

Bangladesh

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

An estimated 13.4 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years were counted as working in Bangladesh in 2002. Approximately 18.5 percent of all boys ages 5 to 14 were working compared to 7.9 percent of girls in the same age group. The majority of working children were found in the agricultural sector (62.3 percent), followed by services (23.2 percent), manufacturing (12.6 percent), and other sectors (2.0 percent).²⁹⁶ Children are frequently found working in the informal sectors.²⁹⁷ Children are also vulnerable to exploitation in a variety of potentially hazardous occupations and sectors, including *bidi* (hand-rolled cigarette) factories, construction, leather tanneries, fish and shrimp-farming, rickshaw-pulling, matches manufacturing, brick-breaking, the garment industry, and many others.²⁹⁸ Government reports indicate that children are found working in hundreds of different activities, 47 of which are regarded as harmful to the child's physical and mental well-being. In 2004, approximately 1.3 million children were working under hazardous conditions.²⁹⁹ Many children work as domestic servants and are vulnerable to sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation.³⁰⁰ Between 35,000 and 45,000 children are reported to be exploited by criminal gangs for the purposes of arms and drug trading and smuggling.³⁰¹ Child labor is one of many problems associated with poverty. In 2000, 36 percent of the population in Bangladesh were living on less than USD 1 a day.³⁰²

Children are trafficked internally, externally, and through Bangladesh to India, Pakistan, and the Middle East for purposes of domestic service, marriage, sale of organs, bonded labor, and sexual exploitation.³⁰³ The problem of monitoring child trafficking is compounded by the low rate of birth registration, since

²⁹⁶ UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*, October 7, 2005. 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, such as the use of children in the illegal drug trade, prostitution, pornography, and trafficking. As a result, statistics and information on children's work in general are reported in this section. Such statistics and information may or may not include the worst forms of child labor. For more information on the definition of working children and other indicators used in this report, please see the "Data Sources and Definitions" section of this report.

²⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2004: Bangladesh*, Washington, DC, February 28, 2005, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41738.htm>.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. See also ILO, *The Effective Abolition of Child Labour*, Geneva, 2003, 26-28; available from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWEB.DOWNLOAD_BLOB?Var_DocumentID=1614.

See also International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, *Internationally Recognized Core Labour Standards in Bangladesh*, 2000; available from <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991209741&Language=EN>.

²⁹⁹ Economic Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Government Submission in Response to Federal Register Notice of July 13, 2004, fax communication to USDOL official, August 31, 2004.

³⁰⁰ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties, Concluding Observations: Bangladesh*, CRC/C/15/Add.221, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, October 27, 2003, para. 69; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/3ff4da770b9e9847c1256df3005a49f4/\\$FILE/G0344627.pdf](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/3ff4da770b9e9847c1256df3005a49f4/$FILE/G0344627.pdf).

³⁰¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Child Soldiers: CRC Country Briefs -Bangladesh*, 34th Session, CSC Briefing in response to reports submitted by States Parties to inform the Committee of the recruitment or use of children as soldiers, June 9-13, 2003, 3.

³⁰² World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2005* [CD-ROM], Washington, DC, 2005.

³⁰³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Washington, DC, June 3, 2005; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005/46613.htm>. See also ILO-IPEC, *Rapid Assessment on Trafficking in Children for Exploitative Employment in Bangladesh (TICSA)*, RAS/02/P51/USA, Dhaka, February, 2002, 17. See also ECPAT International, *Bangladesh*, in ECPAT International, [database online] [cited July 6, 2005], Trafficking; available from http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/online_database/index.asp.

children without legal documents have no proof that they are underage.³⁰⁴ Children are trafficked internally from the rural areas of Bangladesh to its larger cities for labor and sexual exploitation.³⁰⁵ Young boys are trafficked to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait to work as camel jockeys and beggars.³⁰⁶

