cigarettes, footwear, steel furniture, glass, leather, poultry, ornaments, metals and textiles.⁴⁰⁷ While producing these goods, they face dangers that may include working with hazardous chemicals and sharp objects in cramped conditions with low lighting for long hours. Children collect and process shrimp, which has led to urinary tract infections, back injuries, repetitive strain, muscle inflammation, fungal infections and diarrhea.⁴⁰⁸ Children also work dismantling large ships into smaller pieces.⁴⁰⁹ Children lack the physical strength necessary for ship breaking and risk exposure to hazardous chemicals.⁴¹⁰ Children reportedly also work in the worst forms of child labor in the production of jewelry, plastic and rubber.⁴¹¹

Children are also found working on the streets, garbage picking, vending, begging and portering.⁴¹² They may face multiple dangers including severe weather, vehicle accidents and criminal elements. Children working in hotels and

restaurants face long working hours and potential abuse.⁴¹³

Bangladeshi children are exploited in the commercial sex industry; some are trafficked internally and to India for sexual exploitation.⁴¹⁴ Boys and girls, often those living on the streets, are exploited in illicit activities, including smuggling and trading arms and drugs.⁴¹⁵

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Code establishes the minimum age for work at 14 and the minimum age for hazardous work at 18.⁴¹⁶ The Labor Code allows certain exceptions, permitting children age 12 to 13 to perform light work, but it restricts the kinds of

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	No
	Minimum Age for Work	14
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	10
	Free Public Education	Yes

work they can do. It also limits the hours children ages 14 to 18 can work.⁴¹⁷ However, the Labor Code excludes large swaths of the economy in which children work including agriculture and home-based work. Additionally, the law does not define occupations or sectors that are hazardous in nature.⁴¹⁸

Labor Code prohibits parents or guardians from pledging their children’s work in exchange for a payment or benefit and the Penal Code prohibits compulsory labor and the.⁴¹⁹ Those who violate the law are subject to penalties which include imprisonment.⁴²⁰

The Women and Children’s Repression Prevention Act of 2000 (Amended 2003) criminalizes the trafficking of children and establishes strict penalties and fines for violators.⁴²¹ The Penal Code of 1860 criminalizes the prostitution of girls under age 18, in contrast to the Children’s Act of 1974, which only criminalizes the prostitution of girls under age 16.⁴²² The conflicting age thresholds may leave girls ages 16 to 17 vulnerable to exploitation and may cause problems for effective enforcement and prosecution. In addition, both laws fail to protect boys from child prostitution.

While the law establishes that education is free and compulsory in Bangladesh, children are not required to attend school after they reach age 10. Although education is, free, in practice, the costs of teacher fees, books and uniforms are prohibitive for many families; therefore, children are not sent to school.⁴²³ Additionally, the low minimum age for compulsory education makes children particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor as children are not required to be in school after age 10 but are not legally permitted to work either.

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

The Government of Bangladesh has established a Child Labor Unit in the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE) to monitor, coordinate and supervise child labor programs.⁴²⁴

An interministerial anti-trafficking committee oversees national efforts to combat human trafficking. This committee, chaired by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), monitors trafficking issues.⁴²⁵

The Office of the Chief Inspectorate of the Department of Factories and Establishments

under MOLE is responsible for enforcing labor laws, including child labor provisions.⁴²⁶ The ministry has approximately 50 inspectors.⁴²⁷ The inspectors work from 31 offices across the country and each one conducts from five to one hundred monthly inspections.⁴²⁸ Government officials reported that inspections did not discover any child labor violations during the reporting period.⁴²⁹ Due to its limitations, the Government of Bangladesh indicated that the inspection system is not able to work effectively to prevent child labor.⁴³⁰

In 2010, the city of Dhaka established 42 community-based workplace surveillance groups (CWSGs) which monitor workplaces in four zones to ensure hazardous child labor does not exist in these communities.⁴³¹ The CWSGs are comprised of community volunteers and are responsible for reporting any child labor violations in the formal and informal sectors to the appropriate government authority. This type of monitoring system exists only in the city of Dhaka, which limits the coverage of child labor violations.⁴³²

MOHA is the lead agency designated to enforce the country's forced labor and anti-trafficking laws.⁴³³ MOHA maintains an anti-trafficking police unit in each of Bangladesh's 64 districts and provides trafficking training to police officers and other public officials.⁴³⁴ MOHA also maintains a special anti trafficking of human beings unit comprised of 12 police officers charged with investigating all forms of trafficking.⁴³⁵ During the reporting period, MOHA rescued 41 child victims from trafficking situations.⁴³⁶

