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# CHILD LABOUR IN BANGLADESH: A PERSISTENT CHALLENGE

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the persistent issue of child labour in Bangladesh, emphasising the continued challenges encountered in its elimination. Despite extensive endeavours and global focus, the occurrence of child employment persists as a substantial and urgent problem. This study investigates the complex nature of the issue, analysing cultural, economic, and social elements that contribute to its ongoing existence. Furthermore, it explores the detrimental impact on the welfare of children and the measures implemented by the nation to address this problem. The paper highlights the necessity of ongoing international cooperation and focused initiatives to successfully tackle and eradicate child labour in Bangladesh.

## INTRODUCTION

Child labour encompasses the exploitation of children in any type of labour that robs them of their youth, hinders their access to formal education, and causes mental, physical, social, or moral suffering. This behaviour is seen as a breach of children's rights and can have enduring detrimental impacts on their welfare.

Child labour encompasses a range of activities, such as dangerous labour, labour under unsanitary conditions, and labour that hinders a child's education and general growth. It is frequently motivated by poverty, limited access to education, and the need for inexpensive and readily exploitable workforce. The International Employment Organisation (ILO) and many international accords and conventions have the objective of eradicating child employment and advancing the rights and welfare of children on a global scale. Despite extensive domestic and global initiatives aimed at tackling the issue, a significant proportion of children in Bangladesh are involved in several types of employment, sometimes in hazardous circumstances. This phenomenon is

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motivated by a confluence of socio-economic determinants, encompassing poverty, limited educational opportunities, and the need for inexpensive and readily exploitable workforce.

Child labour is prevalent in several areas in Bangladesh, including agriculture, the textile industry, domestic service, and other industries. A significant number of individuals experience prolonged working hours, perilous circumstances, and are denied their essential entitlement to education. The adverse effects on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being are a serious worry.

The mitigation of child labour in Bangladesh entails a synergistic approach that encompasses legal measures, educational efforts, and economic development programmes. NGOs and international agencies work together with the government to execute initiatives with the goal of eradicating child labour, enhancing educational accessibility, and establishing sustainable economic prospects for families.

However, the ongoing existence of child work in Bangladesh highlights the necessity for sustained watchfulness, regulatory modifications, and a thorough, collaborative strategy involving several parties. Addressing the underlying factors, promoting economic development, and guaranteeing rigorous enforcement of rules are essential measures in eliminating child labour and ensuring a brighter future for the country's children.

## **THE DEFINITION OF CHILD LABOUR**

The precise meaning of child work varies based on geographical location, cultural norms, organisational perspectives, and governmental regulations. In Western society, childhood is often depicted as a period of life that is free from responsibilities and where individuals lack the maturity to function as adults. Different groups have distinct definitions of child labour and its criteria. According to the Minimum Age Convention 138 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), children are permitted to engage in light work in non-hazardous conditions from the age of 12, and are eligible to join the workforce at the age of 15.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), child labour is defined as "employment that surpasses a specified threshold of hours, which varies based on the child's age and the nature of the work." The International Labour Organisation (ILO) classifies children in work into three categories: economically active children, child labour, and hazardous employment. Children can be classified as economically active if they engage in labour outside of school or their household for a minimum of one hour each week. Children who are under the age of 12 or engaged in

dangerous labour might be classified as practicing child labour. Children are classified as engaging in hazardous labour if they participate in tasks that have the potential to endanger their bodily, mental, or developmental well-being or safety.

Child work, as defined by UNICEF, encompasses any undertaking that impacts a child's well-being and educational opportunities. Child labour is defined as employment that results in the deprivation of childhood activities, as well as exploitation and maltreatment.

The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) provides a definition for employment and economically active children, stating that it includes both paid and unpaid work in both formal and non-formal sectors in both rural and urban locations. This definition does not include youngsters who work inside their own families.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, children between the ages of 5 and 14 who engage in labour, whether paid or unpaid, for at least one hour per week, are classified as child workers. Any economic activity undertaken by children over the age of 10 is classified as child work. This encompasses tasks performed both within and outside the confines of the domestic environment.

