

Bangladesh – Country Focus

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Country of Origin Information Report

July 2024



Manuscript completed in June 2024

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

PDF ISBN 978-92-9410-278-2 doi: 978-92-9410-278-2 BZ-05-24-479-EN-N

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Cite as: EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report – Bangladesh: Country Focus, July 2024, [url](#)

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Acknowledgements

This report was written by the Country of Origin Information (COI) sector of the EUAA.

The following national asylum and migration departments reviewed this report:

- France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division (DIDR)
- Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Country Analysis
- Hungary, National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing
- Norway, Landinfo, the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre
- The Netherlands, Ministry of Justice and Security, Office for Country Information and Language Analysis (OCILA).

The review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of the EUAA.





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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care within a limited timeframe. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EUAA nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The reference period this report ends on 15 May 2024. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).



Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
AL	Awami League
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CED	Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CLO	Certificate of Land Ownership
CSA	Cyber Security Act
CTG	Caretaker government
DSA	Digital Security Act
<i>Ejahar</i>	Depiction of a criminal event
FIR	First information report
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IGP	Inspector General Police
MP	Member of parliament



Term	Definition
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCCs	One-stop Crisis Centres
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
<i>Shalish</i>	An informal grassroots justice system, typically consisting of village elders or other powerful individuals convening to resolve disputes
<i>Taka</i>	Local currency
ToR	Terms of reference
VSCs	Victim Support Centres
<i>Zila</i>	District



Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information in view of the assessment of international protection, including refugee status and subsidiary protection. This report intends to capture a selection of the main issues relevant to international protection in the assessment of claims from Bangladeshi nationals.

The reference period of this report is 1 January 2022–15 May 2024. Events taking place after the reference period have not been included.

Methodology

This report was drafted by the EUAA and reviewed by the EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries,¹ as mentioned in the Acknowledgements section.

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2023)² and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2023).³

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by the EUAA, based on identified information needs, and external consultations with the EUAA Strategic Network on COI. The ToR are available in [Annex 2: Terms of Reference](#).

Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources, as well as interviews with experts until 15 May 2024. Some limited additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 18 June 2024.

Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the ToR were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 18 June 2024. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

¹ EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland

² EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, February 2023, [url](#)

³ EUAA, EUAA Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, February 2023, [url](#)



Sources

In accordance with EUAA COI Report Methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include: COI reports by governments; information from civil society, advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations, and NGOs; international and NGO human rights reports; reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations (UN); local and regionally-based media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Bangladesh. The content also relies on interviews and email contacts with oral sources, including Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), anonymous expert sources, and two university professors specialising on civil society in Bangladesh. All sources are outlined in [Annex 1: Bibliography](#).

Structure and use of the report

The first two chapters of this report offer general background information on Bangladesh, aiming to provide contextual understanding on the country's geography and demography, as well as the state structure and general human rights issues. This is followed by a chapter outlining the functionality of the justice and security sector, and its capacity to handle certain types of crime – including trafficking in human beings, illegal money lending, violence against women, and land disputes. These subchapters should be read in conjunction with the chapters covering the general capacity and integrity of the police, the prosecution service and the courts. The chapter on the justice and security sector also contains information on informal and semi-informal mechanisms for conflict-resolution. The final chapter covers the situation of select groups and profiles of interest for this report.



Maps



Map 1. Bangladesh⁴

⁴ Map 1: UN, Bangladesh - Map No. 3835 Rev.6, 20 May 2020, [url](#)



1. Geography and demographics

1.1. Administrative division

Bangladesh is divided into eight geographical divisions (*bibhag*), which are named after the respective main city of the divisions (Barishal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Sylhet).⁵ The divisions are divided into 64 districts (*zila*).⁶ Below district level, rural authorities⁷ are divided into 495⁸ subdistricts (*upazila*), which are in turn ordered into 4 554 unions.⁹ The unions group together tens of thousands of villages.¹⁰ Meanwhile, urban areas below district level are divided into 12¹¹ city corporations in the largest cities¹² and into 327 municipalities (*paurashava*)¹³ in other towns.¹⁴ City corporations and municipalities are thereafter divided into wards.¹⁵ For the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) there is a third form of local government with a regional council and three hill district councils.¹⁶

Some administrative units went through changes in their English spelling in 2018, to reflect their pronunciation in Bengali. This includes Chattogram, Barishal, Cumilla, Jashore, and Bogura (previously ‘Chittagong’, ‘Barisal’, ‘Comilla’, ‘Jessore’ and ‘Bogra’).¹⁷ In 2021, the Prime Minister announced plans to form two new divisions, named after the rivers Meghna and Padma.¹⁸ The initiative was however suspended in 2022 as an austerity measure.¹⁹

1.2. Ethnic and religious groups

Bangladesh has a population of over 165 million people,²⁰ and it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.²¹ A great majority of the population belongs to the Bengali

⁵ UK, PCGN, Bangladesh, July 2023, [url](#)

⁶ UK, PCGN, Bangladesh, July 2023, [url](#)

⁷ CLGF, Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); OECD et al., 2019 Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment, Country Profiles, 2019, [url](#), p. 163

⁸ Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Portal, Divisions, n.d., [url](#)

⁹ Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Portal, Union List, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰ Britannica, Bangladesh, Government and society, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

¹¹ Bangladesh, BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022, November 2023, [url](#), pp. 386–387

¹² OECD et al., 2019 Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment, Country Profiles, 2019, [url](#), p. 163; CLGF, Bangladesh, the Local Government System in Bangladesh, Country profile 2017–2018, n.d., [url](#), p. 20

¹³ Bangladesh, BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022, November 2023, [url](#), p. xxi

¹⁴ OECD et al., 2019 Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment, Country Profiles, 2019, [url](#), p. 163; CLGF, Bangladesh, the Local Government System in Bangladesh, Country profile 2017–2018, n.d., [url](#), p. 20

¹⁵ Bangladesh, BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022, November 2023, [url](#), p. 377

¹⁶ Ahmed Khan, N., Challenges and Trends in Decentralised Local Governance in Bangladesh, ISAS, National University of Singapore, January 2016, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁷ Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh changes English spellings of five districts, 2 April 2018, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Mixed reactions as govt changes English spellings of 5 district names, 2 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸ Dhaka Tribune, PM Hasina: New divisions will be named Padma, Meghna, 21 Oct 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹ Business Standard (The), Formation of Padma, Meghna divisions suspended as austerity measure, 27 November 2022, [url](#); Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh halts plan to form Padma, Meghna divisions in austerity measure, 27 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁰ Bangladesh, BBS, Population & Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, August 2022, [url](#), p. vii

²¹ BBC News, Bangladesh country profile, 8 January 2024, [url](#)



ethno-linguistic group, and most are Sunni Muslims.²² The latest census, conducted in June 2022, indicated that 99 % of the population were Bengali and that 91 % identified as Muslim.²³

The Bangladeshi government recognises 50 ethnic groups.²⁴ Many ethnic minorities identify as indigenous people,²⁵ but the government does not recognise this concept²⁶ nor any particular rights relating to it.²⁷ The largest ethnic minority groups are Chakma, Marma and Tripura.²⁸ The 2022 census found that only 1 % of the population belonged to an ethnic minority,²⁹ but the accuracy of the ethnicity data has been questioned by some community members (as well as after the prior census of 2011³⁰), estimating the actual number of minorities to be twice as high (around 3 million people).³¹

Most ethnic minorities live in Chattogram division,³² in its districts Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and Bandarban.³³ This area also goes by the name 'Chittagong Hill Tracts' (CHT).³⁴ Ethnic minorities in the CHT are referred to as *Jumma*.³⁵ The plains of the north are also common areas of origin of ethnic minorities,³⁶ commonly referred to as 'plainland ethnic groups'.³⁷ The fact that many minorities live in remote and inaccessible areas has been pointed out by some critics as obstacles to collect accurate population data for the national census.³⁸

Most people belonging to an ethnic minority also belongs to a religious minority group, and they differ from the Bengali majority as regards physical appearance, language and culture.³⁹ Religious minorities include Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, animists,⁴⁰ Shia Muslims and Ahmaddiyya.⁴¹

More information is available in section [4.3. Ethnic and religious minorities](#).

²² MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)

²³ Bangladesh, BBS, Population & Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, August 2022, [url](#), pp. vii–viii, 1–2

²⁴ MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#); IWGIA, Indigenous World 2019: Bangladesh, 24 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁵ Sweden, UD, Bangladesh – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2021, 22 June 2022, [url](#), p. 14

²⁶ MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)

²⁷ Sweden, UD, Bangladesh – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2021, 22 June 2022, [url](#), p. 14

²⁸ MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#); Bangladesh, BBS, Population & Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, August 2022, [url](#), p. 33

²⁹ Bangladesh, BBS, Population & Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, August 2022, [url](#), p. vii

³⁰ MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)

³¹ Daily Star (The), Ethnic population in 2022 census: Real picture not reflected, 9 August 2022, [url](#); AFP, Ethnic minorities missing from census, say indigenous activists, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

³² MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)

³³ Bangladesh, BBS, Population & Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, August 2022, [url](#), pp. 10, 31

³⁴ IRI, The Challenges Facing Plainland Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh: Land, Dignity And Inclusion, 2020, [url](#), p. 4

³⁵ MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#); Genocide Warning, Genocide Warning: The Jumma People in Bangladesh, 16 November 2021, [url](#)

³⁶ MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#); IRI, The Challenges Facing Plainland Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh: Land, Dignity And Inclusion, 2020, [url](#), p. 4

³⁷ IRI, The Challenges Facing Plainland Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh: Land, Dignity And Inclusion, 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Nagorik Uddyog, Alternative Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), CRPD, [2022] [url](#), p. 9

³⁸ 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](#)

³⁹ IRI, The Challenges Facing Plainland Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh: Land, Dignity And Inclusion, 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁰ IRI, The Challenges Facing Plainland Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh: Land, Dignity And Inclusion, 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁴¹ MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)



1.2.1. Rohingyas from Myanmar

Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar for decades.⁴² Most arrived in 2017,⁴³ following a violent campaign against the group,⁴⁴ including massacres, rape and arson carried out by the Myanmar military.⁴⁵ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that about 1 million Rohingyas live in the district Cox's Bazar, and mainly in Kutupalong⁴⁶ – the largest refugee camp in the world.⁴⁷ As they are not granted citizenship in Myanmar, Rohingyas are in general stateless.⁴⁸ Bangladesh has allowed Rohingyas to cross its border on humanitarian grounds,⁴⁹ but their stay is temporary as Bangladesh is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.⁵⁰ Moreover, the Bangladeshi government has maintained its position that repatriation to Myanmar is the only viable alternative, rather than integrating Rohingyas in Bangladesh.⁵¹ There have been reported cases of human rights abuses, including deadly and sexual violence, torture, and abduction against Rohingyas carried out by Rohingya-led armed groups operating in the camps,⁵² including the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).⁵³ The Bangladeshi police battalions stationed in the camps have also reportedly subjected Rohingyas to abuse,⁵⁴ including arbitrary arrests, extortion, torture,⁵⁵ and sexual violence against women and girls.⁵⁶ The humanitarian situation in the camps has been described as 'dire', with reported issues such as overcrowding⁵⁷ and unsanitary conditions.⁵⁸ World Food Programme (WFP) provided monthly food assistance of USD 8 per person in 2023, and USD 10 in 2024.⁵⁹

⁴² MSF, Timeline: A visual history of the Rohingya refugee crisis, 24 August 2022, [url](#); Freedom House, Bangladesh, 10 March 2023, [url](#); United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, Bangladesh: Information on the situation of Rohingya refugees, 28 March 2001, [url](#)

⁴³ UNHCR, Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁴ MSF Australia, The Rohingya: The World's Largest Stateless Population, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁵ HRW, Myanmar: No Justice, No Freedom for Rohingya 5 Years On, 24 August 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶ UNHCR, Global Focus, Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷ USA for UNHCR, Inside the world's five largest refugee camps, 19 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸ MSF Australia, The Rohingya: The World's Largest Stateless Population, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁹ HPN, Special feature Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: the humanitarian response, October 2018, [url](#), p. 25

⁵⁰ UNHCR, Global Focus, Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); HPN, Special feature Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh: the humanitarian response, October 2018, [url](#), p. 25

⁵¹ Refugees International, Hope amid Despair: Finding Solutions for Rohingya in Bangladesh, 13 December 2022, [url](#)

⁵² HRW, Bangladesh: Spiralling Violence Against Rohingya Refugees, 13 July 2023, [url](#); Win, K., Cox's Bazaar: Insecurity, Criminality and Rohingya Women, South Asia @ LSE, 6 February 2023, [url](#)

⁵³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas H. Andrews, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants Felipe González Morales, 23 May 2023, [url](#), para. 102; Fortify Rights, Bangladesh: Bangladesh: Ensure Accountability for Police Corruption, Torture of Rohingya Refugees, 10 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵ HRW, Bangladesh: Rampant Police Abuse of Rohingya Refugees, 17 January 2023, [url](#); Fortify Rights, Bangladesh: Bangladesh: Ensure Accountability for Police Corruption, Torture of Rohingya Refugees, 10 August 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶ HRW, Bangladesh Police Abuses Rampant in Rohingya Camps, 24 January 2024, [url](#); DW, Rohingya in Bangladesh demand action against police abuse, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁷ International Crisis Group, Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: Limiting the Damage of a Protracted Crisis, 4 October 2023, [url](#); MSF, Bangladesh: "In the Rohingya refugee camps, life is hard, and hope is fading", 12 January 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁸ MSF, Bangladesh: "In the Rohingya refugee camps, life is hard, and hope is fading", 12 January 2024, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Dengue in Rohingya camps: Rising cases cause concern, 5 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹ WFP, WFP's Rohingya Refugee Operation in Bangladesh Receives Major Funding Boost of US\$ 87 Million from the United States, 13 December 2023, [url](#)



1.3. Poverty rates and daily subsistence

Bangladesh has gone through economic growth in the past decades, significantly reducing poverty rates.⁶⁰ In 1971, Bangladesh was one of the poorest nations in the world, but by 2015 it had reached lower-middle income status, according to the World Bank.⁶¹ Yet, the most recent Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) indicated that 18.7 % of the population lived in poverty in 2022 (living on less than USD 3.65 per person per day), and 5.6 % in ‘extreme poverty’ (less than USD 2.15 per person per day).⁶² Most people can access amenities such as electricity,⁶³ clean drinking water,⁶⁴ sanitation,⁶⁵ and housing.⁶⁶ According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), over 1.7 million people live in urban slums, under ‘unhygienic and unplanned conditions with very poor-quality housing structures’.⁶⁷ It has not been possible to corroborate this figure. However, in 2020, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated that about 60 million people lived in urban slums,⁶⁸ while an international organisation engaged in development projects in Bangladesh said that there were about 884 000 slum dwellers in Dhaka alone in April 2024.⁶⁹ Individuals living in slums commonly lack access to improved water sources, sanitation facilities, sufficient living space, housing durability and security of tenure.⁷⁰ In 2022 and 2023, Bangladesh faced economic difficulties with high inflation, a balance-of-payment deficit, and declining foreign exchange reserves.⁷¹ To cope with the situation, Bangladesh has been seeking loans and financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and other international organisations.⁷² IMF granted Bangladesh loans of about USD 4.7 billion in January 2023.⁷³ The World Bank lowered its growth projection for Bangladesh from 6.2 %⁷⁴ to 5.6 % in 2024.⁷⁵

According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the total labour force participation rate was 51.7 % in 2022, 79.6 % for men and 24.4 % for women.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, the unemployment rate was reportedly 4.2 % in 2023.⁷⁷ The main sectors are agriculture, services,

⁶⁰ World Bank (The), Bangladesh Development Update, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 7, 11; ADB and IsDBI, Transforming Bangladesh’s Participation in Trade and Global Value Chains, May 2023, [url](#), p. 4

⁶¹ World Bank (The), The World Bank in Bangladesh, Overview, Context, 4 October 2023, [url](#)

⁶² World Bank (The), Bangladesh Development Update, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 7, 11, 25–26, 28

⁶³ IEEFA, Bangladesh should plan for energy security, not just electricity access, 31 May 2023, [url](#); World Bank (The), Bangladesh Development Update, October 2023, [url](#), p. 28

⁶⁴ UNICEF, Water, sanitation and hygiene, n.d., [url](#); World Bank (The), Bangladesh Development Update, October 2023, [url](#), p. 28

⁶⁵ UN Water, Bangladesh, [2022], [url](#); World Bank (The), Bangladesh Development Update, October 2023, [url](#), p. 28

⁶⁶ World Bank (The), Bangladesh Development Update, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 7, 11, 25–26, 28; Bangladesh, BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022, November 2023, [url](#), p. 117

⁶⁷ Bangladesh, BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022, November 2023, [url](#), pp. Xliii, 17, 28

⁶⁸ UNDP, Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030, [2020], [url](#)

⁶⁹ International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024. The international organisation has been based in Bangladesh for many years, and is engaged in development projects. The source requested to be anonymised out of operational reasons.