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In March 2010, the Government of Bangladesh established a policy framework for the elimination of the worst forms of child labor through approval of the National Child Labor Eradication Policy 2010.⁴³⁷ The policy serves as a guiding instrument for the formulation of future laws and policies regarding child labor. The policy also calls for the formation of a National Child Labor Welfare

Council to monitor the child labor situation at a national level in conjunction with the Child Labor Unit, the entity responsible for monitoring child labor elimination programs.⁴³⁸

The Third National Plan of Action for Children (2005-2010) commits the Government to carry out a variety of tasks to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, with a particular focus on child domestic workers, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups. The commitments include introducing regulations, ensuring working children's access to education and strengthening the labor inspectorate.⁴³⁹ The Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) includes a strategic goal to protect child laborers and eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The three-year 2009 PRSP seeks to accomplish this through raising awareness of child labor, drafting minimum wage and other protective standards, creating a child-friendly code of conduct for employers and improving educational opportunities for working children.⁴⁴⁰ The trafficking in persons is mentioned as an ancillary item in a number of government policies including the PRSP and the Third National Plan of Action for Children.⁴⁴¹

Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

UNICEF continued to collaborate closely with the Government to implement the second phase of a project to set up education centers that provide nonformal education and livelihood skills to more than 350,000 working children and adolescents.⁴⁴² The Government is also supporting the third phase of a project that targets 30,000 child laborers from withdrawal from hazardous job through non-formal education and skills development programs.⁴⁴³

The Government is also participating in a \$10 million Netherlands-funded project that aims to prevent and eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the informal economy in Dhaka and a European Commission-funded project that

includes the provision of market-based skills training for child laborers.⁴⁴⁴ The Government lacks special social programs for working children in rural areas, specifically in agriculture. Additionally, the Government participates in USDOL-funded ILO-IPEC project to conduct a national child labor survey.⁴⁴⁵

To combat child trafficking, the Government is participating in a USAID-funded project that builds the capacity of the police to identify and prosecute traffickers, expand public awareness on trafficking and provide services to trafficking victims.⁴⁴⁶ Additionally, the Government supports

nine shelters for women and children who have experienced violence, including trafficking, and is participating in a Danish International Development Agency-funded child helpline service.⁴⁴⁷

The Government supports approximately 30 social safety net programs that serve the poor.⁴⁴⁸ In 2010, the Government initiated the Employment Generation Program for the Poorest which provides short-term employment for the rural poor.⁴⁴⁹ The question of whether this program, or other social safety net programs, has an impact on child labor does not appear to have been studied.

Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the reduction of the worst forms of child labor in Bangladesh:

IN THE AREAS OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS:

- Develop and approve a list of hazardous work prohibited for children.
- Raise the compulsory education age to 14, the established minimum age for work.
- Amend the law to protect children working in family enterprises and home-based work.
- Amend and harmonize the Penal Code and the Children's Act to include protections against prostitution for all children (including boys) under age 18.

IN THE AREA OF COORDINATION AND ENFORCEMENT:

- Examine changes that need to be made to labor inspection procedures to better enforce child labor laws and protect against exploitative child labor.
- Expand the CWSGs to cover locations outside of Dhaka.

IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS:

- Commit funding and expand the scope of social programs to adequately assist the large number of children engaged in or at risk of the worst forms of child labor in rural areas.
- Assess the impact that existing social safety net programs may have on addressing child labor.

³⁹⁹ The statistics in the chart to the left are based on UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity, School Attendance, and Combined Working and Studying Rates, 2005-2010*. Data on working children and children combining school and work are from 2006. Data on school attendance is from 2007. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms. As a result, statistics on children's work are reported in this section, which may or may not include the worst forms of child labor. For more information on

sources used, the definition of working children, and other indicators used in this report, please see the "Data Sources and Definitions" section.

⁴⁰⁰ U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting, March 28, 2011*, 1, 2. See also U.S. Department of State, "Bangladesh" in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2010*, Washington, DC, April 8, 2011, section 7d; available from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160056.pdf>. See also ILO Labour Office- Dhaka, *Baseline Survey on Child Domestic Labour (CDL) in Bangladesh*, December 2006, xiv, 4; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ipcecinfo/product/viewProduct.do?productId=4647>.

