Please cite as: EUAA, '8.2.1. General information' in *COI Report - Bangladesh: Country Focus*, August 2025.

8.2.1. General information

Bangladesh's constitution prescribes a secular state and designates Islam as state religion. The state is to ensure equal status and rights of other religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, and guarantees all citizens the constitutional right to profess, practice or propagate any religion.783 Bangladesh has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination784 and constitutionally protects 'the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects, and communities'. The constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, or place of birth.785

A great majority of Bangladesh's population belongs to the Bengali ethno-linguistic group, and most are Sunni Muslims.786 According to the most recent census from 2022, only 1 % of the population belonged to an ethnic minority.787 Most ethnic minorities thereto belong to a religious minority, and they are distinct from the Bengali majority as regards physical features, language, and culture.788 There are 50 groups that are recognised as ethnic minorities under the constitution.789 Many of these identify themselves as 'indigenous',790 but specific indigenous rights are not recognised by the state.791 Religious minorities include Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, animists,792 Shia Muslims, and Ahmaddiyya.793

Under the former government, indigenous communities faced censorship,794 but since its fall media has reportedly started to use the local term for indigenous communities (adivasi) more frequently, according to IWGIA.795 In contrast, a human rights activists reporting for the Daily Star stated that some politicians have become more hesitant of using the term.796 The inclusion of the term on a new school textbook cover, for instance, triggered protests in Dhaka 797 from a group perceiving the reference to adivasi as undermining Bangladesh's territorial integrity.798 In response, the term was removed,799 which triggered protests from indigenous students in Dhaka. On 15 January 2025, protesting indigenous students were attacked by a group opposing the term, who were armed with wooden sticks.800 The next day, indigenous students protested again, demanding justice after the attack, but police dispersed them with water cannons, sound grenades, and batons.801

Minorities have been underrepresented in policymaking in general,802 but particularly in areas relating to 'cultural preservation, land rights, and overall social justice', according to IWGIA.803 They are also underrepresented in state authorities,804 as well as in the reform commissions.

805

Many minorities live in remote and inaccessible areas,806 mainly in the CHT807 and in northern and southern plainlands.808 The lack of infrastructure in remote areas pose challenges in accessing public services,809 and indigenous children generally ‘face systemic barriers to education’ due to poverty, language, and limited opportunities and awareness.810 According to MRG, people with disabilities from minority and indigenous communities face intersecting discrimination, due to their minority status and their disability. They face discrimination from the wider society and within their communities. In particular, minority and indigenous women and girls with disabilities fall ‘far behind’.811

Indigenous people have been facing discrimination for a long period of time.812 MRG reported that ‘discrimination and marginalisation pervade daily life’ of minorities,813 and that indigenous people face a general context of stigmatisation, discrimination and violence.814 According to IWGIA, indigenous people are one of Bangladesh’s most vulnerable and marginalised communities.815 Access to land has been a key issue for indigenous people, who face conflicts with Bengali settlers, as well as discrimination from state and local administrations.816

Local indigenous parties, as reported by IWGIA, recorded 200 human rights violations in the CHT in 2024, including 6 000 indigenous people facing various types of violations, including 2 134 acres of indigenous land being grabbed by companies, settlers, and influential persons. They further reported on at least 21 persons being killed by security forces, settlers, land grabbers and in inter-party violence between indigenous political groups.817 This information could not be corroborated with other sources. According to IWGIA, violence against indigenous women and girls remained a ‘persistent concern’ in the plains and in the CHT. The state has responded to cases inconsistently, which ‘suggest discriminatory treatment’, according to the source. In five recorded incidents the police filed a case, but in 12 other cases they either refrained from taking action, or the response was ‘inadequate’ or delayed.818

Some groups face caste-based discrimination and practices of ‘untouchability’,819 including Dalits.820 Dalits face challenges in accessing education, health, political, social and cultural rights, employment and economic opportunities.821 Limited opportunities for social mobility822 often restrict them to perform ‘dirty, dangerous and demeaning work’, for example cleaning out sewers and septic tanks without protective gear.823 Most Dalits live in segregated informal settlements, and experience social prohibitions of renting824 or building houses outside these areas,825 as well as intermingling with people from upper-caste Hindus and Muslims.826

Biharis are an Urdu-speaking Muslim minority, facing hostility and persistent discrimination for their perceived alliance with East Pakistan during the 1971 independence war. Biharis became stateless after the country’s independence and remained so until 2008 when they were granted

a right to citizenship by the Supreme court.827 Many Biharis, however, still face barriers in accessing their rights and privileges as citizens, as most live in extreme poverty828 and in overcrowded slum-like camps set up for them after the independence829 in the outskirts of Dhaka.830 In 2018, MRG reported that there were 300 000 Biharis in Bangladesh.831

As regards religious freedom, those with ‘nonconformist views can face societal opprobrium and attacks from hardline Islamist groups’ as reported by Freedom House.832 Odihkar reported on attacks and vandalism against ‘individuals with differing religious views’ taking place in various parts of the country in January–March 2025.833 UN OHCHR reported on Ahmadiyya Muslims experiencing ‘hostility and discrimination by some adhering to other Islamic schools of belief’.
834

- 783

  Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, url, art. 8 (1), 41

- 784

  United Nations Treaty Collection, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1966, url