Education is free and compulsory for children ages 6 to 10.³⁰⁷ Bangladesh has achieved near gender parity in primary school enrollment.³⁰⁸ In 2002, the gross primary enrollment rate was 96 percent and the net primary enrollment rate was 84 percent.³⁰⁹ Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. In 2002, 82.6 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years were attending school.³¹⁰ As of 2001, 54 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.³¹¹ Universal primary education is hindered because many parents withdraw their children from school, preferring to have them work for money or assist with household activities.³¹² The quality of primary education in Bangladesh is poor,³¹³ in part due to inadequately trained teachers, teacher absenteeism, and a lack of physical facilities.³¹⁴

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The minimum age for employment varies by industrial sector. The Employment of Children Act prohibits children younger than 12 years of age from working in 10 sectors including the tanning, *bidi*, carpet, cloth, cement, and fireworks manufacturing sectors. The Act also prohibits children younger than 15 years of age from working in railways or ports.³¹⁵ The Tea Plantations Labor Ordinance forbids the employment of children under 12 on tea plantations.³¹⁶ The Mines Act prohibits children under 15 years of age from

³⁰⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations*, para. 37. See also ECPAT International, *Bangladesh, Trafficking*.

³⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Burmese children are also trafficked through Bangladesh. See IOM, *Bangladesh: Counter-Trafficking Efforts*, in IOM Press Briefing Notes, [online] June 15, 2004 [cited July 15, 2004]; available from http://www.iom.int/en/archive/archive_press_brief_notes.shtml.

³⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Bangladesh*, Section 5. See also ILO-IPEC, *Rapid Assessment on Trafficking in Children for Exploitative Employment in Bangladesh*, 17.

³⁰⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Bangladesh*, Section 5. See also *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*, (November 1972), Article 17; available from <http://www.pmo.gov.bd/constitution/contents.htm>.

³⁰⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Bangladesh*, Section 5. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations*, para. 63.

³⁰⁹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportID=51> (Gross and Net Enrollment Ratios, Primary; accessed December 2005).

³¹⁰ UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*, October 7, 2005.

³¹¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportID=55> (School Life Expectancy, % of Repeaters, Survival Rates; accessed December 2005).

³¹² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Bangladesh*, Section 5.

³¹³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Summary Record of the 913rd Meeting, October 6, 2003, para. 33.

³¹⁴ World Bank, *Primary Education Development Project II*, in Projects Database, [database online] September 8, 2004 [cited July 1, 2005]; available from

<http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=104231&piPK=73230&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=228424&ProjectID=P074966>. See also World Bank, "Bangladesh: World Bank Joins Donors to Support Primary Education", February 24, 2004; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,contentMDK:20169107~menuPK:34463~pakePK:64003015~piPK:64003012~theSitePK:4607,00.html>.

³¹⁵ Government of Bangladesh, *The Employment of Children Act No. XXVI (as modified by Act LIII of 1974)*, (1938), Section 3; available from <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/47334/65072/E38BGD01.htm>.

³¹⁶ Tea Plantations Labor Ordinance No. 39 of 1962 as cited by ILO, *NATLEX National Labour Law Database*, [cited July 1, 2005]; available from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.country?p_lang=en&p_country=BGD.

working in mines³¹⁷ and the Road Transport Workers Ordinance prohibits children under 18 from working on roads and those under 21 from working as drivers.³¹⁸ The Factories Act and Factories Rules establish 14 years as the minimum age for employment in factories.³¹⁹ The majority of child workers are found in the agriculture and domestic work sectors, but there are no specific laws covering the informal sectors.³²⁰ The Constitution forbids forced labor.³²¹ The minimum age for voluntary military service is 18 years and there is no forced conscription in Bangladesh.³²² The government lists 11 occupations as the worst forms of child labor: sexual acts, smuggling, bidi, battery and chemical factories, glass factories, tanneries, salt factories, transport, rag picking, welding, arms and drug trafficking, and slavery.³²³