- ⁴⁰¹ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Baseline Survey for Determining Hazardous Child Labour Sectors in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, July 2006, 20, 94, 95, 168.
- ⁴⁰² ILO Labour Office- Dhaka, *Baseline Survey on Child Domestic Labour (CDL) in Bangladesh*, xiv.
- ⁴⁰³ Ibid., xiv, 4. See also International Research on Working Children, *The Worst Forms of Child Labour in Asia: Main Findings from Bangladesh and Nepal*, 2010, 59; available from http://www.childlabour.net/documents/worstformsAsiaproject/WOFAS%20presentatie%20samenvatting_2010.pdf.
- ⁴⁰⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2010: Bangladesh,” section 7d. See also ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182) Bangladesh (ratification: 2001)*, online, 2005; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/pdconv.pl?host=status01&textbase=iloeng&document=8259&chapter=6&query=%28Bangladesh%29+%40ref&highlight=&querytype=bool&context=0>. See also International Research on Working Children, *The Worst Forms of Child Labour in Asia*, 59.
- ⁴⁰⁵ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Baseline Survey for Determining Hazardous Child Labour Sectors in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, July 2006. See also U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting, February 23, 2010*, 2.
- ⁴⁰⁶ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Baseline Survey for Determining Hazardous Child Labour*. See also U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting, February 23, 2010*, 2. See also Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan Md. Nurul Huda Bhuyian, Matior Rahim, Kabir Ahmed, K.M. Formuzul Haque, Md. Tariqul Hassan and Md. Nazrul Islam Bhuiyan., *Screening of Organochlorine Insecticides (DDT and Heptachlor) in Dry Fish Available in Bangladesh*, July 29 2008, 115; available from <http://www.banglajol.info/index.php/BJP/article/viewFile/997/1096>.
- ⁴⁰⁷ U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2010: Bangladesh,” section 7d. See also Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Baseline Survey for Determining Hazardous Child Labour*, 20, 94, 95, 168. See also U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting, May 2, 2009*, question 2d.
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- ⁴⁰⁹ International Federation for Human Rights, *Childbreaking Yards*, Paris, 2008, 5, 17, 15; available from <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/bgukreport.pdf>. See also Sandy Tolan, *Babu's Story: A Child Worker in the Shipyards of Bangladesh*, [June 18, 2009 [cited March 21, 2011]; available from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sandy-tolan/babus-story-a-child-worke_b_217670.html. See also U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2010: Bangladesh,” section 7d.
- ⁴¹⁰ International Federation for Human Rights, *Childbreaking Yards*, 5, 17, 15. See also Tolan, *Babu's Story*.
- ⁴¹¹ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Baseline Survey for Determining Hazardous Child Labour*, 20, 95.
- ⁴¹² U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2010: Bangladesh,” section 7d. See also Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Baseline Survey for Determining Hazardous Child Labour*, 95. See also U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting, February 23, 2010*, 1. See also Daily Star, *Child Labour Unabated*, [June 12, 2010 [cited March 14, 2011]]; available from <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=142371>.
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- ⁴¹⁶ U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting, March 28, 2011*, 3.
- ⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 3. See also Government of Bangladesh, *Labour Code, 2006* (June 2, 2006), Chapter III, Article 41.
- ⁴¹⁸ Government of Bangladesh, *Written Communication*, submitted in response to U.S. Department of Labor Federal Register Notice (February 24, 2010) “Request for Information on Efforts by Certain Countries to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor”, Dhaka, April 8, 2010, 3. See also Ministry of Labour and Employment, *National Child Labour Eradication Policy 2010*, Dhaka, March 2010. See also ILO, *Report on the Review of The Decent Work Country Programme: Bangladesh 2006 - 2009*, 2011, 10; available from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_150632.pdf.
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- ⁴²² Government of Bangladesh, *Penal Code*, article 366a. See also Government of Bangladesh, *The Children Act*, Act No. XXXIX (1974), article 42; available from http://www.law.yale.edu/rcw/rcw/jurisdictions/assc/bangladesh/Bang_Child_Act_and_Rules.htm. See also U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting*, May 2, 2009, 2.
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- ⁴²⁶ U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting*, March 28, 2011, 5.
- ⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ⁴³⁰ Government of Bangladesh, *Written Communication*, submitted in response to U.S. Department of Labor Federal Register Notice (April 25, 2011) "Request for Information on Efforts by Certain Countries to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor," Washington, May 12, 2011, 6.
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- ⁴³³ U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting*, February 23, 2010, 4. See also U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting*, March 28, 2011, 4, 5.
- ⁴³⁴ Ministry of Home Affairs, *Bangladesh Country Report on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children*, Dhaka, February 15, 2007, 3-4; available from http://www.mfa.go.th/fhpworkshop/doc/bestpractices/Bangladesh_country_report.pdf. See also U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2010: Bangladesh," 76.
- ⁴³⁵ U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting*, February 23, 2010, 4, 7. See also U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2010: Bangladesh," 76.
- ⁴³⁶ U.S. Embassy - Dhaka, *reporting*, March 28, 2011, 7.
- ⁴³⁷ Ministry of Labour and Employment, *Child Labor Policy*. See also Government of Bangladesh, *Written Communication, submitted in response to U.S. Department of Labor Federal Register Notice*, 3.
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