## **CHILD LABOUR LEGISLATION IN BANGLADESH**

### **THE EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN ACT 1938:**

This legislation permitted individuals aged 15 and over to be employed in the railway sector and in the transportation of commodities in port-related occupations. Furthermore, it permitted individuals between the ages of 15 and 17 to engage in nocturnal employment, which might extend until the morning, subject to specific conditions. These conditions include ensuring a continuous period of rest lasting 13 hours, working under the supervision of an individual who is at least 18 years old, or participating in an apprenticeship programme. The legislation explicitly banned the employment of children under the age of 12 in dangerous sectors, however, it failed to address the safeguards for children aged 12 to 18.

### **THE FACTORIES ACT 1965:**

This legislation effectively banned the employment of minors under the age of 14 and their presence in factory settings. A factory was defined as any establishment employing more than 10

individuals. Additionally, it enumerated some safeguards for youngsters from perilous machinery and activities. It forbade any work period over 5 hours between 7pm and 7am. Additionally, it specifies the maximum weight that workers of different genders and ages are allowed to lift.

### **SHOPS AND ESTABLISHMENT ACT 1965:**

This legislation established a clear definition of a store or establishment as a location that hires a minimum of 5 individuals. This legislation banned the employment of individuals below the age of 12 in all establishments. The regulation permitted individuals between the ages of 12 and 18 to be employed in businesses, with a restriction on the maximum duration of employment to 7 hours per day.

### **THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH, 1972:**

Article 34 of the Constitution of Bangladesh explicitly outlaws all types of coerced labour, ensuring the protection of fundamental rights for its citizens. According to Article 34, any kind of coerced labour is forbidden, and violating this rule is a crime that would be penalised as prescribed by law.

### **THE CHILDREN ACT 2013:**

The Children Act 2013 revoked the old Children Act 1974, which was not in line with international norms, especially the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. According to Section 4 of this Act, regardless of any other existing legislation, every individual below the age of 18 years will be considered as a kid. While there is no explicit prohibition on child labour, there are laws that ban and penalise some severe acts against children, such as the exploitation of minors (section 80).

### **PENAL CODE OF BANGLADESH 1860:**

Section 374 (1) of the legislation states that anybody who forces someone to work against their will, in violation of the law, can be penalised with imprisonment for up to one year, a fine, or both.

### **THE BANGLADESH LABOUR ACT 2006:**

According to Section 34, it is prohibited to engage or allow any kid to work in any occupation or company. As to section 2 (63) of the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, the term "child" refers to an

individual who is below the age of 14. Additionally, according to section 284, those who hire or allow children or adolescents to labour in violation of any provision of this Act will be subject to a fine of up to 5,000 (five thousand) taka.

## **THE PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ACT 2012:**

According to Section 9, if someone unlawfully coerces another person to work against their will, forces them to provide labour or services, holds them in debt bondage, or uses force, pressure, or threats to make them work or provide services, they will be considered to have committed a crime. The punishment for this offence is rigorous imprisonment for a period of 5 (five) to 12 (twelve) years, along with a fine of at least taka 50 (fifty) thousand.

## **CHILD LABOUR STATISTICS IN BANGLADESH**

The tentative report of the "National Child Labour Survey 2022" was published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics on 19 July 2023.<sup>2</sup> According to the 2022 study, Bangladesh has a total of 39.96 million children between the ages of five and 17. Of these children, 51.79% are males and 48.21% are girls. Out of the total population, 4.4 percent (1,776,097) are involved in child work, with 60.14 percent (1,068,212) of them engaging in hazardous child labour. In the 2013 study, it was discovered that there were 39.65 million children aged five to 17 years. Out of this group, 4.3 percent (1,698,894) were involved in child employment, with 75.35 percent (1,280,195) of them participating in hazardous child labour.

