

In 2020, Bangladesh made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government extended implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor from 2021 to 2025. The Ministry of Labor and Employment also drafted an update to the hazardous work list, which if adopted, would add drying fish. In addition, the government constituted and funded seven anti-trafficking in persons tribunals to handle human trafficking cases. However, children in Bangladesh are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor in the production of dried fish and bricks. Children also perform dangerous tasks in garment and leather goods supply chains. The Bangladesh Labor Act does not apply to the informal sector, in which most child labor in Bangladesh occurs. 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 forced child labor in the production of dried fish and bricks. (1,2) Children also perform dangerous tasks in garment and leather goods supply chains. (2-5) 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, 2021. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2019. These data are not comparable with data presented in last year's report due to changes in survey source, survey questionnaire, or age range surveyed. (7)

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, raising poultry, grazing cattle, and harvesting tea leaves (8-13)
	Fishing and drying and processing fish (1,2,9,11,14-16)
	Harvesting and processing shrimp (2,8,12)
Industry	Producing garments, textiles, and jute textiles (2,17-21)
	Producing leather,† leather goods, and footwear† (8,22-26)
	Manufacturing bricks,† glass,† hand-rolled cigarettes (bidis),† matches,† soap,† furniture (steel),† furniture (wood), aluminum products,† and metal products (2,8,9,12,27-31)
	Shipbreaking† and battery recycling† (2,8,26,32-34)
	Construction† and breaking bricks† and stones† (9,11,12)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Domestic work (2,11,35-39)
	Garbage sorting and recycling (2,40)
	Working in transportation, including ticket taking, welding, pulling rickshaws, driving, and repairing automobiles† (2,9,11,23,38-42)
	Working in tea shops and retail shops (2,9,11,39)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including smuggling and selling drugs (8,12,43,44)
	Forced begging (8,39,43)
	Forced labor in the drying of fish and the production of bricks (1,8,14,15,45)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2,8,39,46-48)
	Forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2,8,11,12,39,43,49,50)

† 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.

Although research is limited, there are indications that an increased number of children have been forced into commercial sexual exploitation and forced begging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. (51) The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics estimated that there were 1.28 million children working in hazardous sectors before the pandemic, and one NGO has observed a 33 percent increase in child labor and guessed 20 to 25 percent of children in its programs had moved into more hazardous jobs or returned to their villages since the onset of the pandemic. (2,31,40) 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) Hazardous sectors in which children work include tanneries, shipbreaking, and the dried fish industry. (5,8,35,45) 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. (45,100) 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. (34) Children who work in tanneries lack protective equipment and experience continuous exposure to heavy metals, formaldehyde, and other hazardous substances. (3,4) 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. (25,101-103)

Reports of violence against child workers in various sectors, including in domestic work, have also been documented. (8,20,38,52-54) In 2018, a survey by an international organization found more than 400,000 children in domestic work in Bangladesh. Throughout Bangladesh, street children are coerced into criminality or forced to beg, and begging ringmasters sometimes maim children to increase earnings. (39) Some girls are forced into domestic service, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and are abused by their employers. (2,43,49,50) In 2020, at least eight girls working in domestic work were tortured, and three subsequently died. (55) Children are also forced, especially in border areas, to produce and transport drugs, especially “yaba” tablets (methamphetamine). (39)

Children throughout Bangladesh are sexually exploited through the country’s legal and illegal brothels, and child commercial sexual exploitation remained widespread. (39) 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. (39) 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. (39) In addition, children are trafficked to India where they are forced into labor or commercial sexual exploitation. (2) Research has found that Internet-based trafficking in persons increased during the pandemic, with traffickers adapting to technology by using popular apps to connect with victims. (51)