⁷⁰ Bangladesh, BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022, November 2023, [url](#), pp. Xliii, 27

⁷¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); World Bank (The), The World Bank in Bangladesh, Overview, Context, 4 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷² Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

⁷³ IMF, IMF Executive Board Approves US\$3.3 Billion Under the Extended Credit Facility/Extended Fund Facility and US\$1.4 Billion Under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility for Bangladesh, 30 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴ World Bank (The), Strong Structural Reforms Can Help Bangladesh Sustain Growth, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵ World Bank (The), Bangladesh Development Update, October 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁶ ILO, ILOSTAT, Country Profiles, Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷ World Bank (The), Unemployment, total (% of total labor force (modeled ILO estimate) – Bangladesh, 5 September 2023, [url](#)



and industry,⁷⁸ but the majority of the workforce engages in informal employment.⁷⁹ The textiles industry is large, and the manufacturing and export of garments has driven economic growth.⁸⁰ Occupational injuries and deaths are still common,⁸¹ although safety and working conditions have improved in the garment industry during the last decade.⁸²

According to the study of the BBS, the monthly national average income in 2022 was 32 422 *taka* per household [about EUR 257], and 7 614 *taka* [about EUR 60] per person. There was, however an urban-rural discrepancy, as the income rates in urban areas tended to be higher than the national average, and lower in rural areas.⁸³ In 2023, the monthly minimum wage for the garment industry sector was set to 12 500 *taka*.⁸⁴ Although this increased the minimum wage from 8 000 *taka* in 2018–2023,⁸⁵ two local organisations criticised it for being far below a monthly minimum of a living wage⁸⁶ which they estimated respectively at 33 368 *taka* (Bangladeshi Institute of Labour Studies)⁸⁷ and 51 000 *taka* (Asia Floor Wage Alliance).⁸⁸

According to the BBS study, people spent approximately 46 % of the household income on food.⁸⁹ Moreover, sources reported on food insecurity among parts of the population.⁹⁰ The most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)⁹¹ analysis from 2023 indicated that 24 % of the population experienced high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and Phase 4). The data also included displaced Rohingyas from Myanmar.⁹² Malnutrition was reportedly a ‘severe problem’⁹³ although child malnutrition rates have decreased over time.⁹⁴ In 2022, UNICEF reported that Bangladesh was among the five top countries with the highest number of children under 5 years suffering from severe wasting (low weight for height), with

⁷⁸ Dhaka Tribune, Bangladesh’s total labour force rises to 73.69m, 2 May 2023, [url](#); ADB, Bangladesh’s Agriculture, Natural Resources, And Rural Development Sector Assessment And Strategy, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 2–3

⁷⁹ ILO, ILOSTAT, Country Profiles, Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); Sultana, N. et al., Food insecurity and health outcome nexus: empirical evidence from the informal sector enterprises in Bangladesh, BMC Public Health, 20 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰ ADB and IsDBI, Transforming Bangladesh’s Participation in Trade and Global Value Chains, May 2023, [url](#), p. 5; World Bank (The), Country Climate and Development Report: Bangladesh, October 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁸¹ AI, Bangladesh must stop violating labour rights and uphold corporate accountability, 12 December 2023, [url](#), p. 4; Business Standard (The), OSH records 1,432 workplace deaths in 2023, 29 December 2023, [url](#)

⁸² Al Jazeera, Ten years of Rana Plaza: How safe is Bangladesh garment industry?, 24 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸³ Bangladesh, BBS, Key Findings, Household Income & Expenditure Survey, HIES 2022, 12 April 2023, [url](#), p. 11

⁸⁴ HRW, Is Your Brand Paying Its Share to Reduce Bangladesh Workers’ Wage Despair?, 16 November 2023, [url](#); Reuters, Bangladesh hikes minimum wage for garment workers after protests, 8 November 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵ HRW, Is Your Brand Paying Its Share to Reduce Bangladesh Workers’ Wage Despair?, 16 November 2023, [url](#); Reuters, Bangladesh hikes minimum wage for garment workers after protests, 8 November 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁶ BILS and FEMNET, Mind the Gap, 2022, [url](#) p. 3; AFWA, Living Wage, Living Wage Figures, 2022, [2022], [url](#)

⁸⁷ BILS and FEMNET, Mind the Gap, 2022, [url](#) p. 3

⁸⁸ AFWA, Living Wage, Living Wage Figures, 2022, [2022], [url](#)

⁸⁹ Bangladesh, BBS, Key Findings, Household Income & Expenditure Survey, HIES 2022, 12 April 2023, [url](#), p. 13

⁹⁰ WFP, WFP Bangladesh Country Brief, November 2023, 30 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1; IPC, Bangladesh: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for March - April 2023 and Projection for May - September 2023, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹¹ IPC ‘provides a common scale for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity and acute malnutrition’ with five phases ranging from None/Minimal (Phase 1) to Catastrophe/Famine (Phase 5). See: IPC, Understanding the IPC Scales, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3–4

⁹² IPC, Bangladesh: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for March - April 2023 and Projection for May - September 2023, 1 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹³ Turjo, E. A. and Rahman, M. H., Assessing risk factors for malnutrition among women in Bangladesh and forecasting malnutrition using machine learning approaches, BMC Nutrition, 1 February 2024, [url](#); Kraemer, K. et al., Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Pregnant Women and Healthcare Providers in Bangladesh regarding Multivitamin Supplements during Pregnancy, Healthcare, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Bangladesh, National Institute of Population Research and Training, Demographic and Health Survey 2022, March 2023, [url](#) p. 58



327 859 children being affected.⁹⁵ A survey carried out by the BBS in the same year found that 11 % of children under 5 years suffered from wasting, while 24 % suffered from stunting (low height for age) and 22 % were underweight.⁹⁶

Table 1: Prevalence of acute food insecurity according to Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)

IPC Phase	Percentage	People
1: None or minimal	41 %	15.8 million
2: Stressed	35 %	13.5 million
3: Crisis	21 %	7.9 million
4: Acute	3 %	973 955
5: Famine	0 %	0

Source: IPC, Bangladesh: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for March - April 2023 and Projection for May - September 2023, [url](#)

1.4. Floodings and other natural hazards

Bangladesh is exposed to recurring natural hazards,⁹⁷ including flooding,⁹⁸ cyclones and landslides.⁹⁹ Flood events normally submerge about 20 % of the land area,¹⁰⁰ but occasional extreme floods have submerged far larger territories.¹⁰¹ For example, in June 2022, an extreme monsoon submerged 80 % of Sylhet district and 90 % of Sunamganj district according to the Bangladesh's Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre.¹⁰² Natural hazards, including the flooding in Sylhet and Sunamganj,¹⁰³ have caused death, displacement,¹⁰⁴ and economic loss.¹⁰⁵ The World Bank estimated the average annual losses from tropical cyclones to USD 1 billion (0.7 % of GDP),¹⁰⁶ and the 'risk to assets' of coastal communities to USD 300 million per year.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁵ UNICEF, Severe wasting, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 4–5

⁹⁶ Bangladesh, National Institute of Population Research and Training, Demographic and Health Survey 2022, March 2023, [url](#) p. 56

⁹⁷ NIRAPAD et al., Multi-Hazard Risk Analysis of Climate-Related Disasters in Bangladesh, 31 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9

⁹⁸ Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, Policy Brief, Tackling flooding in Bangladesh in a changing climate, August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁹ World Bank (The), Country Climate and Development Report: Bangladesh, October 2022, [url](#), pp. 12–13

¹⁰⁰ NIRAPAD et al., Multi-Hazard Risk Analysis of Climate-Related Disasters in Bangladesh, 31 July 2021, [url](#), p. 14; Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, Policy Brief, Tackling flooding in Bangladesh in a changing climate, August 2023, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰¹ Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, Policy Brief, Tackling flooding in Bangladesh in a changing climate, August 2023, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰² Shelter Cluster Bangladesh, Shelter Cluster Meeting on Flood 2022 Response, 18 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 4–5

¹⁰³ Guardian (The), After the flood: torrential monsoon rains devastate Bangladesh once again, 22 June 2022, [url](#); Shelter Cluster Bangladesh, Shelter Cluster Meeting on Flood 2022 Response, 18 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 4–5

¹⁰⁴ NIRAPAD et al., Multi-Hazard Risk Analysis of Climate-Related Disasters in Bangladesh, 31 July 2021, [url](#), p. 15;

World Bank (The), Key Highlights: Country Climate and Development Report for Bangladesh, 31 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, Policy Brief, Tackling flooding in Bangladesh in a changing climate, August 2023, [url](#), p. 5; World Bank (The), Country Climate and Development Report: Bangladesh, October 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁶ World Bank (The), Country Climate and Development Report: Bangladesh, October 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁷ Kazi, S. et al., Bangladesh: Enhancing Coastal Resilience in a Changing Climate, World Bank, 2022, [url](#), p. xxv



Riverside and coastal communities are particularly exposed to natural hazards.¹⁰⁸ Submerging not only causes the loss of land,¹⁰⁹ but saltwater intrusion makes agricultural land infertile.¹¹⁰ Climate change and extreme weather induce migration to urban areas¹¹¹ that have been growing rapidly.¹¹² The influx of internal migrants has put pressure on the cities' infrastructure,¹¹³ and have increased the urban slums.¹¹⁴ There is a lack of comprehensive data on the number of climate-induced displacements in Bangladesh,¹¹⁵ and estimated numbers vary from 427 000 people as reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in 2022,¹¹⁶ to 7.1 million people as reported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) the same year.¹¹⁷ Natural disasters also triggered internal displacement during the summer monsoon season.¹¹⁸ According to IDMC, such disasters displace about one million people each year.¹¹⁹ It has not been possible to corroborate this figure through other sources.

Global warming is expected to intensify submerging, due to increases in water flows and the rising sea level.¹²⁰ Nearly 75 % of Bangladesh's territory sits under sea level,¹²¹ and the Ministry of Environment projects that up to 18 % of the coastal areas will be under water by 2100.¹²² Moreover, one in seven of the population are expected to be displaced due to climate change by 2050 according to some estimates.¹²³ In response to climate-induced displacement, the government has rehabilitated and provided homes in cluster villages to homeless and landless people through the 'Ashrayan project'.¹²⁴

For information on state response to land disputes, see section [3.5.4. Land disputes](#).

¹⁰⁸ Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, Policy Brief, Tackling flooding in Bangladesh in a changing climate, August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ Kazi, S. et al., Bangladesh: Enhancing Coastal Resilience in a Changing Climate, World Bank, 2022, [url](#), p. 81

¹¹⁰ Kazi, S. et al., Bangladesh: Enhancing Coastal Resilience in a Changing Climate, World Bank, 2022, [url](#), p. 81;

Suza, M., Vulnerable livelihoods on Bangladesh's Hatiya Island: It's not just the climate, NERPS, [url](#)

¹¹¹ World Bank (The), Country Climate and Development Report: Bangladesh, October 2022, [url](#), p. 34; Parves Rana, M. M. and Ilina, I. N., Climate change and migration impacts on cities: Lessons from Bangladesh, Environmental Challenges, December 2021, [url](#)

¹¹² Huq, S. et al., Climate change impacts in Bangladesh, ICCCAD, 26 January 2024, [url](#), p. 7

¹¹³ Bloomberg, Climate Migration Pushes Bangladesh's Megacity to the Brink, 28 June 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Bloomberg, Climate Migration Pushes Bangladesh's Megacity to the Brink, 28 June 2022, [url](#); Zaikul Alam, M., and Al Mamun, A., Dynamics of internal migration in Bangladesh: Trends, patterns, determinants, and causes, PLOS One, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ IDMC, Country Profile, Bangladesh, 19 May 2022, [url](#); Researching Internal Displacement, Climate Induced Displacement In Bangladesh Through The Lens Of 'Loss And Damage', 2 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ IDMC, Country Profile, Bangladesh, 19 May 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ WHO, Focus on capacity building at WHO's Global School on Refugee and Migrant Health in Dhaka, 28 November 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ IDMC, Country Profile, Bangladesh, 19 May 2022, [url](#); Fahad, A. A. et al., Climate change quadruples flood causing extreme monsoon rainfall events in Bangladesh and northeast India, Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society, 33 December 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ IDMC, Country Profile, Bangladesh, 19 May 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰ Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, Policy Brief, Tackling flooding in Bangladesh in a changing climate, August 2023, [url](#), p. 4

¹²¹ Concern Worldwide, With nearly 75% of Bangladesh underwater, is the country facing a humanitarian crisis?, 21 July 2021, [url](#)

¹²² Daily Star (The), Up to 17.95% of coastal areas may go under sea by 2100, 19 June 2023, [url](#); Huq, S. et al., Climate change impacts in Bangladesh, ICCCAD, 26 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 4, 24 [footnote 8]