The proportion of children aged five to seventeen residing in rural areas (75.94 percent or 30,349,052) is comparable between urban and rural areas. Child labour is prevalent in both settings, with 4.4% in rural areas and 4.6% in urban areas, with hazardous child labour involving 2.7% in rural areas and 2.4% in urban areas. Regarding economic sectors, there were 1.27 million youngsters involved in the service industry, 1.19 million in the industrial sector, and 1.08 million in agriculture.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a small rise in the number of children working and involved in child labour, the implementation of government programmes has resulted in a

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<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics “National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) 2022.” Visit: [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-07-23-04-09-45cae43abbc0bb7f6d57cb2eb7e94857.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-07-23-04-09-45cae43abbc0bb7f6d57cb2eb7e94857.pdf)

considerable drop in the number of children engaging in dangerous forms of child exploitation. The Government of Bangladesh is actively striving to diminish child labour through the implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labour for the period of 2021-2025.

Since 1994, the International employment Organisation (ILO) has been actively engaged in the eradication of child employment in Bangladesh through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).<sup>3</sup> IPEC collaborated with employers' and workers' organisations, research institutions, academia, and civil society to execute several initiatives with the objective of eradicating child labour.<sup>4</sup> The ILO collaborated with an NGO to test a community-based Child Labour Monitoring System (CLMS) in a specific area of Thakurgaon. This approach involved identifying children engaged in child labour, facilitating their withdrawal from work and return to school, and connecting their families to local government social safety net programmes or work/business training opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

The UN Migration Agency (IOM) has identified young girls and boys being sold into forced labour as the most significant group of trafficking victims in Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camps.<sup>6</sup> Counter-trafficking experts from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) caution that, after over a year of the ongoing crisis resulting in a significant increase in the number of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar to nearly one million, an increasing number of desperate families are resorting to sending their young daughters into hazardous work environments due to the lack of alternative income sources in the camps. Recent data indicates that around two-thirds of the individuals who have received assistance from IOM in Cox's Bazar, after fleeing or being rescued from exploitation, are women and girls who were enticed into circumstances of forced labour. An additional 10 percent of the victims who were discovered were females, including women and girls, who experienced sexual exploitation.

Bangladesh ranks as the second biggest exporter of textile and garment items globally. Its ready-made garment sector is a major employer, providing jobs to millions of people and contributing

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<sup>3</sup> ILO "About the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)." Visit: <https://www.ilo.org/pec/programme/lang-en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20ILO%27s%20International%20Programme%20on,worldwide%20movement%20to%20combat%20child>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> UN Migration Agency (IOM) "Girls Sold into Forced Labour Largest Group of Trafficking Victims Identified by IOM in Bangladesh Refugee Camps", published 16 October 2018.

to 85 percent of the country's export revenues.<sup>7</sup> The industry suffered a severe blow from the COVID epidemic, resulting in the cancellation of contracts worth more than \$3 billion.<sup>8</sup> The Ready-made Garments (RMG) business in Bangladesh is supported by subcontracted orders from informal RMG companies. These manufacturers function without official supervision from the government or brands and were severely impacted by the outbreak. This situation placed Bangladeshi labourers in extremely difficult situations. Informal garment workers have a heightened risk of being subjected to forced labour and child labour as a result of elevated poverty levels, the fragmented structure of clothing supply chains, and inadequate implementation of legal safeguards for workers.<sup>9</sup>

According to recent research by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and UNICEF,<sup>10</sup> the global number of children engaged in child labour has surged to 160 million, marking an increase of 8.4 million children over the past four years. Additionally, the report highlights that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has put millions more children at risk of falling into child labour.

Moreover, the COVID epidemic compelled a substantial number of boys in Bangladesh to engage in laborious activities throughout the duration of the pandemic.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in 2019, UNICEF performed an independent investigation, revealing that 10% of male adolescents aged 12 to 14 in Bangladesh were engaged in full-time employment. Income disparities exist; however, empirical studies indicate that a significant proportion of male individuals below the age of 14 get a monthly income below \$40.<sup>12</sup>

On Wednesday, January 31, 2024, Justices Naima Haider and Kazi Jinat Haque of the High Court bench were directed to deposit a fixed amount of 30 lakh taka to 13-year-old Naim Hasan, who lost his right forearm while working at the workshop in Kishoreganj in 2020. His father, Anwar Hossen, is engaged in the shoe business. During the COVID-19 pandemic, to ease the financial pressure on the family, Naim worked in a workshop in Bhairab, Kishoreganj. During the work,

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<sup>7</sup> Bangladesh Bank Research Department RMG Quarterly reports: <https://www.bb.org.bd>

<sup>8</sup> Majumder, F.H. (January - February 2021) 'Covid-19 and the RMG Industry: The Pandemic Effect', The Apparel Story, <https://www.bgmea.com.bd>

<sup>9</sup> Global Fund to End Modern Slavery: "Forced Labor Among Informal Apparel Workers in Apparel Hubs of Bangladesh: A Prevalence Estimation Report". Visit: [https://www.gfems.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/22.12.14\\_Informal\\_Apparel-Prevalence-Brief.pdf](https://www.gfems.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/22.12.14_Informal_Apparel-Prevalence-Brief.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF "Child labour rises to 160 million – first increase in two decades." Visit: <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/child-labour-rises-160-million-first-increase-two-decades>

<sup>11</sup> Corinne Redfern and Ali Ahsan "Tens of Thousands of Boys in Bangladesh Were Forced into Work During the Pandemic." Visit: <https://time.com/6170432/bangladesh-child-labor-pandemic/>, Published, April 26, 2022

<sup>12</sup> Ibid



his right hand accidentally got caught in the machine. Eventually, his right hand had to be amputated through surgical intervention.<sup>13</sup>

On March 22, 2022, the Government of Bangladesh submitted the instrument of ratification for the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138),<sup>14</sup> to the International Labour Office. This action makes Bangladesh the 174th member state of the ILO to ratify this Convention. Convention No. 138 is a crucial international agreement that mandates participating countries to implement measures aimed at gradually eradicating child labour. It establishes a minimum age for employment, prohibiting anybody below this age from being employed or engaged in any activity, with the exception of light work and artistic performances.

Bangladesh, by doing so, reiterates its dedication to combat the problem of child labour and safeguard children from engaging in employment that is unsuitable for their age, endangers their health, morality, or psychological well-being, and hinders their access to school. Furthermore, through the ratification of the Convention, Bangladesh is progressing towards the attainment of decent work and the fulfilment of the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals at the national level, specifically targeting SDG goal 8.7.<sup>15</sup> This goal aims to completely eliminate child labour by 2025 and urges immediate measures to prohibit and eradicate its most severe forms.

## **THE KEY REASONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PREVALENCE OF CHILD LABOUR**

1. Economic hardship is a major factor compelling families to send their children to work. In impoverished households, children often become additional sources of income to help meet basic needs and support the family.
2. Limited access to quality education, including issues such as a shortage of schools, inadequate infrastructure, and high dropout rates, pushes children into the workforce. When educational opportunities are scarce or unaffordable, children are more likely to engage in labour at an early age.

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<sup>13</sup> Jamuna TV News, Visit: <https://jamuna.tv/news/514333>; Daily Sun, 'Pay Tk30 lakh compensation to child who lost forearm during work', visit: <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/732953>

<sup>14</sup> Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).

<sup>15</sup> ILO: "ILO Contributions to achieve Target 8.7." Visit: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/goal-8/target-8-7/lang-en/index.htm>

3. Bangladesh has a high population density, leading to intense competition for jobs. This can drive down wages and increase the likelihood of child labour as families may be willing to accept lower pay for the work performed by children.
4. A significant portion of Bangladesh's economy operates in the informal sector, where labor standards and regulations are often lax. Children may find employment in small-scale enterprises, agriculture, or as domestic help, where oversight is limited.
5. Societal norms and cultural practices can contribute to the acceptance of child labour. Traditional attitudes that view children as economic assets rather than individuals with rights may perpetuate the cycle of child labour.
6. Gender disparities in education and employment opportunities can disproportionately affect girls, leading to their engagement in domestic work or other forms of child labour.
7. Rural families migrating to urban areas in search of better opportunities may face challenges in adapting to the urban lifestyle, including finding suitable housing and employment. Children from these families may end up working to contribute to the household income.
8. Weak enforcement of existing child labour laws and regulations can contribute to the persistence of child labour. Limited resources and challenges in monitoring and enforcing laws create an environment where exploitation can thrive.

Addressing child labour in Bangladesh requires a comprehensive approach that includes economic development, improved educational opportunities, social awareness, and strengthened legal frameworks with effective enforcement mechanisms. International collaboration and support from governmental and non-governmental organisations are also essential to create lasting change.

## INITIATIVES AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

Various initiatives have been undertaken at national and international levels to combat child labour.<sup>16</sup> These initiatives aim to address the root causes, improve legislation and enforcement, raise awareness, and provide support for affected children and their families. Save the Children is one of the biggest international NGOs advancing and protecting rights of children in almost 120 countries around the world. Save the Children works in the most disadvantaged local communities

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<sup>16</sup> Central Monitoring Committee on Child Labour, Draft 'National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour (2020-2025)' visit: [https://mole.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mole.portal.gov.bd/project/6038e47e\\_5792\\_45f4\\_8fc0\\_958f113443f9/NPA.pdf](https://mole.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mole.portal.gov.bd/project/6038e47e_5792_45f4_8fc0_958f113443f9/NPA.pdf)

educating them about the rights of children and helping them understand that children are meant to be at school and not work.<sup>17</sup> Some notable initiatives include:

## **INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION (ILO) CONVENTIONS:**

The ILO has developed conventions, including Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age Convention) and Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention), which set international standards for the elimination of child labour. These conventions provide a framework for countries to develop and implement effective policies.

## **ILO'S INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR (IPEC):**

IPEC is a major initiative by the ILO that focuses specifically on eliminating child labour. It provides technical assistance, policy advice, and capacity-building support to countries, working in collaboration with governments, employers' and workers' organisations, and other stakeholders.

## **NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND ACTION PLANS:**

Many countries, including Bangladesh, have enacted or strengthened laws against child labour. National action plans outline strategies for the eradication of child labour, emphasising education, social protection, and poverty reduction.

## **EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) INITIATIVES:**

Programs such as the EFA initiative strive to improve access to quality education. By addressing barriers to education, such as affordability and infrastructure, these initiatives contribute to reducing the factors that drive children into the workforce.

## **THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) 1995:**

Signed by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), ILO, and UNICEF this initiative allowed children displaced and fired from the garment industry to

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<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Careers, 'Organizations Working to End Child Labor', visit: <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/organizations-end-child-labor/>

receive education, vocational training, and skills training. It also provided families with income to make up for their child's lack of work. This program is also called "The Placement of Children Workers in School Programs and the Elimination of Child Labor." The MOU has made an impact in reducing child labour in the garment industry in Bangladesh. Because of this program, more than 8,200 children received non-formal education after losing their jobs. Additionally, 680 children received vocational training.

## **THE BANGLADESH REHABILITATION ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE (BRAC):**

The Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee is a non-profit organisation founded in the mid-1970s in Bangladesh. BRAC, along with Grameen Bank, are the two largest lenders of microcredit in Bangladesh. Together they cover 59% of borrowers in the country. Microcredit has been shown to alleviate poverty but in small amounts. The effects of microcredit are not large enough to change the lives of an entire population. However, it has been shown to allow families in poverty to find a way out. BRAC has also been responsible for running schools for non-formal education that were put in place to teach children fired from jobs. These non-formal schools also gave children another option besides schooling. Along with the schooling program, families also received health care services and monthly cash stipends to make up for the wages their children were not bringing in by participating in the schooling program.

## **OTHER STRATEGIES**

In addition to the work of the government, BRAC, and ILO, there have been a number of contributions from international organisations and donors to help start strategies against child labour. These strategies include: taking children out of hazardous work environments and placing them in schooling or training programs, giving families stipends to compensate for loss in wages from a decrease in child labour, and raising awareness of the harmful effects of child labour.

Social protection measures, including cash transfer programs, aim to alleviate poverty and provide financial support to vulnerable families. By improving economic conditions, these programs can help reduce the reliance on child labour. Public awareness campaigns play a crucial role in changing societal attitudes toward child labour. These campaigns inform communities about the risks and consequences of child labour, promote education, and encourage reporting of violations.

Initiatives focused on strengthening the capacity of law enforcement agencies contribute to more effective monitoring and enforcement of child labour laws. Training programs for officials help them identify and address child labour violations. Collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society are essential for implementing grassroots initiatives. NGOs often work directly with affected communities, providing support for education, healthcare, and alternative livelihoods. Global initiatives involve collaboration between countries, international organisations, and NGOs to address cross-border issues related to child labour. Cooperation ensures a unified approach to eradicate child labour globally.

Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, and ongoing efforts are necessary to address the multifaceted nature of child labour. Sustainable progress requires a comprehensive approach that combines legislative measures, social programs, education, and economic development, along with a commitment from governments, businesses, and the international community.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment implemented the National Child Labour Elimination Policy (NCEP) 2010<sup>18</sup> as a notable measure to address the issue of child labour in the country. This policy prioritised a holistic strategy, including several domains like education, health, social consciousness, law, employment, prevention, integration, research, and monitoring. The main objective was to provide guidance and supervision for interventions intended to remove children from any type of child employment, including dangerous situations. The goal of this initiative was to safeguard children's rights and improve the welfare of those affected.

The primary objectives of NCEP 2010 were to guarantee equal educational opportunities for all children in order to prevent and eradicate child labor, address health concerns that affect child workers, and improve their general welfare. The program also prioritised increasing awareness about the detrimental effects of child labor, strengthening legislation and regulations to protect children, and establishing alternative job opportunities for families to reduce their reliance on child labor. Furthermore, essential elements included implementing strategies to deter children's involvement in the labor force at a young age, reintegrating former child workers into society by providing them with education and vocational training, and conducting thorough research and monitoring to ensure effective policy implementation.

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Labour and Employment, 'National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010'. Visit: [https://mole.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mole.portal.gov.bd/policies/7e663ccb\\_2413\\_4768\\_ba8d\\_ee99091661a4/National%20Child%20Labour%20Elimination%20Policy%202010%20\(English\)%2010.pdf](https://mole.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mole.portal.gov.bd/policies/7e663ccb_2413_4768_ba8d_ee99091661a4/National%20Child%20Labour%20Elimination%20Policy%202010%20(English)%2010.pdf)

The Ministry has proposed the National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour 2021–2025<sup>19</sup> as part of its efforts to revise and update its policy framework. The new plan delineates five major goals to enhance endeavours against child labour. The primary goal is to reduce child labor susceptibility by implementing poverty alleviation programs, social safety systems, and community-based interventions. The second purpose aims to identify and remove children from dangerous and very exploitative types of child employment while also ensuring their rehabilitation and successful reintegration through educational and vocational training initiatives.

The third goal is to enhance the ability to safeguard children in the workplace. This entails bolstering the capabilities of organisations and individuals involved in safeguarding children, which includes fortifying inspection and enforcement processes and delivering training to employers and workers on the rights of children. The fourth aim focuses on promoting partnerships and involvement across several sectors, including government, civil society, the corporate sector, and international organisations, to establish a unified and comprehensive strategy for eradicating child labour.

The final goal is to oversee and assess the implementation of the NPA for 2021–2025. This entails developing strong monitoring and evaluation methods to evaluate the strategy's execution and effects, guaranteeing responsibility, and ensuring ongoing improvement in efforts to eradicate child labour.

The transition from NCEP 2010 to NPA 2021–2025 exemplifies a gradual and active strategy for tackling child labour. The Ministry aims to make significant progress in eradicating child labour and promoting the rights and well-being of children by prioritising vulnerability reduction, removing children from harmful labour, improving workplace protection, fostering partnerships, and implementing thorough monitoring and evaluation.

## **SEVERAL CHALLENGES CONTRIBUTE TO THE ONGOING PREVALENCE OF CHILD LABOUR**

While various initiatives have been implemented to combat child labour in Bangladesh, the issue persists, indicating that the existing efforts may not be sufficient to fully eliminate this problem.

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<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Labour and Employment, 'National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour 2021–2025'. Visit: [https://dife.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dife.portal.gov.bd/publications/89b99da2\\_9025\\_4cdf\\_9b66\\_3116bde508fe/2023-02-14-06-08-c0442a5d5c1243326e924babf26c6686.pdf](https://dife.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dife.portal.gov.bd/publications/89b99da2_9025_4cdf_9b66_3116bde508fe/2023-02-14-06-08-c0442a5d5c1243326e924babf26c6686.pdf)

Several challenges contribute to the ongoing prevalence of child labour, and addressing them requires a more comprehensive and sustained approach. Here are some factors to consider:

- A) Weak implementation and enforcement of existing laws and regulations undermine the effectiveness of initiatives. Adequate resources, training, and monitoring are crucial to ensure that laws are followed and violations are addressed.
- B) The economic conditions that drive families to rely on child labour may require more targeted interventions. Poverty alleviation programs, social safety nets, and economic development initiatives can help address the root causes of child labour.
- C) Despite efforts to improve access to education, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and cultural barriers persist. Strengthening the education system and addressing these challenges are essential for keeping children in school.
- D) Deep-seated cultural norms and societal attitudes regarding the economic role of children may require long-term awareness and advocacy efforts to shift perspectives. Community engagement is crucial for fostering a collective commitment to ending child labour.
- E) Bangladesh's role in global supply chains, particularly in industries like textiles and garments, poses challenges. Collaborative efforts with international brands and companies are needed to ensure ethical sourcing practices and eliminate child labour from supply chains.
- F) The prevalence of child labour in the informal economy calls for strategies to regulate and monitor these sectors effectively. This requires cooperation between government agencies, employers, and workers in both formal and informal sectors.
- G) Combating child labour necessitates a holistic approach that addresses multiple factors simultaneously. Initiatives focusing on education, economic development, social protection, and legal enforcement must work in tandem for sustainable impact.
- H) Improving the accuracy and comprehensiveness of data on child labour is crucial for targeted interventions. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and conducting regular surveys can provide a clearer understanding of the extent and nature of the issue.
- I) Enhanced collaboration with international organisations, NGOs, and neighbouring countries is essential for a coordinated response. Cross-border issues may require joint efforts to prevent child trafficking and exploitation.
- J) Regular assessment and adjustment of strategies based on the evolving nature of child labour are essential. Flexibility and adaptability in policies and programs can ensure their relevance and effectiveness over time.

While the initiatives against child labour in Bangladesh represent positive steps, addressing this complex issue requires continuous evaluation, adaptation, and collaboration among various stakeholders. A concerted effort that combines legal measures, economic development, educational interventions, and cultural change is essential to create a lasting impact on eradicating child labour in the country.