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 amended to reflect the revised policy. (31) 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. (2) To accommodate the larger number of students receiving compulsory education, Bangladesh is building new schools for students in higher grades. In the 2019–2020 fiscal year, Bangladesh completed 2,249 new schools, installed sanitation facilities in 850 schools, and installed tube wells in 1,175 schools. (31) While poverty was the most common reason children did not attend school, as 31 percent of families depend on child labor to survive, inadequate access to education remains a concern. (40)

In 2020, access to education in Bangladesh was severely inhibited due to the pandemic. Schools in Bangladesh closed in the spring and remained closed through the end of the reporting period. (2) While televised and online classes were made available to students in grades one through ten, the distance learning program did not adequately reach the most vulnerable children. In addition to pandemic-related closures, children in Bangladesh face barriers to education such as high costs for transportation, uniforms, and stationary. (2,56)

Over 400,000 Rohingya children are living in refugee camps in Bangladesh following the Burmese military's ethnic cleansing operations in 2017. Children residing in the camps are vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. (39,43,57,58) In 2020, the government began restricting humanitarian access, including education and protection programs, due to the pandemic. The government also erected barbed wire fences around refugee camps as a security measure. (59) As a result, refugee children are more vulnerable to exploitation and less able to access humanitarian assistance. (59) 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. (39) 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. (43,60) Rohingya boys typically work in construction, fishing, and shops. (39,50) Rohingya children are further sold into bonded labor in the fish drying industry by their parents, 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. (15,39)

Rohingya refugee children are not permitted to attend primary and secondary school in Bangladesh, including in private educational institutions, due to their lack of documentation. (40) The government has 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 have received scholarships. (31,40,59) Aid groups are barred from teaching the Bangla language, using Bangladesh's educational curriculum, or providing accredited education to refugees. (2,40) However, the Government of Bangladesh agreed to allow international partners to implement the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot, which began rolling out in 2020, but was put on hold due to the pandemic. The pilot, based on refugees' interests, would allow children to follow Burma's educational curriculum and learn the Burmese language with the goal of preparing for their return in the future. (31)




II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Bangladesh has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

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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	✓

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	Section 34 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (61)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (61)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Sections 39–42 of the Bangladesh Labor Act; Statutory Regulatory Order Number 65 (61,62)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 370 and 374 of the Penal Code; Sections 3, 6, and 9 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (63,64)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 3 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 6 of the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act (64,65)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 372–373 of the Penal Code; Sections 78 and 80 of the Children's Act; Sections 3 and 6 of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act; Section 8 of the Pornography Control Act (63,64,66,67)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Section 79 of the Children's Act (66)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	16.5	Army, Air Force, and Navy Regulations titles unknown (68-71)
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 (72)
Compulsory Education Age	No	10	Section 2 of the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act (73)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 17 of the Constitution (72)

* No conscription (74)

Minimum age protections in the Bangladesh Labor Act do not cover children working in the informal sector, in which an estimated 93 percent of child labor in Bangladesh occurs, including domestic work, street work, and work on small agricultural farms. (39,56,61,75) In addition, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children do not cover producing garments and drying fish; both are areas of work in which there is evidence that children work in unsafe and unhealthy environments for long periods of time. (1,8,17-21,25,45,62,101-103)

Bangladesh prohibits, but does not criminalize, the use of children in pornographic performances and in the production of drugs. (64,66) Sources indicate that the minimum age for recruitment in the Army is 17 and requires parental consent in addition to birth documents verifying age. (69) Army recruitment and training take 1 year, ensuring that recruits reach the age of 18 before entering regular duty. (70) However, the minimum age for recruitment in the Air Force is 16. (68) In addition, there are no laws that set the minimum age of voluntary recruitment by the state armed forces. Although the Constitution prohibits the formation of non-state armed groups, the legal framework does not criminally prohibit the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups. (72)

As mentioned earlier, though 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 yet enforceable. (31, 76) 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.

In 2020, the Ministry of Labor and Employment drafted an update to the hazardous work list, which if adopted, would add drying fish. (2)

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). However, gaps exist within the authority and operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE)	Enforces labor laws, including those relating to child labor and hazardous work. (77) DIFE is within the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE). (78)
Bangladesh Police	Enforce Penal Code provisions protecting children from forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (8) The Trafficking in Persons Monitoring Cell investigates cases of human trafficking and enforces the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act's anti-trafficking provisions. (79)
Bangladesh Labor Court	Prosecutes labor law violations, including those related to child labor, and imposes fines or sanctions against employers. (80) Research has found that fines are usually minimal and that perpetrators are usually not sentenced to jail for employing children. (31)
Child Protection Networks	Respond to violations against children, including child labor. Comprises 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. (81) Reporting indicates that Child Protection Networks, intended to be a referral mechanism between law enforcement and social services, are not operating due to a lack of funds. (82)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including a lack of authority of labor inspectors to assess penalties.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$4,940,920† (71)	\$5,488,943‡ (71)
Number of Labor Inspectors	302 (83)	308 (71)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (61)	Yes (61)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (8)	Yes (71)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (83)	Yes (71)

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	37,327† (71)	22,195‡ (71)
Number Conducted at Worksite	37,327† (71)	22,195‡ (71)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	2,110† (71)	3,531‡ (71)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (71)	27 (31)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	42 (83)	27 (31)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (83)	Yes (71)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (83)	Yes (71)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (61)	Yes (61)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (83)	Yes (71)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (8)	Yes (71)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (40)	No (71)

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

‡ Data are from July 1, 2020 to December 30, 2020.

DIFE conducts routine inspections in assigned areas based on a checklist that includes child labor. In response to complaints, DIFE also conducts unannounced visits. (2) However, DIFE is only authorized to conduct unannounced inspections outside the export processing zones and special economic zones. (2,56,104) The lack of routine unannounced inspections in all sectors allows employers to hide child laborers. (39) Sources report that garment factories producing for local markets are rarely inspected despite a high prevalence of child labor in the sector. (2) Some employers move children to night shifts to evade inspectors, as night inspections are only conducted until 8 p.m. (2,34) In addition, the penalty for a child labor law violation, which can only be imposed by a court after a lengthy process, and the low amount of penalties imposed are inadequate to act as deterrents. (2,56) Research has found that the maximum penalty for a child labor law violation is approximately \$59 (5,000 taka), which is insufficient to deter violations. (61,84)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Bangladesh's workforce, which includes more than 66 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Bangladesh would employ about 1,666 labor inspectors. (8,85-88) Sources indicate that DIFE is insufficiently funded and inspectors are reluctant to enforce labor laws because they believe factories will close and force the poor out of work. (2)

The government reported that, between July 2019 and December 2020, labor inspections led to the removal of 1,924 child laborers from 1,500 worksites. The government also reported that in 2020, 88 cases were filed against factory owners for child labor violations. (71) However, courts were closed for much of 2020, so the outcome of these cases and whether financial penalties were imposed are unknown. When discovered, children are not referred to schools or other social safety net programs, and research has found that it is possible they find work elsewhere. (31)

A previous reciprocal referral mechanism existed between labor authorities and social services. However, in 2020, research indicates that this reciprocal referral mechanism no longer exists. (71)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of criminal law enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including publicly releasing criminal law enforcement information.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (8)	Unknown
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (83)	Unknown
Number of Investigations	Unknown (8)	Unknown
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (8)	Unknown
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (8)	Unknown
Number of Convictions	Unknown (8)	Unknown
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (8)	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (40)	Yes (40)

In 2020, the government constituted and funded seven anti-trafficking in persons tribunals to handle human trafficking cases. The tribunals functioned virtually until August 2020 when in-person court hearings resumed. (51)

During the reporting period, some police accepted bribes to not check documentation that workers in registered brothels were older than age 18 and to procure falsified documents for workers, some as young as age 10. (39) In addition, the government did not provide specific information on criminal law enforcement efforts against child labor crimes for inclusion in this report. However, research has found a small number of cases during the reporting period in which police arrested brick kiln owners for alleged abuse of child workers. (85) The government also reported initiating prosecutions against 333 defendants for forced labor crimes and 184 defendants for alleged sex trafficking crimes in 2020, while continuing prosecutions against 340 defendants indicted in previous reporting periods. The government did not provide disaggregated information as to whether any of these cases involved child victims. (51)

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 operate effectively.

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, coordinate, 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. (86) In 2020, the Council visited multiple sectors, including shipbreaking (ship recycling), leather, and shrimp, to verify that child labor was absent, and educated employers about not using child labor. Findings about child labor-free sectors were to be announced in 2021. (31) Although meetings were held quarterly during the reporting period, research found that the Council is not operating effectively. (71)
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. (79) However, some of the district and sub-district level counter-trafficking committees struggled to operate effectively during lockdowns associated with the pandemic. (14,31)
Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration Task Force, MOHA	Coordinates efforts by the Governments of Bangladesh and India to rescue, recover, repatriate, and reintegrate victims 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. (14,60,87) However, the government lacks the capacity to track its citizens abroad, case management systems have not been developed, and the process to repatriate human trafficking victims is lengthy. (87,88) Research was unable to determine whether the Task Force was active during the reporting period.

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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 incorporating child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor (2012–2025)	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. (89) 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. (2) Research has found that MOLE is not effectively coordinating the implementation of this policy. (2,51) Research has also found that, at local levels, corruption and a lack of legal understanding were obstacles in implementation. (31)
Seventh Five Year Plan (2016–2020)	Includes elimination of the worst forms of child labor, with a focus on child domestic workers and other vulnerable groups. Sets out actions to be taken by the government, including forming a policy for children working in the formal sector; providing assistance to street children to protect them from exploitation, coordinating with stakeholders for effective rehabilitation, increasing working children's access to formal and non-formal learning, and providing livelihood support to poor households with children. (90) The Seventh Five Year Plan expired at the end of the reporting period and the government approved an Eighth Five Year Plan in December 2020. (2,31)
Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy	Sets the minimum age for domestic work at 14 years; all children under age 18 require parental permission to engage in domestic work. (91) However, the policy is not legally enforceable until the legal framework is amended to reflect the revised policy. (92) In 2020, MOLE held public consultations with domestic workers, NGOs, and journalists to gather information before deciding whether to amend existing legislation or draft new legislation. MOLE, including the Secretary, also held awareness-raising workshops about the policy across the country for officials and citizens. (31)
National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (2018–2022)	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. (93,94) Led by MOHA. In 2020, MOHA continued to meet and solicit advice from civil society organizations regarding trafficking issues. (51) However, during the reporting period, research has found that many MOHA officials with responsibilities for coordinating government trafficking efforts transitioned to new government positions, leading to a loss of institutional knowledge and government momentum in implementing the National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking. MOHA authorities claimed the National Authority—an institution that would serve as a national supervisory body on combating trafficking in persons—was set up in 2020, but sources reported the National Authority body was neither active, nor funded. (51) In addition, research found that due to the pandemic, MOHA was prevented from convening consultative workshops with the trafficking in persons civil society collective as in previous years. (51)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (76)

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. (76)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2020, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, issues exist in these social programs, including lack of adequate programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Elimination of Hazardous Child Labor, Phase IV (2018–2021)†	\$35 million Government of Bangladesh-funded, 3 year project implemented by MOLE. 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. (40,95,96) Phase IV of the Elimination of Hazardous Child Labor program was delayed. (2,31)

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (Cont.)