The worst forms of child labor may be prosecuted under different statutes in Bangladesh. Child trafficking for illegal or immoral purposes is illegal and carries penalties ranging from life imprisonment to death.³²⁴ The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act prohibits inducing children under the age of 18 into prostitution.³²⁵ The legal definitions of prostitution and trafficking do not account for male children.³²⁶ The Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act, passed in 2000, protects children from sexual exploitation and maiming and imposes strict punishments on offenders.³²⁷ The Extradition Act enables the government to order traffickers who live in or have fled to other countries back to Bangladesh for trial.³²⁸ The recently passed Birth and Death Registration Act makes birth registration a requirement for attending school, receiving a marriage certificate or applying for a passport, making the identification of trafficking victims easier.³²⁹

The Office of the Chief Inspector of Factories under the Ministry of Labor and Employment is responsible for implementation and enforcement of labor legislation.³³⁰ According to the U.S. Department of State, child labor laws are seldom enforced due to a lack of manpower. Within the formal sector, the Ministry has only 88 inspectors to monitor 21,500 registered factories and an unknown number of smaller shops and establishments.³³¹ Government officials have arrested, prosecuted and given prison sentences to some traffickers. The government has created an anti-trafficking monitoring unit within the police force, and

³¹⁷ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *reporting*, December 19, 2000.

³¹⁸ Road Transport Workers Ordinance No. 18 of 1961 as cited by ILO, *NATLEX*.

³¹⁹ Government of Bangladesh, *The Factories Rules*, Article 76, (1979); available from <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/50617/65128/E79BGD01.htm>. See also Government of Bangladesh, *Factories Act, 1965 (No. 4 of 1965)*, (1965), Sections 66-74; available from <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/47346/65073/E65BGD01.htm>.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *The Constitution of Bangladesh*, Article 34.

³²² C.I.A., <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields/2024.html> (World Factbook).

³²³ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *reporting*, August 30, 2005.

³²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Bangladesh*, Section 5.

³²⁵ Government of Bangladesh, *Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1933 (Act No. VI of 1933)*, Sections 9-12, (1933).

³²⁶ ECPAT International, *Bangladesh, Child Prostitution*.

³²⁷ Government of Bangladesh, *Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act, 2000 (Act. No. VIII of 2000)*, (2000), Articles 4-7. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties: Second Periodic Reports of States Parties due in 1997, Bangladesh*, CRC/C/65/Add.22, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, March 14, 2003, 7; available from [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/c0800ae5e758a57fc1256d3a002b4951/\\$FILE/G0340776.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/898586b1dc7b4043c1256a450044f331/c0800ae5e758a57fc1256d3a002b4951/$FILE/G0340776.pdf).

³²⁸ Mina Neumuller, *The Legal Framework on Trafficking in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka*, ILO-IPEC, Katmandu, October, 2000, 16.

³²⁹ UNICEF, *Bangladesh- Background*, [cited July 1, 2005]; available from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bangladesh_bangladesh_background.html.

³³⁰ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *reporting*, August 30, 2005.

³³¹ A joint monitoring team comprising officials from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), ILO, and the Office of the Chief Inspector of Factories routinely inspects all 4,000 member factories of BGMEA. From January to July 2005, the team found 9 child labor violations in 5 factories, and fined each factory the local currency equivalent of USD 100. See U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *reporting*, 22 November, 2005.

assigned prosecutors to deal exclusively with trafficking cases.³³² Despite successes, public corruption is still widespread and the court system is slow. In addition, traffickers are often charged with lesser crimes such as crossing borders without proper documentation. This makes trafficking cases difficult to quantify.³³³ The government has intensified its efforts to investigate and prosecute public officials complicit in trafficking. Approximately 12 officials were charged and prosecuted in 2005.³³⁴ In 2005, 192 child camel jockeys were repatriated from the United Arab Emirates and provided with reintegration services.³³⁵

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

The Government of Bangladesh is working to eliminate child labor through the implementation of action programs, stipends, rehabilitation and reintegration for former child laborers, and promoting universal access to education.³³⁶ The National Children’s Council is responsible for enforcing laws related to children and is the highest authority for overall policy guidance on child development.³³⁷ The ILO-IPEC program in Bangladesh is currently implementing four programs totaling USD 8.2 million to eliminate child labor through the implementation of Timebound policies and programs.³³⁸ A USD 6 million USDOL-funded ILO-IPEC project to eliminate child labor in *bidis*, construction, leather tanneries, matches, and domestic service in third-party homes concluded in August 2005.³³⁹

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138		
Ratified Convention 182	3/12/2001	✓
ILO-IPEC Member		✓
National Plan for Children		✓
National Child Labor Action Plan		✓
Sector Action Plan (Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking)		✓

The Government of Bangladesh has increased its efforts to combat trafficking. These efforts include the establishment of a police anti-trafficking unit; arrests of several public officials for complicity in trafficking crimes; the rescue of more than 160 victims; and the creation of an inter-ministerial committee on trafficking.³⁴⁰ The government is also collaborating extensively with the NGO community on efforts to combat child trafficking in the areas of prevention, research, advocacy, awareness raising, enforcement, rehabilitation, and legislative reform.³⁴¹ Bangladesh is one of six countries included in a USDOL-funded ILO-IPEC Asia project to combat child trafficking for labor and sexual exploitation.³⁴² The government is

³³² U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

³³³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Bangladesh*, Section 5. See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

³³⁴ U.S. Embassy- Dhaka, *reporting*, August 30, 2005.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ ILO, *The Effective Abolition of Child Labour*, 217-218. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations*, para. 69.

³³⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Second Periodic Reports of States Parties: Bangladesh*, 9.

³³⁸ ILO-IPEC Official, e-mail communication to USDOL Official, November 8, 2005.

³³⁹ ILO-IPEC, *Preventing and Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Selected Formal and Informal Sectors in Bangladesh*, Technical Progress Report, Geneva, September 2005. See also U.S. Department of Labor, *Preventing and Eliminating Worst Forms of Child Labor in Selected Formal and Informal Sectors in Bangladesh*, ILAB Technical Cooperation Project Summary, November 8, 2005.

³⁴⁰ White House Office of the Press Secretary, *Memorandum for the Secretary of State: Presidential Determination N. 2004-46 with Respect to Foreign Governments’ Efforts Regarding Trafficking in Persons*, press release, Washington, D.C., September 10, 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/prsr1/36127.htm>.

³⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Bangladesh*, Section 5.

³⁴² The USD 3 million project, which also includes Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Thailand, is in its second phase and is scheduled to end in 2006. See ILO-IPEC, *Combating Child Trafficking for Labor and Sexual Exploitation (TICSA Phase II)*, project document, RAS/02/P51/USA, Geneva, February 2002.

supporting a major national anti-trafficking prevention campaign to increase awareness of the problem among vulnerable groups. The program includes radio and television advertisements and anti-trafficking training for religious leaders and the border patrol.³⁴³ With support from IOM, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs launched a strategic initiative outlining a framework of action for the government, NGOs, and civil society to combat trafficking. IOM also collaborated with the Ministry of Home Affairs to organize training sessions in several districts to enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies and immigration officials to address trafficking in Bangladesh.³⁴⁴

The Government of Bangladesh has made progress in improving the quality of and access to basic education.³⁴⁵ The government is implementing a second phase of the National Plan of Action for Education for All for the period 2003 to 2015, which embraces all of the goals of Education for All (EFA) for making education compulsory, accessible, and all-inclusive.³⁴⁶ Recent government efforts have included the abolition of tuition fees for primary schools, the establishment of a 500 million *taka* (USD 7.6 million) stipend program, and a “food for education” program.³⁴⁷