¹²³ OHCHR, End of mission statement by Mr. Olivier De Schutter Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Visit to Bangladesh, 17-29 May 2023, 29 May 2023, [url](#), p. 14; Fahad, A. A. et al., Climate change quadruples flood-causing extreme monsoon rainfall events in Bangladesh and northeast India, Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society, 33 December 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Huq, S. et al., Climate-induced Displacement: Loss and Damage in Bangladesh, 7 November 2023, [url](#)



1.5. International migration

Bangladesh is one of the largest countries of origin of migrant workers in the world,¹²⁵ as hundreds of thousands go abroad to work each year.¹²⁶ The country is, moreover, one of the world's top remittance recipients,¹²⁷ with migrants bringing in over USD 21 billion (about 5 % of GDP¹²⁸) in the past years.¹²⁹ Mainly men go abroad (although thousands of women also do so¹³⁰) to work in Southeast Asia¹³¹ and Middle Eastern countries,¹³² such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Gulf states.¹³³ Many migrate to these regions for temporary low-skilled work under bilateral labour agreements between Bangladesh and relevant states.¹³⁴ There is also a large diaspora in, inter alia, the United States (US),¹³⁵ where Bangladeshis tend to have higher-skill and -income jobs.¹³⁶

According to a research article prepared for the World Bank, information about employment abroad is primarily disseminated through social networks and intermediaries, especially among people from remote rural areas.¹³⁷ Bangladeshi migrants face a relatively high cost of migrating,¹³⁸ including fees charged by such intermediaries and recruitment agencies.¹³⁹ Many therefore borrow money or take loans to migrate.¹⁴⁰ Although NGOs¹⁴¹ and the state owned bank Probashi Kallyan Bank¹⁴² offer loans to fund migration, many rely on informal money lenders.¹⁴³ Some migrant workers use all their income to recoup the costs of migration,¹⁴⁴ or return to Bangladesh indebted.¹⁴⁵

¹²⁵ IOM, World Migration Report 2022, 1 December 2022, [url](#), p. 84

¹²⁶ ILO, Labour migration in Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#); Bangladesh, BMET, Overseas Employment & Remittances (2004 to 2024), [2024], [url](#)

¹²⁷ IOM, World Migration Report 2022, 1 December 2022, [url](#), p. 85; MPI, Bangladesh's Economic Vitality Owes in Part to Migration and Remittances, 19 April 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁸ World Bank (The), Personal remittances, received (% of GDP) – Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

¹²⁹ IOM, Remittance Inflows to Bangladesh (2019–2022), February 2024, [url](#), p. 1; Bangladesh, BMET, Overseas employment and remittances from 1976 to 2023, 27 January 2024, [url](#)

¹³⁰ Bangladesh, BMET, Overseas Employment of Female Workers from 2004 to 2024, [url](#)

¹³¹ Mahmud, H., International Migration in Bangladesh: A Political Economic Overview, 29 June 2023, [url](#), chapter 3; Bossavie, L., Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh, April 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹³² Mahmud, H., International Migration in Bangladesh: A Political Economic Overview, 29 June 2023, [url](#), chapter 3; UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3

¹³³ Mahmud, H., International Migration in Bangladesh: A Political Economic Overview, 29 June 2023, [url](#), chapter 3

¹³⁴ Bossavie, L., Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh, April 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹³⁵ IOM, Remittance Inflows to Bangladesh (2019–2022), February 2024, [url](#), pp. 3–4

¹³⁶ IOM, Remittance Inflows to Bangladesh (2019–2022), February 2024, [url](#), pp. 3–4; Dhaka Tribune, America is a thriving source of remittances: Should we utilize this opportunity?, 3 June 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁷ Bossavie, L., Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh, April 2023, [url](#), p. 9

¹³⁸ Bossavie, L., Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10; USA, USDOS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁹ ILO, Labour migration in Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ Bossavie, L., Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁴¹ Bossavie, L., Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10; BRAC, Loans for Migrant Households, 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴² Financial Express (The), The bank meant for serving migrants starts providing loans to general clients, 6 February 2021, [url](#); Bossavie, L., Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁴³ Bossavie, L., Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10; IOM, Bangladesh: Debt Mediation for Returnee Migrants, 2024, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ RMMRU, Labour Migration From Bangladesh 2022, Achievements and Challenge, January 2023, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴⁵ openDemocracy, Migrant workers still paying off debts that brought them to Qatar, 30 November 2022, [url](#)



The costs of migration¹⁴⁶ also made people turn to unofficial intermediaries.¹⁴⁷ The slow and deficient official bureaucracy,¹⁴⁸ and lack of information or access to formal migrant channels also contributed to this tendency.¹⁴⁹ Unofficial agencies have engaged in recruitment fraud, contract switching¹⁵⁰ and trafficking in human beings.¹⁵¹ Traffickers took advantage of people's lack of information,¹⁵² and convinced people of going abroad by deceiving them with false promises.¹⁵³ They have also operated under the cover of being a travel agency,¹⁵⁴ as employees at actual licenced agencies, or have made use of licenced agencies that 'either knowingly or unknowingly' have assisted them, as reported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the government of Bangladesh.¹⁵⁵

Bangladeshi work migrants faced widespread abuse, particularly in the Middle East.¹⁵⁶ Reports included beatings, torture,¹⁵⁷ unpaid work and lack of food.¹⁵⁸ The UN Special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants stated that some reports amounted to 'contemporary forms of slavery'.¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch reported that migrant workers, including Bangladeshis, were 'overwhelmingly exposed to the most dangerous working conditions' in the Gulf states, including extreme heat.¹⁶⁰ There were also reports of female work migrants being exposed to sexual violence and killed.¹⁶¹ The '*kafala* system', which is common in most Middle Eastern countries, contributed to work migrants' vulnerability.¹⁶² It binds a migrant's immigration status

¹⁴⁶ USA, USDOS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 29 July 2022, [url](#); UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3

¹⁴⁷ USA, USDOS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 29 July 2022, [url](#); UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3; France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 87

¹⁴⁸ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 87

¹⁴⁹ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 29 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 12, 37

¹⁵⁰ USA, USDOS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 29 July 2022, [url](#); UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3

¹⁵¹ USA, USDOS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵² Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), pp. 12, 37

¹⁵³ Dhaka Tribune, Mountain of human trafficking cases await trial in Bangladesh, 11 June 2023, [url](#); Zahin, A., False Promises: Migrant workers in Middle East, CGS, 25 June 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, Ministry of Home Affairs, National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking, 2018-2022, 2023, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁵⁴ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 87

¹⁵⁵ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), pp. 12, 37

¹⁵⁶ UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3

¹⁵⁷ UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3; Business Standard (The), 52% female migrants faced torture, workplace harassment: Study, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3; Al Jazeera [YouTube], Why do domestic workers in Lebanon still face abuse?, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶⁰ HRW, Gulf States: Migrant Workers at Serious Risk from Dangerous Heat, 31 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ Business & Human rights Resource Centre, Bangladesh: Embassies allegedly fail to investigate abuse of women migrant workers, incl. in care & garment sectors, showing need for greater protection of women migrants, 13 December 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶² Al Jazeera [YouTube], Why do domestic workers in Lebanon still face abuse?, 24 January 2022, [url](#)



to a sponsor (*kafeel*) which can also be their employer.¹⁶³ This reduces their possibility to negotiate,¹⁶⁴ change employment and leave the country.¹⁶⁵ Some migrants are also being deprived of their passports in the country of destination.¹⁶⁶

For more information on state response to trafficking in human beings and illegal money lending, see sections [3.5.1. Trafficking in human beings](#) and [3.5.2. Illegal money lending](#).

¹⁶³ Bangladesh, MRC, I heard a lot about Kafala, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Official visit to Bangladesh of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, [2023], [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶⁵ Daily Star (The), Rights of migrant workers, 11 August 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, MRC, I heard a lot about Kafala, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ Ainul S. et al., Assessment of overseas labor migration systems in Bangladesh, 1 October 2022, Population Council, [url](#), p. 3; Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 12



2. Political system and state institutions

2.1. State structure

The Bangladeshi constitution from 1972 prescribes a parliamentary republic,¹⁶⁷ with the separation of powers between the judiciary and the executive branches of the state.¹⁶⁸ The legislative power rests with the parliament which is called *Jatiya Sangsad* ('House of the Nation'). It consists of 350 seats, whereof 300 seats¹⁶⁹ are filled through direct elections every five years.¹⁷⁰ The parliament elects the remaining 50 members¹⁷¹ which are reserved for women.¹⁷²

The parliament elects the president¹⁷³ as the head of state¹⁷⁴ to serve for a five-year term.¹⁷⁵ Although the president's role is mainly ceremonial,¹⁷⁶ it includes appointing the prime minister, which shall be the leader of the parliament's majority party, or the coalition in majority.¹⁷⁷ The prime minister is the head of government.¹⁷⁸ The president also formally appoints the ministers, although they are selected by the prime minister.¹⁷⁹

The prime minister exercises the executive power in Bangladesh,¹⁸⁰ and the government's policies are implemented through government offices and constitutional and statutory bodies.¹⁸¹

For information on the division of local governance, see section [1.1. Administrative division](#).

The Supreme Court is the highest court in Bangladesh and consists of the High Court Division and the Appellate Division,¹⁸² which inter alia have original jurisdiction in hearing constitutional matters¹⁸³ and in assessing the law's constitutionality.¹⁸⁴ The president appoints the Chief Justice, as well as other supreme court judges after consultation with the Chief Justice.¹⁸⁵

¹⁶⁷ Britannica, Bangladesh, Government and society, 1 March 2024, [url](#); Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 65

¹⁶⁸ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 22

¹⁶⁹ Fidh, Bangladesh An election in name only, 5 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ Britannica, Bangladesh, Government and society, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Bdnews24.com, 50 MPs elected to reserved women's seats take oath, 28 February 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷² Britannica, Bangladesh, Government and society, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Britannica, Bangladesh, Government and society, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), para. 48

¹⁷⁵ Britannica, Bangladesh, Government and society, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ Daily Star (The), Explained: The branches of Bangladesh's government, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ Britannica, Bangladesh, Government and society, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ Daily Star (The), Explained: The branches of Bangladesh's government, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), para. 56

¹⁸⁰ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), para. 55 (2)

¹⁸¹ Business Standard (The), Balancing the President's and the Prime Minister's executive responsibilities, 4 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸² Bangladesh, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸³ UNHCR, Bangladesh: Supreme Court, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ Daily Star (The), Explained: The branches of Bangladesh's government, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), para. 95 (1)



In practice, the political power is concentrated around the prime minister.¹⁸⁶ Sheikh Hasina has held the position since 2009, and has also served an earlier term in 1996–2001.¹⁸⁷ Checks and balances of the government have been limited as the opposition's representation in parliament is minimal.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, there are no effective checks and balances in place between the government and the court¹⁸⁹ – as the executive has gradually been able to intrude on the formal independence of the judiciary.¹⁹⁰ This has included political pressure on rulings,¹⁹¹ and politically-motivated appointments of lower level judges and other court staff.¹⁹² Court proceedings have also been used to serve political ends,¹⁹³ including to undermine the opposition and silence critical voices.¹⁹⁴ Although Bangladesh has the formal accoutrements of a democracy,¹⁹⁵ several sources reported on democratic backsliding¹⁹⁶ and the situation approaching an authoritarian one-party system.¹⁹⁷ In global democracy indexes, Bangladesh's ranking has gradually worsened in recent years.¹⁹⁸ Among others, the indexes of Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Economist Intelligence Unit, classified Bangladesh as a 'hybrid regime'.¹⁹⁹

More information on the justice system is available in section [3. Justice and security sector](#).

2.2. Political context

2.2.1. Political parties and elections

Sheikh Hasina was elected to serve a fourth successive term as prime minister in January 2024,²⁰⁰ and her party, the Awami League (AL), has been in power for the past 15 years.²⁰¹ The opposition, including the main opposition party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has called on Hasina to step down,²⁰² and also boycotted the elections of 2014 and 2024, requesting an

¹⁸⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ Time, Sheikh Hasina and the Future of Democracy in Bangladesh, 2 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ S&P Global Ratings, Bangladesh Outlook Revised To Negative On Endurin, 24 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ FIDH, Out of Control, Human rights and rule of law crises in Bangladesh, December 2021, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁹⁰ FIDH, Out of Control, Human rights and rule of law crises in Bangladesh, December 2021, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁹¹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023, Bangladesh, 9 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹² Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023, Bangladesh, 9 March 2023, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹³ International IDEA and Global State of Democracy, Case Study: Bangladesh, November 2023, [url](#) p. 4

¹⁹⁴ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Government continues targeting activists and criminalising opposition members ahead of UN human rights review, 23 October 2023, [url](#); New York Times (The), Quietly Crushing a Democracy: Millions on Trial in Bangladesh, 3 September 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ V-Dem, Democracy Report 2023, Defiance in the Face of Autocratization, 2023, [url](#), pp. 20–21; Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); EPRS, Bangladesh and the 2024 elections From 'basket case' to rising star, December 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁹⁷ Syed, S., Opinion, Is Bangladesh Sleep Walking to Dictatorship?, IPS, 22 January 2024, [url](#); Macdonald, G., A Perilous Moment for Bangladesh's Democracy, USIP, [url](#); Ali, S. M., Bangladesh's Declining Democracy, New Lines institute, 15 September 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Is Bangladesh on a path to becoming a one-party state?, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); EIU (The), Democracy Index 2023, 15 February 2024, [url](#), pp. 11, 19; WJP, WJP rule of Law Index, Bangladesh, 25 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); EIU (The), Democracy Index 2023, 15 February 2024, [url](#), p. 11

²⁰⁰ NPR, Bangladesh's prime minister wins a majority in parliamentary elections, 8 January 2024, [url](#); CNN, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina secures fourth term in election boycotted by opposition, 7 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁰¹ Daily Star (The), Column by Mahfuz Anam: Our political culture – you reap what you sow, 21 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁰² GZERO, In Bangladesh, a powerful premiership is transforming into a brutal dictatorship, 16 January 2023, [url](#)



independent caretaker government (CTG) to call the elections.²⁰³ The CTG system was previously in place to avoid incumbent governments from influencing the elections. It was however abolished in 2011 by the AL, who had supermajority in the parliament at the time,²⁰⁴ and as a Supreme Court ruling had found the system unconstitutional.²⁰⁵ As a result, the tradition of AL and BNP changing office every five years was broken.²⁰⁶

There is deep mistrust and animosity between AL and BNP.²⁰⁷ The past elections have involved irregularities such as political violence, voter intimidation and arrests of opposition party leaders and dissidents.²⁰⁸ The opposition is weak and fragmented,²⁰⁹ but has still staged large-scale protests in Dhaka and other cities before the 2024 election.²¹⁰ Some rallies involved hundreds of thousands of protesters.²¹¹ There were reports of protesters clashing with the police, as well as the police using excessive force to disperse crowds.²¹² Following a large protest on 28 October 2023,²¹³ in which a police officer died during violent clashes, most of the senior BNP members were arrested, alongside thousands of BNP supporters.²¹⁴

As the BNP boycotted the 2024 parliamentary election, the voter turnout was low.²¹⁵ Official numbers indicated that the voter participation rate was about 40 %, in contrast to the elections of 2008 and 2018 in which over 80 % voted.²¹⁶ The AL secured the vast majority of seats in parliament, also through independent candidates who were mainly party affiliates.²¹⁷ The Jatiya Party (JP) is the main opposition party as regards the number of parliamentary seats,²¹⁸ but they could only secure 11 out of 350 seats in 2024.²¹⁹ The Bangladesh Workers Party (*Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal*) and the Bangladesh Kalyan Party won one seat each.²²⁰ According to local media Prothom Alo, there was no true opposition, as all elected parties and individual

²⁰³ BBC News, Bangladesh election: PM Sheikh Hasina wins fourth term in controversial vote, 8 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ EPRS, Briefing, Bangladesh and the 2024 elections, From 'basket case' to rising star, December 2023, [url](#) p. 3; International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ Syed, S., Opinion, Is Bangladesh Sleep Walking to Dictatorship?, IPS, 22 January 2024, [url](#); Nazneen, S., Bangladesh election results: implications for growth, democracy and development, Institute of Development Studies, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ GZERO, In Bangladesh, a powerful premiership is transforming into a brutal dictatorship, 16 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh opposition holds rally seeking PM Hasina's resignation, 11 January 2023, [url](#)

²¹¹ International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#); Guardian (The), 'They beat me with sticks': Bangladesh opposition reels under crackdown as thousands arrested, 22 January 2023, [url](#)

²¹² Al, Bangladesh: Unlawful use of force against protesters must end immediately, 4 August 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh police clash with protesters calling for PM resignation, 29 July 2023, [url](#)

²¹³ Reuters, Bangladesh opposition protests turns violent amid calls for PM to resign, 28 October 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁴ International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#); BBC News, Bangladesh opposition chief Alamgir arrested after clashes, 29 October 2023, [url](#)

²¹⁵ AA, Bangladeshi general elections see 40% voter turnout: Officials, 7 January 2024, [url](#)

²¹⁶ Business Standards (The), Voter turnout estimated to be 40%: CEC, 7 January 2024, [url](#)

²¹⁷ New York Times (The), Bangladesh Leader Headed to 4th Straight Term in Vote Marred by Crackdown, 7 January 2024, [url](#)

²¹⁸ Rahman, T., From Revolutionaries to Visionless Parties: Leftist Politics in Bangladesh, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 6 September 2022, [url](#)

²¹⁹ Daily Star (The), JP slumps to its worst showing, 8 January 2024, [url](#)

²²⁰ Daily Star (The), AL wins 222 seats, independents 62; turnout 41.8pc: CEC, 8 January 2024, [url](#)



candidates were either directly or indirectly affiliated with the AL.²²¹ CIVICUS also reported that all the independent candidates had been asked to ‘stand as “dummy candidates” to give the election a competitive veneer’.²²²

Jamaat e-Islami is the largest Islamist party,²²³ but it was banned from registering for elections by the Supreme Court in 2013 as the party’s charter was found to be in conflict with the constitution.²²⁴ Several of Jamaat e-Islami’s top leaders were convicted and executed in 2013–2016 for war crimes committed during the 1971 independence war, and the party claimed that these trials were politically motivated.²²⁵ The party has remained active although to a lesser extent, but reportedly resurged in 2023²²⁶ when it organised a large protest in Dhaka.²²⁷ This was the first time in 10 years that the party was permitted to stage a protest.²²⁸

2.2.2. Civil society and civic space

Bangladesh’s civil society involves a high number of active civil society organisations, and it has been widely recognised for achievements in, inter alia, micro-loans and other development initiatives.²²⁹ Civil society has however been highly politicised for a long time²³⁰ and generally divided alongside party lines.²³¹ This has also applied to sectors such as media, academia,²³² and civil society organisations.²³³ Imtiaz Ahmed, professor of international relations at the University of Dhaka and director of the Center of Genocide Studies, told the Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (OFPRA) that there was an ‘extreme

²²¹ Prothom Alo, Awami League and only Awami League in parliament, 9 January 2024, [url](#)

²²² CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Criminalisation of activists and crackdown on protests continue following one-sided elections, 12 April 2024, [url](#)

²²³ AFP, Bangladesh releases opposition party leader after 15 months, 12 March 2024, [url](#); Nazrul Islam, M., Political Islam in South Asia: A critical appraisal of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, International Area Studies Review, May 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴ Bdnews24.com, Jamaat not on EC list of parties, 17 June 2014, [url](#); BBC News, Bangladesh high court restricts Islamist party Jamaat, 1 August 2013, [url](#)

²²⁵ AFP, Bangladesh releases opposition party leader after 15 months, 12 March 2024, [url](#)

²²⁶ Sinan Siyech, M., Understanding the Bangladesh Jamaat e-Islami’s return, 15 July 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), How to explain Jamaat’s return to the political scene?, 17 June 2023, [url](#)

²²⁷ ACCORD, Bangladesh: COI Compilation, August 2023, [url](#), p. 31; Sinan Siyech, M., Understanding the Bangladesh Jamaat e-Islami’s return, 15 July 2023, [url](#)

²²⁸ Prothom Alo, Jamaat holds rally after 10 yrs, speculations rise in political arena, 11 June 2023, [url](#); Sinan Siyech, M., Understanding the Bangladesh Jamaat e-Islami’s return, 15 July 2023, [url](#)

²²⁹ Asia Foundation (The), A Glass Half-Full: Civic Space and Contestation in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, March 2023, [url](#), p. 10; Hossain, N. and Lewis, D., Draft for discussion, Revisiting civil society in Bangladesh, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 1–2

²³⁰ Lewis, D., email communication, 26 April 2024; Tasnim, F., Politicized Civil Society, 14 February 2021, [url](#)

²³¹ Syed, S., Opinion, Is Bangladesh Sleep Walking to Dictatorship?, IPS, 22 January 2024, [url](#); Asia Foundation (The), A Glass Half-Full: Civic Space and Contestation in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, March 2023, [url](#), p. 10; France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh [Source: Imtiaz Ahmed, professor of international relations at the University of Dhaka and director of the Center of Genocide Studies], 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 13

²³² Lewis, D., email, 26 April 2024; Adnin, T., Freedom of Press and Broadcasting Media in England and Bangladesh, Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism, 2018, [url](#), p. 3; France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh [Source: Imtiaz Ahmed, professor of international relations at the University of Dhaka and director of the Center of Genocide Studies], 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 13

²³³ Lewis, D., email, 26 April 2024; Tasnim, F., Politicized Civil Society, 14 February 2021, [url](#); France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh [Source: Imtiaz Ahmed, professor of international relations at the University of Dhaka and director of the Center of Genocide Studies], 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 13



polarisation’ of political life between the AL and BNP.²³⁴ In contrast, Naomi Hossain, Professor at the Department of Development Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at University of London, and David Lewis, Professor at the Department of International Development at London School of Economics and Political Science, told the EUAA that affiliation with the opposition had become less important, due to AL’s dominance and control of most sectors. Hossain and Lewis however stressed that, although Bangladeshi society is ‘deeply politically polarised in general’, civil society is not entirely politically affiliated, and some civil society actors have remained because of their prominence, and not due to a certain party-affiliation.²³⁵ Several interlocutors consulted during a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh, carried out by OFPRA in June 2023, also emphasised that Bangladeshi politics should not be reduced to the polarisation between AL and BNP, as allegiances are fluid, and as counter-intuitive alliances between local officials of rivaling parties have regularly been observed.²³⁶

In recent years, Bangladesh’s civil society has faced obstacles stemming from shrinking civic space, including a restrictive legal environment, limiting the possibilities for civil society organisations to operate and receive foreign funds.²³⁷ For example, the prominent local human rights organisation Odhikar was denied a renewal of its registration in 2022,²³⁸ and the organisation’s director and secretary were sentenced to two years imprisonment and a fine in 2023.²³⁹ This case dates back to 2013 when the organisation released a report on extrajudicial killings.²⁴⁰ Some legal acts also give vast powers to state authorities, opening up for repression of critical voices.²⁴¹ One such example is the Digital Security Act (DSA) from 2018 under which critics have been arrested and prosecuted for, inter alia, spreading alleged propaganda.²⁴² As of January 2023, over 7 000 cases had been filed under the act according to Bangladeshi authorities,²⁴³ and the accused have included (among others) journalists,²⁴⁴ activists and educators.²⁴⁵ Later in 2023, the act was replaced by the Cyber Security Act (CSA) which removed some abusive elements,²⁴⁶ although many problematic aspects were

²³⁴ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh [Source: Imtiaz Ahmed, professor of international relations at the University of Dhaka and director of the Center of Genocide Studies], 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 13

²³⁵ Hossain, N. and Lewis, D, email communication, 26 April 2024

²³⁶ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 13–14

²³⁷ Asia Foundation (The), A Glass Half-Full: Civic Space and Contestation in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 10, 16; Hossain, N. and Lewis, D., Draft for discussion, Revisiting civil society in Bangladesh, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 10–11

²³⁸ OHCHR, Press briefing notes on Bangladesh, 10 June 2022, [url](#); European Parliament, European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2023 on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, notably the case of Odhikar (2023/2833(RSP)), 14 September 2023, [url](#)

²³⁹ HRW, Bangladesh: Quash Conviction and Release Rights Defenders, 14 September 2023, [url](#); European Parliament, European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2023 on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, notably the case of Odhikar (2023/2833(RSP)), 14 September 2023, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ HRW, Bangladesh: Quash Conviction and Release Rights Defenders, 14 September 2023, [url](#)

²⁴¹ CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 March 2023, [url](#); ICNL, Bangladesh, 7 March 2024, [url](#)

²⁴² Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

²⁴³ Business Standard (The), Over 7,000 cases filed under DSA: Law minister, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ Riaz, A., How Bangladesh’s Digital Security Act Is Creating a Culture of Fear, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 9 December 2021, [url](#); CGS, Digital Security Act: 147 sued, 67 arrests a month, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); CGS, CGS: Nearly 1,500 DSA cases in 20 months, [2021], [url](#)

²⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, Bangladesh to tone down ‘draconian’ digital security law, 7 August 2023, [url](#)



retained²⁴⁷ – including an extensive mandate for the police to operate without judicial supervision.²⁴⁸

In addition, dissidents and critics have been suppressed through harassment, surveillance, arbitrary arrest, and enforced disappearance.²⁴⁹ State authorities have also reportedly harassed family members of such individuals.²⁵⁰ Journalists moreover described that they were facing a 'hostile environment',²⁵¹ and self-censorship has become part of the media climate following government abuse.²⁵² Those reporting on sensitive topics (such as human rights abuse and corruption) have experienced threats, harassment and violence²⁵³ from state actors²⁵⁴ and political activists.²⁵⁵ Moreover, addressing sensitive topics such as secularism and religious minorities was 'off limits' according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF).²⁵⁶ Before the 2024 election, the government reportedly increased their repression, and targeted media, the opposition, and human rights defenders.²⁵⁷ The CIVICUS monitoring project downgraded civic space in Bangladesh from 'repressed' to 'closed' in 2024,²⁵⁸ which is the worst ranking on their five point scale.²⁵⁹ The silencing of critics reportedly created an atmosphere of self-censorship and fear, that hinders civil society from holding the government accountable.²⁶⁰

More information on the treatment of dissidents and critics is available in section [4.1. Political activists, journalists, and human rights defenders](#).

²⁴⁷ HRW, World Report 2024: Bangladesh, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ TIB, In the name of protecting cyber space, fundamental rights continue to be criminalised, 30 August 2023, [url](#); AI, Bangladesh: Open letter to the government: Feedback on proposed "Cyber Security Act", 22 August 2023, [url](#), p. 3

²⁴⁹ CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ HRW, Bangladesh: Stop Reprisals Against Victims, Activists, 7 April 2022, [url](#); New Age, Families face harassment, arrest, 4 November 2023, [url](#)

²⁵¹ IFJ, Bangladesh: 30 journalists attacked while covering protests, 6 November 2023, [url](#); RSF, Alarming surge of press freedom violations in Bangladesh, 5 September 2023, [url](#)

²⁵² International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#); CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁵³ CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Crackdown on the opposition and critical journalists escalates as elections loom, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁵⁵ RSF, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#); RSF, Bangladeshi local daily raided by ruling party activists, 17 February 2022, [url](#); CPJ, At least 27 Bangladeshi journalists attacked, harassed while covering political rallies, 1 November 2023, [url](#)

²⁵⁶ RSF, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

²⁵⁷ CIVICUS, People Power Under Attack 2023, December 2023, [url](#), p. 34; HRW, World Report 2024: Bangladesh, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁵⁸ CIVICUS, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

²⁵⁹ CIVICUS, Ratings, n.d., [url](#)

²⁶⁰ TIB, Censorship comes naturally in a climate overshadowed by fear, 9 December 2023, [url](#); CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 March 2023, [url](#)



2.2.3. Corruption

Corruption was described as ‘endemic’²⁶¹ and widely present at all levels of society.²⁶² This included the business sectors,²⁶³ as well as public sectors,²⁶⁴ such as healthcare²⁶⁵ and law enforcement.²⁶⁶ Bribery is reportedly common practice to access public services.²⁶⁷ In a household survey, Transparency International found that one of the major reasons to giving bribes was that services were not performed without them, and also ‘to avoid difficulties and harassment’, ‘to get services on time’, and because many were not aware of official charges and fees. The same survey found that law enforcement was one of the most corrupt authorities in terms of bribing, with 55.7 % of households having paid bribes to it.²⁶⁸ In Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index for 2023, Bangladesh ranked 149 out of 180 countries, making it one of the countries worst affected by corruption.²⁶⁹

2.3. Security situation

Bangladesh is not engaged in any international or non-international armed conflict.²⁷⁰

There were, however, some protracted domestic political instability and tensions in the CHT,²⁷¹ including skirmishes between Bangladeshi security forces and militant rebel groups,²⁷² and also violence between the local indigenous population and Bengali settlers.²⁷³ This situation stems from a previous conflict in 1973–1997 between the Bangladeshi government and the local indigenous population, during which Bengali settlers were being relocated to the area in order to change the demographic balance.²⁷⁴ The conflict was settled in 1997 through a peace

²⁶¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023, Bangladesh, 9 March 2023, [url](#)

²⁶² Sweden, Unit for Migration Analysis, Swedish Migration Agency, Bangladesh: Folkbokföring, id-handlingar och förekomst av falska handlingar, 19 December 2023, [url](#), p. 25

²⁶³ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); Hossain, M. M. et al., Covid-19 corruption in the public health sector—emerging evidence from Bangladesh, Health Policy and Planning, Oxford Academic, 27 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); Daily Star (The), ‘Health services deeply troubled by corruption, lack of accountability’, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁶⁵ Hossain, M. M. et al., Covid-19 corruption in the public health sector—emerging evidence from Bangladesh, Health Policy and Planning, Oxford Academic, 27 May 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), ‘Health services deeply troubled by corruption, lack of accountability’, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); TI Bangladesh, Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2021, Extended Executive Summary, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 14

²⁶⁷ TI Bangladesh, Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2021, Extended Executive Summary, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); CPD, Bangladesh Business Environment 2023, 2024, [url](#), p. 25

²⁶⁸ TI Bangladesh, Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2021, Extended Executive Summary, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 14

²⁶⁹ TI, Corruption Perceptions Index, Bangladesh, 2023, 2024, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Atrocity Crimes Risk Assessment Series, Bangladesh, The University of Queensland, April 2023, [url](#), p. 4

²⁷¹ Haider, S. A., A Tale of Two Regions: Unveiling the Underlying Similarities between Manipur and Chittagong Hill Tracts, Southeast Asia Journal, 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 2. f

²⁷² Rashiduzzaman, M., Bangladesh-Chittagong Hill Tracts?: Bonfire of triangular accord?, South Asia Journal, 13 February 2023, [url](#)

²⁷³ Rashiduzzaman, M., Bangladesh-Chittagong Hill Tracts?: Bonfire of triangular accord?, South Asia Journal, 13 February 2023, [url](#); IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2023: Bangladesh, 9 March 2023, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 2. f



accord,²⁷⁵ but most aspects of the agreement have not been implemented.²⁷⁶ There are still land ownership issues,²⁷⁷ and the local indigenous population face continuous land eviction by state and non-state actors.²⁷⁸ Reports of a militant group called the Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA) emerged in mid-2022.²⁷⁹ It is reportedly a wing of the banned²⁸⁰ separatist group Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF),²⁸¹ which reportedly seeks to create a separate state for subgroups of the Kuki-Chin ethnic group.²⁸² KNA has carried out attacks against Bangladeshi security forces,²⁸³ has killed military personnel²⁸⁴ and has also abducted civilians.²⁸⁵ According to local media Dhaka Tribune, reporting on 22 April 2024, the tensions had led to 6 army personnel being killed, as well as 17 KNF members, with more than 50 individuals being injured, and 30 kidnapped since October 2022.²⁸⁶ It has not been possible to corroborate these figures. In October 2022, Bangladeshi authorities launched an operation against the KNA,²⁸⁷ and claimed to also target the terrorist organisation Jama'at-ul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiy (JAHS).²⁸⁸ The operation caused hundreds of displacements into India.²⁸⁹ Due to the security situation, travel bans were issued for parts of the district of Bandarban on 18 October 2022.²⁹⁰ Several subdistricts were imposed a travel ban until 14 July 2023.²⁹¹ The last travel restriction was lifted on 22 January 2024, and concerned the subdistrict of Rowangchhari.²⁹² However, on 2–3 April 2024,²⁹³ a series of bank robberies took place, during which the robbers looted both

²⁷⁵ IWGIA, Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord 25 Years Later: Indigenous Peoples Still at Serious Risk, 30 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2023, [url](#), p. 160

²⁷⁷ Haider, S. A., A Tale of Two Regions: Unveiling the Underlying Similarities between Manipur and Chittagong Hill Tracts, Southeast Asia Journal, 2023, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2023, [url](#), pp. 160, 162; OHCHR, Bangladesh: UN expert concerned about non implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, 2 December 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ BBC Monitoring, Bangladesh media highlights 30 Jun 22, 30 June 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database, July 2023, 2024, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ Business Standard (The), Who are the Kuki-Chin National Army?, 17 May 2023, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Why Bangladesh's Kuki National Front is Cause for Concern, 29 April 2024, [url](#)

²⁸¹ Dhaka Tribune, KNF: Where does it get its funding and what is its endgame?, 22 February 2023, [url](#); Business Standard (The), Who are the Kuki-Chin National Army?, 17 May 2023, [url](#)

²⁸² Business Standard (The), Who are the Kuki-Chin National Army?, 17 May 2023, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Why Bangladesh's Kuki National Front is Cause for Concern, 29 April 2024, [url](#)

²⁸³ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database, July 2023, 2024, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, Bangladesh media highlights 6 Nov 23, 6 November 2023, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database, July 2023, 2024, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Army man killed in Bandarban KNA attack, 14 March 2023, [url](#); Prothom Alo, Army warrant officer killed, two injured as Kuki-Chin separatists open fire in Bandarban, 13 March 2023, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ Prothom Alo, Retired army sergeant abducted by KNA, 17 March 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database, February 2024, 2024, [url](#); Business Standard (The), Army man killed as Kuki-Chin separatists attack patrol in Bandarban, 13 March 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, KNF allegedly abducts 5 people from Ruma, 7 February 2024, [url](#)

²⁸⁶ Dhaka Tribune, KNF armed wing member killed in raid in Bandarban, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

²⁸⁷ Diplomat (The), Kuki-Chin Refugees From Bangladesh Take Shelter in Mizoram, 22 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁸ BenarNews, In Bandarban operation, Bangladesh targets Muslim militant-hill tribe rebel link, 28 October 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ Diplomat (The), Kuki-Chin Refugees From Bangladesh Take Shelter in Mizoram, 22 November 2022, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ Business Standard (The), Travel ban imposed on 3 upazilas of Bandarban, 15 March 2023, [url](#); Daily Sun, Ban on travel to Bandarban's Ruma, Thanchi lifted, 15 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁹¹ Dhaka Tribune, Bandarban tourism ban lifted, 14 July 2023, [url](#); New Age, Travel ban lifted from Bandarban's Ruma, Thanchi, 14 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁹² Business Standard (The), Tourist ban lifted in Bandarban's Rowangchhari after over a year, 18 January 2024, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Debotakhum to be reopened to tourists on January 22, 18 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁹³ Bdnews24.com, Bandarban hotels hit hard by booking cancellations after KNF attacks on Banks, 12 April 2024, [url](#); IWGIA, CHTC urges urgent action to address escalating tensions in Bandarban, emphasizes the need for a



money and weapons, abducted a bank official, and exchanged fire with the police.²⁹⁴ Travel bans were therefore imposed anew in April 2024, due to operations targeting the KNF.²⁹⁵ While local media Dhaka Tribune only reported on a travel ban in the district of Ruma between 9–13 April 2024,²⁹⁶ another local media outlet, Bdnews24.com, reported on bans being imposed in Ruma, and also in the districts of Rowangchhari and Thanchi.²⁹⁷ According to the Hill Voice, an online newspaper reporting on the CHT and indigenous rights,²⁹⁸ 54 individuals of the Bawm community were arrested following the bank robberies, most of whom being ‘innocent’, including pregnant women, students, teachers, and government employees.²⁹⁹ There were also reports of villagers fleeing their homes due to the fear of harassment during the operation.³⁰⁰ Security operations targeting KNF continued later in April and in May 2024, as reported by International Crisis Group.³⁰¹

Incidents of shelling and firing across the border in clashes between the Myanmar army and armed groups also occurred.³⁰² On 5 February 2024, two civilians died as a house in the district of Bandarban was hit.³⁰³

More information on the treatment of ethno-religious minorities, and state response to land disputes is available in sections [4.3. Ethnic and religious minorities](#), and [3.5.4. Land disputes](#).

Several violent Islamist groups operate in Bangladesh,³⁰⁴ including regional groups such as al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State (IS),³⁰⁵ although the government denied these groups’ presence in the country.³⁰⁶ There are also domestic groups, with Neo-JMB (an offshoot of the defunct Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), affiliated with IS)

peaceful resolution, protection of civilians, and calls for action against alleged sponsored proxy conflicts, 16 April 2024, [url](#)

²⁹⁴ Bdnews24.com, Bandarban hotels hit hard by booking cancellations after KNF attacks on Banks, 12 April 2024, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, KNF loots 2 banks in Thanchi in broad daylight, 3 April 2024, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ Bdnews24.com, Joint forces operation: Thanchi, Ruma and Rowangchhari again under travel ban, 12 April 2024, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Ban suspended, no restriction on traveling to Ruma, 13 April 2024, [url](#)

²⁹⁶ Dhaka Tribune, Ban suspended, no restriction on traveling to Ruma, 13 April 2024, [url](#)

²⁹⁷ Bdnews24.com, Joint forces operation: Thanchi, Ruma and Rowangchhari again under travel ban, 12 April 2024, [url](#)

²⁹⁸ Hill Voice, n.d., [url](#)

²⁹⁹ Hill Voice, 54 men-women of Bawm villagers arrested in Ruma, most of them innocent, 10 April 2024, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ Hill Voice, 54 men-women of Bawm villagers arrested in Ruma, most of them innocent, 10 April 2024, [url](#); IWGIA, CHTC urges urgent action to address escalating tensions in Bandarban, emphasizes the need for a peaceful resolution, protection of civilians, and calls for action against alleged sponsored proxy conflicts, 16 April 2024, [url](#)

³⁰¹ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database, May 2024, 2024, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database, April 2024, 2024, [url](#)

³⁰² RFA, Bangladesh, Myanmar border police agree to work jointly against militant groups, 20 November 2022, [url](#); AA, 68 Myanmar border police take refuge in Bangladesh as fighting between junta, rebels intensifies, 5 February 2024, [url](#)

³⁰³ AP, For the first time, Myanmar forces flee into Bangladesh during fighting with an ethnic armed group, 5 February 2024, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Database, February 2024, 2024, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); Hasan, M. and Macdonald G., he Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 9–10

³⁰⁵ Hasan, M. and Macdonald, G., The Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh, USIP, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 8–10; Hamming, T. and Sayed, A., Al-Aida in the Indian Subcontinent: An Appraisal of the Threat in the Wake of the Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan, CTC Sentinel, August 2022, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ Marjan, S. M. H., Mostofa S. M., State Fragility and Dynamism of Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh: Recruitment Strategies, Women and Prison Radicalization, and Future Trajectories, In: Mostofa, S.M. (eds) Dynamics of Violent Extremism in South Asia. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 3 February 2023, [url](#)



and Ansar al-Islam³⁰⁷ [also known as Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), affiliated with AQ] being the most prominent.³⁰⁸ Amid the above-mentioned military operations in the CHT in October 2022, Bangladeshi authorities claimed that the extremist group JAHS had presence in the area.³⁰⁹ During ‘a wave of terrorism’³¹⁰ taking place in the early and mid-2010s, several secular bloggers and LGBTIQ activists were killed.³¹¹ This period of violence culminated in a terrorist attack referred to as the ‘Holey Artisan attack’ in 2016³¹² in which 22 people were killed.³¹³ After this event, the government initiated an intense counterterrorism campaign³¹⁴ and the number of terrorist attacks has since declined.³¹⁵ The campaign has however been criticised as alleged Islamic militants have been tortured and forcibly disappeared.³¹⁶ Particularly the elite paramilitary force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), operative since 2004, has committed severe human rights violations.³¹⁷ Among those forcibly disappeared were reportedly activists and dissidents labelled as ‘Islamic militants’.³¹⁸ According to data collected in 2021 by Shafi Mostofa, associate professor at Dhaka University, 92 militants had been killed by the security forces since June 2016, and 65 had been convicted on militancy charges. RAB alone had arrested 512 alleged militants since July 2016, and the source indicated that the actual number would be much higher if other law enforcement branches had been included. The same source further described Islamist militancy in Bangladesh entering a ‘dormant phase’ in 2018, due to the crackdown of security forces, following the more violent phase in 2013–2017.³¹⁹ A ‘terrorism narrative’ has also been used against individuals and groups in the CHT, inter alia to motivate the continued presence of Bangladeshi security forces in the area.³²⁰

³⁰⁷ Hasan, M. and Macdonald, G., The Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh, USIP, [url](#), pp. 8–10; Marjan, S. M. H., Mostofa S. M., State Fragility and Dynamism of Islamist Extremism in Bangladesh: Recruitment Strategies, Women and Prison Radicalization, and Future Trajectories, In: Mostofa, S.M. (eds) Dynamics of Violent Extremism in South Asia. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ Hasan, M. and Macdonald, G., The Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh, USIP, [url](#), pp. 8–10; Shafi, M. M., Understanding Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh, May 2021, Journal of Asian and African Studies, May 2021, [url](#), p. 7

³⁰⁹ BenarNews, In Bandarban operation, Bangladesh targets Muslim militant-hill tribe rebel link, 28 October 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁰ DW, ‘Death squad’: Inside Bangladesh’s Rapid Action Battalion, 4 March 2023, [url](#); Roul, A., Jamaatul Ansar: A Terrorism Threat in Bangladesh Before the 2024 elections?, Terrorism Monitor, 26 June 2023, [url](#)

³¹¹ Hasan, M. and Macdonald, G., The Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh, USIP, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 4–5, 9, 11; Bhatt, C., Words and violence: militant Islamist attacks on bloggers in Bangladesh and the UK, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 7–15

³¹² Bhatt, C., Words and violence: militant Islamist attacks on bloggers in Bangladesh and the UK, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³¹³ BBC News, Holley Artisan cafe: Bangladesh Islamists sentenced to death for 2016 attack, 27 November 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁴ Hasan, M. and Macdonald, G., The Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh, USIP, [url](#), pp. 4–5, 9,

³¹⁵ Hasan, M. and Macdonald, G., The Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh, USIP, [url](#), pp. 4–5, 9; Shafi, M. M., Understanding Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh, May 2021, Journal of Asian and African Studies, May 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁶ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), paras. 43, 53; HRW, “Where No Sun Can Enter”, A Decade of Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh, 16 August 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁷ Riaz, A., US sanctions on Bangladesh’s RAB: What happened? What’s next?, 16 December 2021, [url](#); Swedish Radio, Exclusive: Officer Exposes Brutal Killings by Bangladeshi Elite Police Unit RAB, 4 April 2017, [url](#)

³¹⁸ Fidh, Bangladesh: Government must cease enforced disappearances, stop harassment of the victims’ families and hold perpetrators accountable, 30 August 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Shafi, M. M., Understanding Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh, May 2021, Journal of Asian and African Studies, May 2021, [url](#), p. 5

³²⁰ Daily Star (The), Paradoxes of terrorism in Bangladesh, 23 February 2023, [url](#); IWGIA, The International CHT Commission expresses deep concern about the introduction of a new unit of the Armed Police Battalion in Hill Tracts, [url](#)



2.4. Respect of human rights

Bangladesh has ratified several of the major international human rights treaties, including the conventions on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (ICCPR and CESCR), the rights of the child (CRC), and the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD). The country has also ratified conventions on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (CERD) and discrimination against women (CEDAW). However, Bangladesh has refrained from signing the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED),³²¹ and the second optional protocol to ICCPR that seeks to abolish the death penalty.³²²

Bangladesh's constitution enshrines the principle of secularism³²³ and religious freedom,³²⁴ although Islam is the designated state religion.³²⁵ There is, however, a long history of radical Islamists targeting Hindus and Buddhists,³²⁶ and such attacks continued to be reported in 2023.³²⁷ More information is available in section [4.3. Ethnic and religious minorities](#).

The constitution grants freedom of thought and conscience, and also the freedom of speech, expression, assembly, association and the press.³²⁸ However, legal acts limit these rights, including the CSA that inter alia criminalises 'propaganda' against national symbols, content that 'hurts' religious values, as well as defamation and false information.³²⁹ Such provisions have frequently been used to detain government critics.³³⁰ More information is available in section [4.1. Political activists, journalists, and human rights defenders](#).

The government used law enforcement as a tool for its own agenda,³³¹ including to undermine the political opposition.³³² The RAB has committed human rights abuses,³³³ such as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture.³³⁴ Such reports made the US issue sanctions for the RAB,³³⁵ as well as for its current and past officers on 10 December 2021.³³⁶

³²¹ OHCHR, UN Treaty Body Database, Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

³²² AI, Human Rights Charter – Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#), p. 5

³²³ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 1

³²⁴ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), para. 12, 41

³²⁵ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 1

³²⁶ Patel, R. P., Extremist Upsurge in Bangladesh Politics, Journal of North East India Studies, 24 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 91–92

³²⁷ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 6; Freedom House, Bangladesh, 10 March 2023, [url](#)

³²⁸ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), para. 37–39

³²⁹ OHCHR, Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 28 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 3–4; TI Bangladesh, Digital Security Act 2018 and the draft Cyber Security Act 2023 : A Comparative Analysis, [2023], [url](#), pp. 5–7, 26

³³⁰ OHCHR, Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 28 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 3–4; Riaz, A., How Bangladesh's Digital Security Act Is Creating a Culture of Fear, 9 December 2021, [url](#)

³³¹ Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, Bangladesh: Government Must Stop Human Rights Violations and End Impunity, 9 December 2022, [url](#); AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

³³² Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2023, [url](#), para. 50; AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#); RFK Human Rights, Bangladesh: Government Must Stop Human Rights Violations and End Impunity, 9 December 2022, [url](#)

³³³ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

³³⁴ DW, 'Death squad': Inside Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion, 4 March 2023, [url](#)

³³⁵ USA, US Department of the Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Perpetrators of Serious Human Rights Abuse on International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2021, [url](#)

³³⁶ USA, USDOS, The United States Promotes Accountability for Human Rights Violations and Abuses, 10 December 2021, [url](#)



2.4.1. Death penalty

Bangladesh retains the death penalty, and the punishment is being implemented.³³⁷ The death penalty applies to 33 offences,³³⁸ including several non-lethal crimes such as rape,³³⁹ certain drug offences,³⁴⁰ and kidnapping of children under the age of 10 years.³⁴¹ The age of criminal responsibility is 9 years, but the Children Act of 2013 prohibits children from being sentenced to death³⁴² '[n]otwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other law'.³⁴³

In 2022, Odhikar reported that people are being sentenced to death every year.³⁴⁴ In 2022, over 2 000 persons were on death row,³⁴⁵ and at least 2 400 persons by the end of 2023, according to Amnesty International.³⁴⁶ In 2022–2023, both Odhikar and Amnesty International recorded 9 executions.³⁴⁷ While Odhikar recorded 728 death sentences,³⁴⁸ Amnesty International recorded 417 – but the source indicated that it believed that more sentences had been handed down.³⁴⁹ The method of execution is hanging³⁵⁰ or shooting³⁵¹ – although shooting has never been enforced as punishment according to a 2020 article of the University of Dhaka.³⁵²

2.4.2. Enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings

As reported by Amnesty International 'Bangladesh has a long, dark history of enforced disappearance',³⁵³ which is commonly referred to as *goom*.³⁵⁴ Bangladesh has not ratified the CED and enforced disappearance is not a recognised crime in domestic law.³⁵⁵ Branches of

³³⁷ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 2

³³⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Imposition of the death penalty and its impact, 27 April 2022, [url](#), p. 1; Rahman, M. M. and Wadud, P., The Death Penalty and Death Row Prisoners in Bangladesh, Faculty Of Law Blogs, University Of Oxford, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

³³⁹ Death Penalty Project (The), A punishment reserved for the poor and marginalised? New study shines light on the profiles and experiences of death row inmates in Bangladesh, 29 March 2022, [url](#); New York Times (The), Bangladesh to Allow Death Penalty for Rape Convictions, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ Harm Reduction International, The Death Penalty For Drug Offences: Global Overview 2022, 2023, [url](#); pp. 41, 43, 47; Daily Star (The), Death penalty for carrying yaba, heroin, 23 October 2018, [url](#)

³⁴¹ Bangladesh, The Penal Code, 1860, Chapter XVI 354A, [url](#); Daily Star (The), 3 get death penalty for kidnap, murder of 3-yr-old girl, 30 May 2023, [url](#)

³⁴² BLAST, The Children Act 2013: A Commentary by Justice Imman Ali, 2013, [url](#), p. 16

³⁴³ Bangladesh, The Children Act, 2013, [url](#), para. 33

³⁴⁴ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Imposition of the death penalty and its impact, 27 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 1–2

³⁴⁵ AI, Death Sentences and Executions 2022, 2023, [url](#) p. 1; Odhikar, Bangladesh: Imposition of the death penalty and its impact, 27 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³⁴⁶ AI, Death sentences and executions 2023, 29 May 2024, [url](#), p. 21

³⁴⁷ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 2; Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 53; AI, Death sentences and executions 2023, 29 May 2024, [url](#), p. 21; AI, Death sentences and executions 2022, 16 March 2023, [url](#), p. 21

³⁴⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 2; Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 53

³⁴⁹ AI, Death sentences and executions 2023, 29 May 2024, [url](#), p. 21; AI, Death sentences and executions 2022, 16 March 2023, [url](#), p. 21

³⁵⁰ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Imposition of the death penalty and its impact, 27 April 2022, [url](#), p. 3

³⁵¹ World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (The), Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#)

³⁵² University of Dhaka, Living Under Sentence of Death, December 2020, [url](#), p. 24

³⁵³ AI, Human Rights Charter – Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#), p. 3

³⁵⁴ Himal, The uses and abuses of Bangladesh's law-enforcement and prison systems, 29 January 2024, [url](#); Free Voice, Disappearance tells it all, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ AI, Human Rights Charter – Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#), p. 3; RFK Human rights, Bangladesh: Government must investigate all cases of enforced disappearance, stop acts of retaliation, hold perpetrators accountable, and ensure the security of victims' families, 25 May 2023, [url](#)



law enforcement, including the RAB and the Detective Branch, have engaged in enforced disappearances³⁵⁶ and extrajudicial killings.³⁵⁷ Local and regional human rights organisations have counted around 2 600 extrajudicial killings since 2009.³⁵⁸ The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) stated that enforced disappearance became widespread after the AL came to power in 2009, and ‘continues to take place with blatant impunity’, although it decreased in numbers after the US imposed sanctions on the RAB.³⁵⁹

The government has reportedly been using enforced disappearance as a tool to suppress dissent and spread fear.³⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch described enforced disappearances as a ‘hallmark’ of Sheikh Hasina’s rule,³⁶¹ and among those forcibly disappeared were leaders and supporters of opposition parties,³⁶² alleged Islamic militants,³⁶³ and seemingly ordinary people.³⁶⁴ Family members of forcibly disappeared individuals have been put under surveillance,³⁶⁵ threatened and harassed after seeking justice.³⁶⁶ This includes reports of authorities showing up at their homes and pressuring them to sign false statements that the victims had not been forcibly disappeared, and that they had ‘misled’ the police.³⁶⁷ More information is available in section [4.1. Political activists, journalists, and human rights defenders](#)

Victims have reportedly been abducted by men in plainclothes claiming to represent the law enforcement agencies.³⁶⁸ Sometimes victims have been deprived of their liberty repeated times, sometimes directly after being released from jail,³⁶⁹ finding themselves in a continuous cycle of arrests.³⁷⁰ In 2022 and 2023, Odhikar recorded 73 enforced disappearances in total carried out by law enforcement agencies.³⁷¹ Meanwhile, the United States Department of State (USDOS), citing an anonymous local human rights organisation, reported on 16 enforced

³⁵⁶ AI, Human Rights Charter – Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#), p. 3; Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 44

³⁵⁷ Riaz, A., Executions at Will?, March 2022, CGS, [url](#), pp. 5, 15; Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 28–29

³⁵⁸ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 27; VOA, No Extrajudicial Killings, Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh, Bachelet Is Told, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁹ AHRC, Bangladesh: Government must investigate all cases of enforced disappearance, stop acts of retaliation, hold perpetrators accountable, and ensure the security of victims’ families, 25 May 2023, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ ADPAN et al., Bangladesh, Government must cease enforced disappearances, stop harassment of the victims’ families and hold perpetrators accountable, 29 August 2023, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

³⁶¹ HRW, Decade of Disappearances, n.d., [url](#)

³⁶² Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 46; AP, Thousands of opposition activists languish in prison as Bangladesh gears up for national election, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

³⁶³ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 43; Fidh, Bangladesh: Government must cease enforced disappearances, stop harassment of the victims’ families and hold perpetrators accountable, 30 August 2023, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ Netra News, Secret prisoners of Dhaka, 14 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁵ AHRC, Bangladesh: Government Must Bear Responsibilities if Victims of Enforced Disappearances are Harmed, 8 September 2022, [url](#); Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 44

³⁶⁶ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 44; HRW, Bangladesh: Open Forced Disappearances Inquiry, 29 August 2023, [url](#); Riaz, A., Where are they?, March 2022, [url](#), p. 10

³⁶⁷ HRW, Bangladesh: Open Forced Disappearances Inquiry, 29 August 2023, [url](#); New Age, Police force victim families to write new versions, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 46; Riaz, A., Where are They?, Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh, CGS, March 2022, [url](#), p. 10

³⁶⁹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 3

³⁷⁰ Himat, The uses and abuses of Bangladesh’s law-enforcement and prison systems, 29 January 2024, [url](#); Guardian (The), Full prisons and false charges: Bangladesh opposition faces pre-election crackdown, 10 November 2023, [url](#)

³⁷¹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 47; Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 39



disappearances in January–September 2022,³⁷² and 32 enforced disappearances in January–September 2023.³⁷³ Human Rights Watch reported that local human rights monitors have recorded over 600 enforced disappearances since 2009. Most victims have reappeared after being released, or have reappeared in court, or were killed during alleged ‘armed exchange’ with security forces. As of 20 August 2023, nearly 100 individuals remained missing.³⁷⁴

Extrajudicial executions committed by the RAB have reportedly been deliberate, planned³⁷⁵ and covered up.³⁷⁶ In 2022 and 2023, Odhikar recorded 55 extrajudicial killings in total committed by law enforcement agencies,³⁷⁷ while another local human rights organisation, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), recorded 39 extrajudicial killings and custodial deaths in the same period.³⁷⁸ Both sources report on eight individuals being tortured to death in 2023,³⁷⁹ while in 2022, Odhikar recorded 10 cases,³⁸⁰ and ASK 8 cases.³⁸¹

Public lynching of suspected criminals has also been reported.³⁸² The tendency of people to take the law into their own hands through mass beatings reportedly derived from a lack of trust in state institutions.³⁸³ Odhikar recorded a total of 97 deaths due to public lynching in 2022–2023,³⁸⁴ while ASK recorded 87 deaths due to public lynching in the same period.³⁸⁵ In 2023, Odhikar noted that a significant number of victims were suspected of theft or robbery, and that one victim was a teenager and another a mentally challenged man.³⁸⁶

2.4.3. Torture and physical abuse

Bangladesh has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT)³⁸⁷ which establishes an international control mechanism for places of detention in order to ‘prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’.³⁸⁸

³⁷² USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. b

³⁷³ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 1. b

³⁷⁴ HRW, Bangladesh: Open Forced Disappearances Inquiry, 29 August 2023, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ DW, ‘Death squad’: Inside Bangladesh’s Rapid Action Battalion, 4 March 2023, [url](#); Riaz, A., Executions at Will? Extrajudicial Killings by State Actors in Bangladesh, CGS, March 2022, [url](#), p. 7

³⁷⁶ DW, ‘Death squad’: Inside Bangladesh’s Rapid Action Battalion, 4 March 2023, [url](#); Radio Sweden, Exclusive: Officer Exposes Brutal Killings by Bangladeshi Elite Police Unit RAB, 4 April 2017, [url](#)

³⁷⁷ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 49; Odhikar, Annual Human Rights Report 2022, Bangladesh, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 29

³⁷⁸ ASK, Extrajudicial killings and Custodial Deaths, January- December 2023, 8 January 2024, [url](#)

³⁷⁹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 49; ASK, Extrajudicial killings and Custodial Deaths, January- December 2023, 8 January 2024, [url](#)

³⁸⁰ Odhikar, Annual Human Rights Report 2022, Bangladesh, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 29

³⁸¹ ASK, Extrajudicial killings and Custodial Deaths, January- December 2022, 3 January 2023, [url](#);

³⁸² Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para 60; ASK, Mob Beating Jan-Feb 2024, 13 March 2024, [url](#); ASK, Mob Beating (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#)

³⁸³ Odhikar, Three-Month Human Rights Monitoring Report on Bangladesh, 20 April 2022, [url](#) p. 13; Rahim, M. A. and Morsalin Hider, S. M. Extra-Judicial Killings by the Law Enforcing Agencies in Bangladesh: A Threat to the Public Confidence in the Judiciary, 19 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 30–31

³⁸⁴ Odhikar, Annual Human Rights Report 2022 Bangladesh, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 61; Odhikar, Annual Human Rights Report 2022 Bangladesh, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 50

³⁸⁵ ASK, Mob Beating (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#); ASK, Mob Beating (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁸⁶ Odhikar, Bangladesh Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 60

³⁸⁷ United Nations Treaty Collection, 9. b Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, status as at 25 March 2024, 25 March 2024, [url](#)

³⁸⁸ OHCHR, Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 18 December 2002, [url](#), art. 1



Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment is however prohibited in the constitution and by law.³⁸⁹

Torture and other forms of abuse were reportedly widespread practice within law enforcement;³⁹⁰ inter alia as a means to extract forced confessions³⁹¹ but also to humiliate the victims, and instil fear according to AHRC and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).³⁹² Victims of detention and subsequent torture have included opposition members³⁹³ and other critics,³⁹⁴ alleged ‘militants’,³⁹⁵ and ordinary citizens.³⁹⁶ Law enforcement agencies have reportedly enjoyed extensive impunity,³⁹⁷ and have harassed torture victims and relatives filing cases against law enforcement officers.³⁹⁸ As reported by Human Rights Watch, only one case of torture has led to conviction under Bangladesh’s Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act since it was adopted in 2013.³⁹⁹

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has raised ‘deep concerns about the serious allegations of torture involving government ministries’, Furthermore, the Committee against Torture raised concern on allegations of the use of torture being ‘widespread and routine’ among law enforcement officials, including RAB.⁴⁰⁰ USDOS reported that torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment was being employed by ‘security forces, including those from the intelligence services, police, and soldiers seconded into civilian law enforcement agencies’.⁴⁰¹

2.4.4. Prison conditions

According to USDOS, ‘[p]rison conditions were harsh and at times life threatening due to severe overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and physical abuse’⁴⁰² The government permitted government and non-government observers to visit prisons, but no reports from such inspections were published.⁴⁰³ Available reports indicated that Bangladesh’s prisons are

³⁸⁹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 1. c

³⁹⁰ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 50; AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁹¹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 53; AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁹² AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁹³ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 4, para. 54; VOA, Six Bangladesh Opposition Activists Die in Custody, 19 December 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review – Bangladesh, Compilation of UN information, 30 August 2023, [url](#), para. 30

³⁹⁵ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 53; USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. c

³⁹⁶ AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Ordinary citizens’ vulnerability to custodial torture, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 50; AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#); New Age, Justice must be ensured for custodial torture victims, 10 February 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁹ HRW, Allegations of Bangladesh Police Torture, Illegal Detentions, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review – Bangladesh, Compilation of UN information, 30 August 2023, [url](#), para. 23

⁴⁰¹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 1. c

⁴⁰² USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 1. c

⁴⁰³ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. c; International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024



generally overcrowded.⁴⁰⁴ As of December 2023, the prison population stood at 84 851 inmates according to figures of the Bangladesh Prison Directorate,⁴⁰⁵ which is nearly twice as many inmates as the maximum capacity of the prison system.⁴⁰⁶ The USDOS reported on overcrowding, inadequate facilities, physical abuse and lack of sanitation.⁴⁰⁷ Odhikar referred to overcrowding as a ‘humanitarian crisis’ impacting the possibilities for inmates to eat, sleep and move.⁴⁰⁸ After a visit to Dhaka central jail in Keraniganj in November 2022, the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, noted that older prisoners suffered among other things from scabies and allergies, possibly ‘linked to the overcrowding of the prisons’.⁴⁰⁹ There were moreover not enough physicians to provide healthcare to the prison population.⁴¹⁰

Pretrial detainees comprised 75 % of the total prison population according to the World Prison Brief.⁴¹¹ Pretrial detainees were commonly incarcerated with convicted persons.⁴¹² Mahler noted that some of the older prisoners in pre-trial detention had awaited their trial for over five years.⁴¹³ Moreover, although the Children Act of 2013 provides for the separation of children from adults in detention,⁴¹⁴ many juveniles were incarcerated with adults according to USDOS,⁴¹⁵ and in some instances children were imprisoned together with their convicted mothers.⁴¹⁶

There were reports of political activists being tortured while being imprisoned.⁴¹⁷ In 2023, 128 persons died in prison according to Odhikar’s records, which state authorities stated to be due to ‘illness’ (121 cases), and ‘suicides’ (2 cases).⁴¹⁸ In the same period, ASK recorded 106 deaths in jail and custody, whereof 64 awaited their trial.⁴¹⁹ After a grand rally on 28 October 2023, several BNP leaders and activists were detained.⁴²⁰ Odhikar reported that eight of the arrested BNP leaders had died in custody before the end of the year.⁴²¹ According to a joint

⁴⁰⁴ Himat, The uses and abuses of Bangladesh’s law-enforcement and prison systems, 29 January 2024, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. c

⁴⁰⁵ Himat, The uses and abuses of Bangladesh’s law-enforcement and prison systems, 29 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶ Himat, The uses and abuses of Bangladesh’s law-enforcement and prison systems, 29 January 2024, [url](#); International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁴⁰⁷ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 1. c

⁴⁰⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 55

⁴⁰⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Bangladesh, Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, 24 July 2023, [url](#), para. 81

⁴¹⁰ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. c; Prothom Alo, Prisons teeming with inmates, 8 November 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹¹ WPB, Bangladesh, n.d, [url](#)

⁴¹² USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. c

⁴¹³ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Bangladesh, Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, 24 July 2023, [url](#), paras. 80–81

⁴¹⁴ BLAST, The Children Act 2013: A Commentary by Justice Imman Ali, 2013, [url](#), p. 17; Bangladesh, The Children Act, 2013, [url](#), para. 33

⁴¹⁵ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. c

⁴¹⁶ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. c; Dhaka Tribune, CRAC highlights plight of children in prisons with their mothers, urges action, 22 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴¹⁷ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 4, para. 54; Fidh, Bangladesh An election in name only, 5 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴¹⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 57

⁴¹⁹ ASK, Deaths in Jail Custody (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴²⁰ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 32; VOA, Six Bangladesh Opposition Activists Die in Custody, 19 December 2023, [url](#)

⁴²¹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 32



report by AHRC and OMCT, deaths in custody due to torture were being disguised as ‘suicide’.⁴²²

Odhikar further reported that there were ‘allegations of irregularities and corruption’ involving prison superintendents and jailers. Prison officials reportedly collected money from prisoners systematically, tortured inmates to extort money, accepted bribes from inmates, and engaged in the ‘sale’ of new prisoners to old inmates (as explained by the source: handing new prisoners over to the old inmates, and later giving them facilities after extorting money and torturing them if they cannot pay). In Sylhet Central Jail, juvenile inmates were reportedly sexually abused, and inmates were handcuffed and beaten with sticks.⁴²³ Based on interviews with former inmates of Sylhet Central Jail, Prothom Alo reported that the guards forced ‘children of correction centres and new inmates’ to stay with old inmates in exchange of 2 000–3 000 *taka* [about EUR 16–24]. The same source reported on inmates stating that they had been beaten up by prison guards, and that surveillance cameras had been dismantled to conceal irregularities. Former inmates also stated that water was unavailable and the food quality poor, and that they faced torture if they complained about such issues.⁴²⁴

⁴²² AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴²³ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 59, p. 38 [footnote 161]

⁴²⁴ Prothom Alo, Sylhet Central Jail: Anything available in exchange of money, 30 September 2022, [url](#)



3. Justice and security sector

As mentioned in the Introduction this chapter focuses on the functionality of the Bangladeshi justice and security sector, in terms of its capacity and integrity to carry out mandated tasks. While this chapter focuses on legal remedies for victims of crime, information on abuse committed by law enforcement agencies is available in sections [2.2. Political context](#), [2.3. Security situation](#), [2.4. Respect of human rights](#), and [4. Treatment of specific profiles and groups of the population](#).

Moreover, relevant information on the structure of the Bangladeshi state and the prevalence of corruption is available in sections [2.1. State structure](#) and [2.2. Political context](#).

3.1. Police

3.1.1. Organisation

The Bangladeshi police force is headed by the Inspector General of Police (IGP).⁴²⁵ Below the IGP there are several units,⁴²⁶ divided by district or metropolitan area and specialisation.⁴²⁷ The administrative divisions and their subdistricts are covered by the Range Police,⁴²⁸ while urban areas are under the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police (including Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, and Barisal).⁴²⁹ Specialised branches include the Criminal Investigation Department (CID),⁴³⁰ which has designated units to combat trafficking in human beings, financial crimes, and terrorism.⁴³¹ Furthermore, there are armed battalions (including the RAB) formed to ‘maintain internal security, contain armed gangs, recover illegal arms and explosives’ and to ‘help police in maintaining law and order’.⁴³²

According to the Prime Minister, as cited by local media, there were 659 police stations across Bangladesh in 2022.⁴³³ Meanwhile, UNFPA stated that there were 630 police stations as of March 2024.⁴³⁴

⁴²⁵ Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Police, 2024, [url](#); Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Units Police Headquarters, 2024, [url](#); Fidh, Out of Control, Human rights and rule of law crises in Bangladesh, [url](#), p. 7

⁴²⁶ Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Police, 2024, [url](#); Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Units Police Headquarters, 2024, [url](#)

⁴²⁷ Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Police, 2024, [url](#); Fidh, Out of Control, Human rights and rule of law crises in Bangladesh, [url](#), p. 8

⁴²⁸ Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Range Police, 2024, [url](#); Afroze, S., Modernization and Policing in South Asia: The Case of Bangladesh with Particular Reference to Women in Policing, February 2017, [url](#), pp. 256–257

⁴²⁹ Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Metropolitan Police, 2024, [url](#)

⁴³⁰ Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police Units Criminal Investigation Department (CID), 2024, [url](#); Fidh, Out of Control, Human rights and rule of law crises in Bangladesh, [url](#), p. 8

⁴³¹ Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Units Criminal Investigation Department (CID), 2024, [url](#)

⁴³² Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Units Armed Police Battalion (APBN), 2024, [url](#)

⁴³³ Prothom Alo, PM Hasina asks police to earn people’s confidence, trust, 10 April 2022, [url](#); Daily Star (The), PM opens ‘Service Desk at 659 police stations, 10 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ UNFPA Bangladesh [Facebook], posted on: 17 March 2024, [url](#)



3.1.2. Representation and recruitment

As of early 2024, there were over 200 000 police officers in Bangladesh.⁴³⁵ Women made up approximately 8 % of the total force.⁴³⁶ According to Iftekhar Zaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), ethnic and religious minorities were represented in the police force, although the possibility for them to be promoted has been limited to mid-level or senior mid-level.⁴³⁷ An NGO representative however told OFPRA that minorities were ‘poorly represented’ within the police.⁴³⁸

According to the executive director of TIB, the recruitment process of the police was quite robust and with ‘potentially competitive exams’ taking place. Nevertheless, the same source mentioned integrity issues in the selection procedure, and that successful candidates passing the exams were not necessarily recruited. He further explained that the security agencies played a ‘significant role’ in the recruitment process, as they have been checking the ‘political acceptability’ or ‘unacceptable track records’ of the candidates as well as their political linkages or political identity.⁴³⁹ A research study by David Jackman, research fellow at the University of Oxford, and Mathilde Maitrot, research fellow at the University of Bath, based on over one hundred interviews with political leaders, activists, journalists and civil servants in 2018, found that there was an alleged tendency of increasingly recruiting individuals from the AL’s student wing (Chhatra League). Remaining officers that were leaning towards BNP were reportedly serving in lower ranks, and had been given ‘obscure postings’, ‘unimportant roles’ or had remained on the payroll but without a ‘day-to-day role’.⁴⁴⁰ Similarly, Zaman reported that some individuals within the police have been trying to serve public interest with honesty and integrity, although ‘they consider themselves in the category of extinct species’, further explaining that such individuals have been vulnerable to accusations of being part of the opposing political camp. According to the source, this is a common way of victimising officials at various levels, and they might be turned into so-called ‘officer[s] on special duty’, meaning that they are stripped off relevant official duties, or can be transferred to remote or insignificant posts, or forced to retire. Zaman concluded that the recruitment, postings, promotions, and transfers of an officer may depend on whether and to what extent the individual is serving the interests of the ruling party.⁴⁴¹

The interviewees of Jackman’s and Maitrot’s study did not only state that individuals aligned with the AL were increasingly recruited, but also individuals from the Prime Minister’s home district Gopalganj.⁴⁴² Other sources confirmed that individuals connected to the Prime Minister’s home districts had been recruited or speedily promoted.⁴⁴³ One example is Benazir

⁴³⁵ Dhaka Tribune, Home Minister urges city mayors to ensure traffic police rest, 1 February 2024, [url](#); Daily Star (The), When cops turn part-time robbers, 24 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴³⁶ BPWN, Journey of BPWN, 2024, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, IGP: Women make up over 8% of police force, 30 November 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁷ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴³⁸ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 53

⁴³⁹ Iftekhar Zaman, Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁴⁰ Jackman, D. and Maitrot, M., The Patry-Police Nexus in Bangladesh, the Journal of Development Studies, 5 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 1517, 1522

⁴⁴¹ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁴² Jackman, D. and Maitrot, M., The Patry-Police Nexus in Bangladesh, the Journal of Development Studies, 5 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 1517, 1522

⁴⁴³ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024; France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 17



Ahmed,⁴⁴⁴ a former senior police officer, who has been accused of corruption by local media.⁴⁴⁵ Zaman added that the tendency of recruiting from the prime minister's home district is not uncommon as it takes place in all public services, and neither new to the current prime minister as it occurred under earlier administrations as well.⁴⁴⁶

In their research study, Jackman and Maitrot found that members of parliament (MPs) and police officers at district and *thana* levels had close relationships. MPs had 'considerable power to alter the careers of individual police officers', for example, by requesting transfers.⁴⁴⁷ Moreover, interviewed police officers stated that they needed to make significant payments to acquire certain posts, to get promoted or transferred – describing this practice as 'routine and ubiquitous'. One police officer stated that there was a 'bidding' contest for his position, and he won by paying 7 million *taka*. Another officer added that payments were also required 'to avoid being transferred to undesirable locations'.⁴⁴⁸ A professor of criminology, as cited in the Daily Star, also pointed out that police officials got 'transferred or promoted in exchange for bribes'.⁴⁴⁹ An academic article, authored by Mohammad Abdul Jabber and Nazmus Sakib of the University of Dhaka, and Mostafizur Rahman, media officer of the RAB-12 in Shirajganj, stated that the 'police face biases in regard to the promotion and performance appraisal system', with nepotism influencing some promotions, and police officers being 'subject to extraneous postings and transfers'.⁴⁵⁰

3.1.3. Reporting a crime

In order to report a crime, the normal procedure is to submit an *ejahar* (a depiction of the criminal event) to the police.⁴⁵¹ The police, in turn, establishes a First Information Report (FIR).⁴⁵² If the crime is serious⁴⁵³ and thus considered 'cognisable', it falls under the police station's jurisdiction and the police may initiate an investigation⁴⁵⁴ without a warrant as per the Code of Criminal Procedure.⁴⁵⁵ This law does not, however, provide examples of crimes qualifying as 'cognisable'.⁴⁵⁶ Sources consulted by IRB Canada, described cognisable offences as 'serious', and among the examples provided were rape, murder, theft and kidnapping.⁴⁵⁷ The government of Bangladesh has stated that torture qualifies as a cognisable offence, as

⁴⁴⁴ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁴⁵ Dhaka Tribune, Benazir Ahmed responds to corruption allegations, 2 April 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁴⁷ Jackman, D. and Maitrot, M., The Patry-Police Nexus in Bangladesh, the Journal of Development Studies, 5 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 1523–1524

⁴⁴⁸ Jackman, D. and Maitrot, M., The Patry-Police Nexus in Bangladesh, the Journal of Development Studies, 5 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 1524–1525

⁴⁴⁹ Daily Star (The), Errant cops: Leniency lends them impunity, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ Jabber, M. A. et al., Exploring the roles and challenges of the servant leadership: A critical examination of the Bangladesh police, 2 January 2023, Heliyon, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵¹ Daily Star (The), How to take legal action if you're a victim of harassment, 6 July 2023, [url](#); Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁵² Daily Star (The), How to take legal action if you're a victim of harassment, 6 July 2023, [url](#); Canada, IRB, Bangladesh: Requirements and procedures to file a complaint with the police, 4 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ Daily Star (The), How to take legal action if you're a victim of harassment, 6 July 2023, [url](#); Canada, IRB, Bangladesh: Requirements and procedures to file a complaint with the police, 4 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ Daily Star (The), How to take legal action if you're a victim of harassment, 6 July 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, Part V, Chapter XIV, 22 March 1898, [url](#), para. 156 (1–3)