- 785

  Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, url, art. 23 (A), 28 (1)

- 786

  MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, url

- 787

  Bangladesh, BBS, Population & Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, August 2022, url, p. vii

- 788

  IRI, The Challenges Facing Plainland Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh: Land, Dignity And Inclusion, 2020, url, p. 4

- 789

  MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, url; IWGIA, Indigenous World 2019: Bangladesh, 24 April 2019, url

- 790

Sweden, UD, Bangladesh – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2021, 22 June 2022, url, p. 14

- 791

  IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2025: Bangladesh, 25 April 2025, url

- 792

  IRI, The Challenges Facing Plainland Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh: Land, Dignity And Inclusion, 2020, url, p. 4

- 793

  MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, url

- 794

  Netra News, Censoring the indigenous, 1 August 2022, url; Al Jazeera, Bangladesh and the indigenous people, 10 August 2022, url

- 795

  IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2025: Bangladesh, 25 April 2025, url

- 796

  Daily Star (The), How are Indigenous people faring in the new Bangladesh?, 26 February 2025, url

- 797

  IWGIA, A letter to Chief Adviser, Interim Government of Bangladesh to take urgent action on violent attacks on Indigenous students, 31 January 2025, url

- 798

  Front Line Defenders, Bangladesh: Interim government must ensure accountability for violence against peaceful protesters advocating for Indigenous people’s rights, 27 January 2025, url

- 799

  Daily Star (The), NCTB removes 'Adivasi' graffiti from textbook after protests, 13 January 2025, url

- 800

  Daily Star (The), Attack on adivasis: Most attackers at large despite video proof, 22 January 2025, url; Front Line Defenders, Bangladesh: Interim government must ensure accountability for violence against peaceful protesters advocating for Indigenous people’s

rights, 27 January 2025, url

- 801

  Front Line Defenders, Bangladesh: Interim government must ensure accountability for violence against peaceful protesters advocating for Indigenous people's rights, 27 January 2025, url; Daily Star (The), 7 hurt as cops foil march for adivasis, 17 January 2025, url; Business Standard (The), Police use sound grenades, water cannon to disperse march protesting attack on ethnic minority students, 16 January 2025, url

- 802

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Bangladesh, 2025, url

- 803

  IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2025: Bangladesh, 25 April 2025, url

- 804

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Bangladesh, 2025, url; Netra News, Bangladeshi politics is failing Bangladesh's Hindus, 18 December 2024, url

- 805

  IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2025: Bangladesh, 25 April 2025, url

- 806

  AFP, Ethnic Minorities Missing From Census, Say Bangladesh Activists, 11 August 2022, url; Daily Star (The), Ethnic population in 2022 census: Real picture not reflected, 9 August 2022, url

- 807

  Bangladesh, BBS, Population & Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, August 2022, url, pp. 10, 31

- 808

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 18

- 809

  Daily Star (The), How are Indigenous people faring in the new Bangladesh?, 26 February 2025, url; Rasul, G. and Gurung, P., Unlocking the potentials of sustainable livelihoods in Chattogram Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, Nature-Based Solutions, June 2024, url

- 810

Daily Star (The), How are Indigenous people faring in the new Bangladesh?, 26 February 2025, url

- 811

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 14

- 812

  Daily Star (The), How are Indigenous people faring in the new Bangladesh?, 26 February 2025, url; IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2025: Bangladesh, 25 April 2025, url

- 813

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 14

- 814

  MRG, Bangladesh: MRG condemns renewed violence and hate speech against indigenous peoples, 24 September 2024, url

- 815

  IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2025: Bangladesh, 25 April 2025, url

- 816

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 18

- 817

  IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2025: Bangladesh, 25 April 2025, url

- 818

  IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2025: Bangladesh, 25 April 2025, url

- 819

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, pp. 17–18; Daily Star (The), Kaiputra: The untold story of a discriminated and excluded community, 1 June 2024, url

- 820

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, pp. 17–18; GFOD, The Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh: Country Report 2023, 26 February 2024, url, p. 8

- 821

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, pp. 17–18

- 822

  GFOD, The Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh: Country Report 2023, 26 February 2024, url, p. 10

- 823

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, pp. 17–18

- 824

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 18; GFOD, The Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh: Country Report 2023, 26 February 2024, url, pp. 21, 24

- 825

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 18

- 826

  GFOD, The Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh: Country Report 2023, 26 February 2024, url, p. 27

- 827

  Guardian (The), ‘We have a right to live in dignity’: Biharis in Bangladesh fight for equality – and jobs, 9 May 2023, url; MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 18

- 828

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 18

- 829

  MRG, Exploring the status of persons with disabilities among minority and indigenous communities in Bangladesh, 28 January 2025, url, p. 18; IRI, Bangladesh: Urdu-speaking “Biharis” Seek Recognition, Respect and Rights, 2020, url, p. 3

- 830

  MRG, Biharis in Bangladesh, July 2018, url

- 831

  MRG, Biharis in Bangladesh, July 2018, url

- 832

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Bangladesh, 2025, url

- 833

  Odhikar, Quarterly Human Rights Report, January–March 2025, 14 May 2025, url, paras. 55–56

- 834

  UN OHCHR, Human Rights Violations and Abuses Related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh, 12 February 2025, url, para. 237

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu