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8.6.3. Victims of trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings is a prevalent issue both for Bangladeshis working abroad, and inside Bangladesh.1184 Inside Bangladesh, women and girls have been trafficked for sexual exploitation,1185 but women and children have also been trafficked overseas for the purposes of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.1186 Some of the groups vulnerable to sex trafficking included victims of child marriage and gender-based violence, as reported by USDOS. 1187

In 2025, UNODC reported on socio-economic hardships, lack of employment opportunities, and demand for cheap labour in countries neighbouring Bangladesh and beyond, being factors contributing to trafficking and smuggling of Bangladeshis.1188

Bangladesh is among countries with the highest prevalence of 'modern slavery'1189 within Asia and the Pacific (ranking 9 out of 27 countries) and ranks 56 out of 160 countries globally as per the 2023 Global Slavery Index.1190According to USDOS the Bangladeshi government identified 1 210 trafficking victims in 2023, including 210 sex trafficking victims, 795 forced labour victims, and 205 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking.1191

In 2022 Eurostat data, Bangladesh was ranked as the fourth non-EU country of origin of trafficking victims, with a total of 227 registered victims.1192 Trafficking victims from Bangladesh were mainly male and subjected to labour exploitation.1193 The 2023 Eurostat data showed a decrease in trafficked victims from Bangladesh, with 203 registered cases.1194

According to IOM, in 2024, Bangladesh was the 7th most-represented nationality in Libya with 3 % of migrants being Bangladeshis. The majority were single men between 20 and 39 years old, and working mainly as construction workers, cleaners or waiters.1195 In March 2025, Libyan authorities arrested two Bangladeshi nationals and one Libyan in connection with a human trafficking network operating between Libya and Bangladesh.1196 In March another ringleader of a trafficking network was arrested in Bangladesh. The network had been luring Bangladeshi nationals with promises of going to Italy but captured and trafficked them to Libya.1197 In Libya, victims of trafficking were tortured and held captive for ransom.1198

○ (a) Societal treatment of trafficked victims upon return

According to the international development organisation BRAC and reports by the Daily Star in May 2025, more than 470 000 Bangladeshi migrant workers have returned home in the past six years, including 67 199 women who were subjected to sexual and physical abuse. Upon return to their communities, women face mental health challenges such as trauma, depression, and social isolation. In addition, women migrant returnees are often indebted and experience difficulty in finding employment. 1205

The NGO Justice and Care reported on women being forced into prostitution facing judgement,1206 shame and fear when re-entering society.1207 A study from 2022, also found that many returning women who had been victims of trafficking in human beings experienced stigmatisation and blame from their families and community members, resulting in reduced self-esteem, confidence, and limited opportunities for successful reintegration.1208

According to a representative of BRAC Migration Program, returnee migrants ‘usually bring with them a celebrating story of achievement around which a new identity is built’ and ‘returnees are constantly evaluated by what s/he have achieved abroad’, and this is why social networks tend to be unwilling to provide economic assistance to ‘unsuccessful returnees’.1209 Meanwhile many returnees return home indebted.1210 More information is available in section 8.6.2. Illegal money lending.

□ (b) Legislation and access to justice and legal assistance

In Bangladesh, there are laws to combat trafficking in human beings and specialised tribunals, while the police cooperate with INTERPOL on trafficking cases.1205 Bangladesh has inter alia ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United

Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,1206 and has specialised national legislation on trafficking under the 2012 Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act.1207 The former government, moreover, implemented five year action plans to combat trafficking in human beings.1208 The 2023-2025 action plan identified five objectives, including prevention of trafficking in human beings, holistic protection of trafficking victims, prosecution of traffickers, partnership and transnational legal assistance, and monitoring and evaluation.1209 Moreover, the former government amended its overseas migrant workers policy to bring recruitment agents under greater oversight and to increase accountability,1210 and launched the guideline for a National Referral Mechanism to Protect and Assist Victims of Human Trafficking in February 2024.1211 Sources reported on weak enforcement of existing anti-human trafficking laws,1212 including lack of training for relevant stakeholders, low public awareness and understanding of the laws and court processes, lack of financial means to initiate and continue legal proceedings, insufficient protection and care for victims and witnesses, and complex and prolonged procedures of trials, as reported by Arafat Reza and Shahariar Sadat, scholars of BRAC University.1213

In September 2023, the former government adopted victim identification guidelines for front-line officials.1214 Attitudes among inter alia police officers preventing victims from reporting crime, social stigma around sexual abuse1215 and corruption have posed challenges in combating trafficking in human beings.1216 The former government set up specialised Anti-Human Trafficking Tribunals in seven districts.1217 The tribunals are comprised of judges and specialised prosecutors assigned to hear cases of trafficking in human beings.1218 Although police, prosecutors and judges undergo anti-trafficking training,1219 there have been calls for further training efforts. 1220 There was inter alia a reported lack of expertise in trafficking in human beings. 1221

More information on state response to trafficking in human beings under the former government is available in the 2024 EUAA COI Report: Bangladesh Country Focus.

The interim government, through its Home Affairs Adviser, reaffirmed publicly in April 2025 Bangladesh's 'strong commitment to combatting human trafficking.' Furthermore, several recent initiatives were highlighted, including 'a national action plan to combat human trafficking, a web-based national referral mechanism for victim support, and the establishment of dedicated tribunals to expedite the prosecution of trafficking cases.' 1222 In May 2025, Bangladesh and Italy signed a memorandum of understanding to combat irregular migration and promote 'safe and legal migration pathways for workers.' Bangladesh and Italy both pledged to combat trafficking in human beings 1223 and agreed to establish a joint committee for cooperation in preventing and

combating transitional organised crime.1224

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