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5.3. Treatment of detained individuals

As reported in the 2024 EUAA COI Report: Bangladesh – Country Focus, Bangladesh had not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) under the former government.387 Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment were however prohibited by the constitution and other laws.388 Sources however described torture and other forms of abuse as widespread practice within law enforcement, including to extract forced confessions389 and to humiliate victims and instill fear.390 The interim government had not ratified the OPCAT as of June 2025.391

According to Dhaka Tribune, reporting on 7 April 2025, detainees face ‘extreme malnutrition’, and ‘insufficient medical treatment’. With reference to accounts of ‘current detainees’ the same source reported on electricity torture being applied ‘along with brutal physical abuse and coerced admission of guilt’.392 In the period September 2024–May 2025, ASK recorded 50 custodial deaths, including 34 of prisoners under trail and 16 of convicted prisoners.393 In contrast, in January–August 2024, the same source reported on 52 custodial deaths, 30 of prisoners under trail and 22 of convicted prisoners.394 According to Odhikar, 83 individuals died in prison in 2024, of which 20 deaths occurred under the interim government.395

To improve detention conditions and treatment of detainees, the Prisons Directorate of Bangladesh and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) held several workshops for superintendents, jailers and deputy jailers from across Bangladesh in January 2025.396 Moreover, in February 2025, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) organised a specialised training for 30 participants including judges, prison officials, police officers, and legal professionals to address prison overcrowding and promoting non-custodial measures to incarceration.397

Overcrowding is prevalent in prisons across the country, ‘leading to deplorable living conditions and security risks’ as reported by the Daily Star.398 As of October 2024, official data, as presented by World Prison Brief, indicated that the prison population stood at 53 831 inmates, while the prison capacity was at 42 877, corresponding to a 125.5 % occupancy level (based on official capacity).399 According to Dhaka Tribune this constituted a 30 % drop in the prison population compared to 2023.400 In March 2025, other sources reported that the number of inmates stood at 70 065.401 Pre-trial detainees accounted for 75.6 % of prison population in 2022 according to official data presented by World Prison Brief.402 As reported by Dhaka

Tribune, ‘the normal length of cases ranges from 5 to 10 years while undertrial prisoners generally remain incarcerated longer than their later awarded sentences.’ The same source claimed that there were 4.2 million pending cases in 2023.403 Further updated information on pre-trail detainees and pending cases could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

In December 2024, prison authorities reported that at least 2 200 inmates had fled after breaking out of jails before and after the fall of the former government on 5 August 2024. As of 10 March 2025, 700 escaped prisoners were reportedly still in hiding while 1 500 already surrendered or were arrested by the law enforcement agencies.404

The government offers legal aid services and helpline for poor and underprivileged litigants405 and between 2009 and February 2025, the National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO) provided legal aid funded by the government to 124 808 prisoners.406 Dhaka Tribune reported that, according to Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), an organisation based in Bangladesh and providing free legal services, ‘[…] 68% of families who support an arrestee need to spend more than Tk100,000 [about EUR 700] on legal costs thus driving them into severe financial problems.’407

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