The Government of Bangladesh is also receiving intensified support to improve the education system from the World Bank, UNICEF, Save the Children and several other donors and NGOs.³⁴⁸ Multiple donors fund the USD 150 million Primary Education Development Program (PEDP II) that aims to enhance the quality, access, and efficiency of primary education by operationalizing key aspects of the government’s EFA initiative and Poverty Reduction strategies.³⁴⁹ The World Bank supports the USD 51 million Reaching Out-of-School Children Project to improve access and quality of education with a focus on disadvantaged children.³⁵⁰

The government has also received support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in its efforts to improve the education system. Current ADB technical assistance projects include the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project,³⁵¹ the Strengthening Primary Education Development Program,³⁵² and the Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project II.³⁵³ USAID is sponsoring an early

³⁴³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

³⁴⁴ More than 100 government officials, NGO staff, and other development partners participated in the workshops. See IOM, *Bangladesh: Counter-Trafficking Efforts*. See also IOM, *Bangladesh: Training of Immigration Officials*, in IOM Press Briefing Notes, [online] August 13, 2004 [cited November 30, 2005]; available from http://www.iom.int/en/archive/archive_press_brief_notes.shtml.

³⁴⁵ World Bank, *World Bank Joins Donors to Support Primary Education*, February 24, 2004; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,contentMDK:20169107~menuPK:34463~pagePK:64003015~piPK:6403012~theSitePK:4607,00.html>.

³⁴⁶ Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Education for All: National Plan of Action II 2003-2015*, May 2003, Chapters V-VII.

³⁴⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations*, para. 63. For currency conversion, see FX Converter, [online] [cited October 3, 2005]; available from <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm>.

³⁴⁸ UNICEF, *Bangladesh- Girls Education*, [cited July 1, 2005]; available from http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/education_646.htm. See also Save the Children, *Bangladesh*, [cited July 1, 2005]; available from <http://www.savethechildren.org/countries/asia/bangladesh.asp>. See also World Bank, *Primary Education Development Project II*.

³⁴⁹ World Bank, *Primary Education Development Project II*.

³⁵⁰ World Bank, *Bangladesh- Reaching Out of School Children*, [cited July 1, 2005]; available from <http://www.worldbank.org.bd/external/default/main?pagePK=64027221&piPK=64027220&theSitePK=295760&menuPK=295794&Projectid=P086791>. See also World Bank, *Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Grant in the Amount of SDR 35.2 Million to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh for a Reaching Out-of-School Children Project*, May 19, 2004; available from http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/05/27/000160016_20040527125030/Rendered/PDF/29019.pdf

³⁵¹ Asian Development Bank, *Technical Assistance to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh for Preparing the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project*, August 2002; available from http://www.adb.org/Documents/TARs/BAN/R178_02.pdf.

³⁵² Asian Development Bank, *Technical Assistance to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh for the Strengthening Primary Education Development Program*, December 2002; available from http://www.adb.org/Documents/TARs/BAN/tar_ban_36618.pdf.

childhood education program designed to introduce preschool programs to Bangladesh and create and distribute high-quality, educational television programs for young students.³⁵⁴

As part of its Country Program 2001–2005, the World Food Program provides meals for non-formal primary education students in areas with low enrollment. The School Feeding Program also provides supplementary snacks to adolescent girls.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Asian Development Bank, *Technical Assistance to the People's Republic of Bangladesh for Preparing the Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project II*, December 2004; available from <http://www.adb.org/Documents/TARs/BAN/tar-ban-37307.pdf>.

³⁵⁴ USAID, *Data Sheet - Bangladesh - Education*, 2005 [cited July 1, 2005]; available from <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/ane/pdf/bd388-010.pdf>.

³⁵⁵ The World Food Programme, *World Hunger- Bangladesh*, April 24, 2004 [cited July 7, 2005]; available from http://www.wfp.org/country_brief/indexcountry.asp?country=050.