Program	Description
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 years, and empower them as agents of social change to combat risks and protection issues like child marriage, child labor, reproductive health, and adolescent nutrition. In 2020, directly supported 118,722 adolescents and reached another 200,000 through digital platforms. (31)
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). (31) In 2020, supported 2,000 street children in different urban locations and rescued 400 children from child labor through family reintegration and referral services, alternative care, and schooling using case management tools. Reached 20,000 children with psychosocial counselling and over 7,000 children with case management. (31)
Child Help Line 1098 [†]	Ministry of Social Welfare-implemented and UNICEF-supported 24-hour emergency hotline under the CSPB project. Connects children vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation with social protection services. (71,98) During the pandemic, call agents received four times more calls than in other years. In 2020, the help line supported 180,000 children through information on child protection issues, rescue, and referrals. (31)
School Feeding Program [†]	Provides fortified biscuits 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. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education program serves 3 million children at 15,700 schools in 29 districts. (31)
Child Labor Improvements in Bangladesh (CLIMB) (2017–2021)	USDOL-funded project implemented by Winrock International that aims to build the capacity of civil society to more effectively detect and combat forced child labor and other labor abuses in the dried fish sector in Bangladesh. In 2020, this project provided direct relief to hundreds of families in response to the impact of the pandemic. (97) Additional information is available on the USDOL website .

[†] 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. (51,99)

The Ministry of Labor and Employment is expected to conduct a national survey on child labor by 2021. (8)

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. (2) In addition, while Bangladesh has other hotlines beyond the Child Help Line 1098, including the 16357 DIFE hotline to report labor law violations, and the national 109 hotline to report violence against women and children, the number of complaints received through these hotlines related to child labor and the government responses to them are unknown. (71)

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).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Amend the national law to reflect the amended Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare policy.	2018 – 2020
	Extend the law's minimum age protections to children working in the informal sector, including in domestic work, on the streets, and in small-scale agriculture.	2009 – 2020
	Ensure that the types of hazardous work prohibited for children are comprehensive, in particular by including garment production and fish drying.	2016 – 2020
	Establish criminal prohibitions on the use of children for pornographic performances.	2015 – 2020
	Establish criminal prohibitions on the use of children in illicit activities, particularly in the production of drugs.	2015 – 2020
	Establish criminal prohibitions on the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2020
	Ensure that education is compulsory through eighth grade and is consistent with the minimum age for work.	2012 – 2020

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Ensure enforcement of citations and penalties for labor law violations, including reducing the length of time taken to assess penalties for child labor law violations and increasing penalties for child labor law violations to be an adequate deterrent.	2014 – 2020
	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2009 – 2020
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted unannounced and during overnight shifts.	2013 – 2020
	Create mechanisms for labor and criminal law enforcement to refer children involved in child labor to appropriate legal and social services.	2013 – 2020
	Ensure that law enforcement personnel are investigated, prosecuted, and convicted for falsifying age documents and accepting bribes to overlook age verification procedures, which contribute to offenses related to the worst forms of child labor, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2019 – 2020
	Publish information related to criminal law enforcement, including training, the number of investigations, violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions, and penalties imposed for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2012 – 2020
	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 – 2020
Coordination	Ensure that the National Child Labor Welfare Council is operating effectively.	2020
	Ensure that counter-trafficking committees are able to function, including with adequate funding, and that its efforts include monitoring and reporting.	2019 – 2020
	Effectively coordinate with the Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation, and Integration Task Force to ensure the timely repatriation of human trafficking victims.	2018 – 2020
	Ensure all coordinating bodies are able to carry out their intended mandates.	2020
Government Policies	Ensure that the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor is transparently implemented.	2020
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Education Policy.	2014 – 2020
	Ensure that there is adequate funding for full implementation of the National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking, especially for measures protecting victims.	2020
	Publish activities undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor to address child labor during the reporting period.	2020
Social Programs	Implement programs that rehabilitate street children engaged in child labor and enroll them in school.	2020
	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 – 2020
	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 – 2020
	Ensure that Phase IV of the Elimination of Hazardous Child Labor program is implemented.	2020
	Ensure that the Child Help Line and other help lines are operating effectively.	2020
	Publish activities undertaken to implement social programs to address child labor during the reporting period.	2020

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