## **POSSIBLE STEPS MIGHT REDUCE CHILD LABOUR IN BANGLADESH**

Eliminating or significantly reducing child labour in Bangladesh requires a multifaceted and sustained approach that addresses the root causes and provides comprehensive solutions. Here are several strategies that can contribute to the abolition or reduction of child labour in Bangladesh:

- I) Enhance existing laws related to child labour, ensuring they are in line with international standards. Strengthen enforcement mechanisms, increase penalties for violations, and ensure that all sectors, including the informal economy, are covered.
- II) Invest in education infrastructure, including the construction of schools, hiring qualified teachers, and providing necessary resources. Eliminate barriers to education, such as fees and transportation costs, to make education accessible to all children.
- III) Implement targeted poverty alleviation programs that provide financial assistance, vocational training, and employment opportunities for families living in poverty. Addressing the root causes of child labour can help families break the cycle of exploitation.
- IV) Introduce and expand social protection programs that provide financial support to vulnerable families. Cash transfer programs, for example, can help alleviate immediate economic pressures, reducing the need for children to work.
- V) Conduct widespread awareness campaigns to educate communities about the detrimental effects of child labour. Challenge cultural norms that perpetuate the acceptance of child labour and promote a collective commitment to children's rights and education.
- VI) Provide training and resources for law enforcement agencies to enhance their capacity to identify and address child labour violations. Strengthen collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and community leaders to improve monitoring and reporting.
- VII) Work collaboratively with international organisations, NGOs, and neighbouring countries to address cross-border issues related to child trafficking and exploitation. Shared initiatives and best practices can contribute to a more comprehensive and effective response.



- VIII) Encourage responsible business practices among companies operating in Bangladesh. Ensure that international brands and companies adhere to ethical sourcing practices and conduct regular audits to eliminate child labour from their supply chains.
- IX) Empower local communities to take ownership of the issue by involving them in the development and implementation of solutions. Community-based programs that focus on education, skill development, and alternative livelihoods can be particularly effective.
- X) Strengthen data collection mechanisms to monitor the prevalence and nature of child labour. Regular surveys and assessments can inform policy adjustments and targeted interventions.
- XI) Ensure that child rights and protection are integral components of broader development policies. This includes integrating child-focused indicators into national development plans and strategies.
- XII) Provide targeted support for vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced populations and migrant families. Addressing their specific challenges, including limited access to education and economic opportunities, can prevent the exploitation of children.
- XIII) Implement alternative learning programs for children who have already entered the workforce. These programs should be designed to help them catch up on education while offering skills training for future employment.
- XIV) Encourage research on the causes and consequences of child labour in Bangladesh. Innovation in policy design and implementation, as well as the use of technology, can contribute to more effective solutions.

Creating lasting change in the fight against child labour in Bangladesh requires a coordinated effort from government agencies, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and the international community. By addressing the various dimensions of the issue, these strategies can work together to create an environment where children are protected, educated, and provided with the opportunities they need to thrive.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the ban on child labor in both Bangladeshi law and international law, it persists worldwide. Dangerous places, such as industrial or construction areas, often target young children for work. International organisations such as the ILO, UNICEF, and IPEC have taken a number of practical steps to prevent child labour with the help of local governments, but still, it is not possible to prevent child labour in third-world countries, particularly in Bangladesh. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh prohibits and punishes forced labour. Also, like the Employment

of Children Act 1938, the Factories Act 1965, and the Children Act 2013, the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 imposed age restrictions on children to allow particular work.

However, it appears that the government does not strictly enforce these laws to reduce child labour in practice. Bangladesh must adopt an in-depth plan that addresses a number of issues in order to reduce child labour. Essential approaches include improving child labor legislation and implementation, allocating resources to improve educational facilities, and removing obstacles such as fees. Focusing on poverty reduction initiatives and social welfare schemes can alleviate household financial burdens. It is crucial to increase public knowledge about the negative impacts of child labour, strengthen the ability to enforce laws, and promote ethical business conduct. Effective monitoring and policy modifications need international cooperation, community engagement, and thorough data collection. It is critical to provide assistance to disadvantaged populations, as well as alternative education and vocational training for working children. Additionally, it is crucial to promote research and innovation to inform policies and actions.