⁴⁵⁵ Bangladesh, The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, Part I, Chapter I, 22 March 1898, [url](#), para. 4 (f)

⁴⁵⁶ Bangladesh, The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, March 1898, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ Canada, IRB, Bangladesh: Requirements and procedures to file a complaint with the police, 4 January 2022, [url](#)



per the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act of 2013.⁴⁵⁸ The CSA adopted in 2023 also identifies ‘cognisable’ offences:⁴⁵⁹ according to an unofficial translation, these included ‘illegal access to critical information structure’, ‘damage of computer, computer system’, ‘cyber terrorism’, and ‘abetment of committing an offence under the act’.⁴⁶⁰

‘Non-cognisable’ offences are referred to a magistrate who decides whether to order the police to initiate an investigation or not.⁴⁶¹

In principle, a FIR is to be filed at the police station responsible for the area in which the crime was committed.⁴⁶² A local barrister noted in a blog post that, although the police may refuse to register a FIR for crimes taking place outside of their jurisdiction, the Code of Criminal Procedure does not mention jurisdictional limits in the process of registering a FIR.⁴⁶³

According to a Facebook post of the First Capital University in Dhaka, a so-called ‘Zero FIR’ can be filed at any police station, irrespective of the police station’s geographic jurisdiction.⁴⁶⁴ According to an anonymous source consulted by IRB Canada, described as a professor at the University of Dhaka, ‘anyone can provide information orally or in writing to the police regarding a cognizable offence’. Sources consulted by IRB Canada further described that oral statements were written down by the police and signed by the informant, in order to file a FIR.⁴⁶⁵

Some sources reported that the police demanded bribes in order to file a report.⁴⁶⁶ In a household survey carried out by TIB, over 80 % of households experiencing corruption within law enforcement agencies, had faced corruption when seeking to file a FIR. Filing a FIR, moreover, required the highest amount of bribe money recorded within law enforcement agencies: 10 544 *taka* on average [which constituted about EUR 106 at the time].⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁵⁸ UN Committee against Torture, Initial report submitted by Bangladesh under article 19 of the Convention, due in 1999*, 3 October 2019, [url](#), para. 35

⁴⁵⁹ TIB, Digital Security Act 2018 and the draft Cyber Security Act 2023 : A Comparative Analysis, 2023, [url](#); Tarique Barkatullah [LinkedIn], posted on: 27 October 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, সাইবার নিরাপত্তা আইন, ২০২৩ (২০২৩ সনের ৩৯ নং আইন) [Cyber Security Act, 2023, (Act No. 29 of 2023)], 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ Tarique Barkatullah [LinkedIn], posted on: 27 October 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ Bangladesh, The Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, Part V, Chapter XIV, 22 March 1898, [url](#), para. 155 (1); Bangladesh, The Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, Part V, Chapter XIV, 22 March 1898, [url](#), para. 155 (2–3);

Canada, IRB, Bangladesh: Requirements and procedures to file a complaint with the police, 4 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶² Khan, A. R., India’s Zero FIR is not a new concept to Bangladesh, Here’s why, LawyersClubBangladesh.com, 2 February 2022, [url](#); Bangladesh, Reviews on Prosecution Service Framework in Bangladesh, Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, [2018], [url](#), p. 17

⁴⁶³ Khan, A. R., India’s Zero FIR is not a new concept to Bangladesh, Here’s why, LawyersClubBangladesh.com, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ আইন বিভাগ ফাস্ট ক্যাপিটাল ইউনিভার্সিটি [Facebook], posted on: 15 August 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁵ Canada, IRB, Bangladesh: Requirements and procedures to file a complaint with the police, 4 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁶ Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Atrocity Crimes Risk Assessment Series, Bangladesh, The University of Queensland, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10; Daily Star (The), Errant cops: Leniency lends them impunity, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁷ TIB, Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2021, Extended Executive Summary, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 23



3.1.4. Competence and responsiveness

Sources reported some shortcomings including their lack of equipment and lack of training.⁴⁶⁸ In a multi-authored academic article, authored by associates of Dhaka University and a RAB media official, the police was described as ‘overburdened with work’, and also ‘underpaid’ when compared to other professions. The article further stated that the police had ‘minimal logistical support’ and were not equipped nor trained to handle modern crime.⁴⁶⁹ On the contrary, the executive director of TIB, Iftekhar Zaman, explained that the low salaries used to be a factor fostering corruption, but recently police salaries had been raised significantly. The source described law enforcement agencies as ‘reasonably well-trained’ with regular and advanced training programmes, including on advanced technologies. However, the source confirmed that the infrastructure and logistics were below necessary standards. He had for example heard of cases in some remote areas, where the police did not have service vehicles to transport dead bodies when handling killings. Zaman assessed that, although both infrastructure and professional skills would require improvements, law enforcement had ‘sufficient skills’ – the main issue related to integrity issues impacting their existing capacity. Further explaining that, even though skills have been available in logistics, human resources, and technology, they have not been duly applied with honesty and integrity as per existing rules and regulations.⁴⁷⁰

In the 2023 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, Bangladesh ranked 123 out of 142 countries, and scored 0.30 (out of 1)⁴⁷¹ as regards criminal justice. While the effectiveness of the criminal investigation system scored 0.40 (out of 1), the lower average scoring was due to shortcomings in the criminal justice system’s impartiality, government influence, and due process of the law and rights of the accused (scoring 0.27 out of 1). The prevalence of corruption in the criminal system scored 0.32 (out of 1).⁴⁷²

The police is the entity responsible for crime investigation in the criminal justice system.⁴⁷³ Zaman explained that money used to be a dominant factor, but that influence nowadays depends on personal linkages. According to him, some individuals with connections enjoy ‘unlimited rights’ and ‘can do and undo anything’.⁴⁷⁴ The Daily Star also reported that influential individuals could impact the outcomes of cases.⁴⁷⁵ According to a professor of criminology, as cited in the Daily Star, field-level police may ‘act according to politically connected or influential people’s bidding while registering cases and making arrests’.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁶⁸ Jabber, M. A. et al., Exploring the roles and challenges of the servant leadership: A critical examination of the Bangladesh police, 2 January 2023, Heliyon, [url](#), p. 7; Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁶⁹ Jabber, M. A. et al., Exploring the roles and challenges of the servant leadership: A critical examination of the Bangladesh police, 2 January 2023, Heliyon, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁷⁰ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁷¹ ‘The scores range from 0 to 1, where 1 signifies the highest possible score (strong adherence to rule of law) and 0 signifies the lowest possible score (weak adherence to rule of law). See WJP, Rule of Law Index 2023, [url](#), p. 39

⁴⁷² WJP, Bangladesh, Criminal Justice for Bangladesh, 25 October 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ Daily Star (The), Where is our independent prosecution service?, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁷⁵ Daily Star (The), Errant cops: Leniency lends them impunity, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ Daily Star (The), Errant cops: Leniency lends them impunity, 4 October 2022, [url](#)



3.1.5. Victim and witness protection

Bangladesh does not have a law specifically addressing victim⁴⁷⁷ or witness protection.⁴⁷⁸ There have been draft bills addressing the issue, but no legislation has been passed.⁴⁷⁹ Neither is there any protection mechanism in place for victims and witnesses.⁴⁸⁰ According to the Business Standard, the absence of a protection mechanism was reportedly one reason why many victims and witnesses refrained from reporting crimes.⁴⁸¹ This was also stated in a special issue of the Bangladesh Journal of Law, published before the reference period (August 2021), in which an associate professor at Dhaka University noted that there were ‘no adequate victim and witness protection provisions under the main substantive and procedural laws’.⁴⁸² Some special status provide rights for victims of gender-based crimes (more information is available in section [3.5.3 Violence against women and girls](#)), and some specific provisions deal with the rights of witnesses and victims,⁴⁸³ such as the right to camera trials in closed-doors settings,⁴⁸⁴ and the specific criminalisation of threatening a victim or witness.⁴⁸⁵ There were also some provisions for the victims and witnesses of trafficking in human beings, including identity protection, secured travel to legal proceedings, and protected residence, as well as financial assistance.⁴⁸⁶ A joint research report by the Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, however, identified the need to expand victim protection structures.⁴⁸⁷ Another research study focusing on organ trafficking also noted a lack of victim and witness protection, and argued that existing laws were ‘largely ineffective from a criminal justice and human rights perspective’.⁴⁸⁸ More information on trafficking in human beings is available in section [3.5.1. Trafficking in human beings](#).

Victims, witnesses and their family members were reportedly threatened, and sometimes harassed and assaulted by offenders for filing complaints⁴⁸⁹ or refrained from testifying in court fearing for their or their family members safety.⁴⁹⁰ According to Arafat Reza Jaan,

⁴⁷⁷ Tahmidur Rahman Lawfirm, Witness Protection laws in Bangladesh, 22 October 2022, [url](#); Bari, H., An Appraisal of Victim Protection in Bangladesh, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 10 July 2016, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ Rahman, M. K. and Rahman M. M., Addressing the Necessity for a ‘Witness Protection Law’ to Eliminate Backlogs in Criminal Cases in Bangladesh, Indonesian Journal of Law and Society, 31 December 2022, [url](#), p. 167; Tahmidur Rahman Lawfirm, Witness Protection laws in Bangladesh, 22 October 2022, [url](#); Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁷⁹ Business Standard (The), Why victim and witness protection mechanism is imperative, 11 February 2024, [url](#); Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁸⁰ BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), p. 6; Business Standard (The), Why victim and witness protection mechanism is imperative, 11 February 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸¹ Business Standard (The), Why victim and witness protection mechanism is imperative, 11 February 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸² Al Farque, A., Goals and Purposes of Criminal Justice System in Bangladesh: an Evaluation, 2021, [url](#), p. 21

⁴⁸³ Business Standard (The), Why victim and witness protection mechanism is imperative, 11 February 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ Tahmidur Rahman Lawfirm, Camera Trial in Bangladesh, 3 March 2024, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Rape attempt: Pori Moni allowed closed-door deposition, 25 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁵ Rahman, M. K. and Rahman, M. M., Addressing the Necessity for a ‘Witness Protection Law’ to Eliminate Backlogs in Criminal Cases in Bangladesh, Indonesian Journal of Law and Society, 2022, [url](#), p. 180; Daily Star (The), The state of witness protection in Bangladesh, 7 April 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 59

⁴⁸⁷ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 15

⁴⁸⁸ Fatima, M. K. and Yea, S., Bangladesh’s Body Parts Trade: A Critical Analysis of Gaps in Justice, 31 August 2023, Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ Business Standard (The), Why victim and witness protection mechanism is imperative, 11 February 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁰ Daily Star (The), The state of witness protection in Bangladesh, 7 April 2023, [url](#)



research associate at the BRAC University in Dhaka, ‘many, particularly those living in rural areas’ were discouraged to seek justice due to fear of reprisals from influential community members.⁴⁹¹ Local news media, the Daily Star, also reported on the fear of retaliation as a ‘major worry’ for victims of crime, as ‘perpetrators and their relatives may resort to violence and intimidation’.⁴⁹² Likewise, Zaman stated that people refrained from approaching the police due to the risk of getting ‘entangled in the process’ and subject to harassment ‘endlessly’.⁴⁹³

3.1.6. Public perception and public trust

As mentioned in section [2.4. Respect of human rights](#), law enforcement has been used as a tool for political purposes,⁴⁹⁴ and involved in human rights abuse⁴⁹⁵ and other irregularities such as demanding bribes from the public,⁴⁹⁶ and there have also been reported cases of police personnel being involved in crimes such as robbery,⁴⁹⁷ drug trade,⁴⁹⁸ and rape.⁴⁹⁹

According to TIB who published a survey over corruption in public service sectors on 31 August 2022, law enforcement was perceived as the most corrupt state authority.⁵⁰⁰ Although many police officers are involved in crimes, disciplinary action is rarely taken⁵⁰¹ and some sources noted a culture of impunity.⁵⁰² According to the Daily Star, referring to statistics from the Bangladeshi Police, 1 731 police staff faced ‘departmental actions’ in 2022, and the majority were suspended or transferred. The same source referred to ‘experts’ saying that ‘the fact that they managed to get away with what is basically a slap on the wrist is one of the main reasons why cops are increasingly getting involved in criminal activities’.⁵⁰³

Irregularities within law enforcement negatively impacted the public trust.⁵⁰⁴ A survey from 2022 carried out inter alia by the Asia Foundation, found that the police was the least trusted institution, being trusted by 29 % of respondents.⁵⁰⁵ During a speech held on the occasion of the ‘Police Week 2024’, the President acknowledged that people were afraid of going to the police stations.⁵⁰⁶ According to the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, the

⁴⁹¹ Jaan, A. R., What makes access to Justice elusive in Bangladesh?, South Asia @ LSE, 1 May 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹² Daily Star (The), How to take legal action if you’re a victim of harassment, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹³ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁴⁹⁴ Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, Bangladesh: Government Must Stop Human Rights Violations and End Impunity, 9 December 2022, [url](#); AHRC and OMCT, Bangladesh: End torture and impunity, 24 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ Uddin, M. K., Human rights abuses and criminal justice in policing practices in Bangladesh, Criminology & Criminal Justice, 25 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Atrocity Crimes Risk Assessment Series, Bangladesh, The University of Queensland, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10; Daily Star (The), Errant cops: Leniency lends them impunity, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ Business Standard (The), 5, including 2 suspended policemen, arrested over robbing man at IFIC Bank, 21 September 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), When cops turn part-time robbers, 24 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ Prothom Alo, Names of police members in DMP’s list of drug dealers, 19 July 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), When cops turn part-time robbers, 24 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Daily Star (The), When cops turn part-time robbers, 24 January 2024, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Khagrachhari police officer sent to jail in rape case, 12 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ TIB, Law enforcement, passport services among the most corrupt sectors in Bangladesh, 7 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Daily Star (The), Errant cops: Leniency lends them impunity, 4 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰² Uddin, M. K., Human rights abuses and criminal justice in policing practices in Bangladesh, Criminology & Criminal Justice, 25 September 2022, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Article 19: Culture of impunity declines confidence in rule of law, 25 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰³ Daily Star (The), Rising crimes by police most worrying, 25 January 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁴ Dhaka Tribune, Article 19: Culture of impunity declines confidence in rule of law, 25 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁵ Asia Foundation (The), The State of Bangladesh’s Political Governance, Development and Society: According to Its Citizens, 2023, [url](#), p. 51

⁵⁰⁶ Dhaka Tribune, President tells police: Do not harass people on streets, 28 February 2024, [url](#)



prevalence of bribes and police harassment in exchange for bribes has caused ‘deep mistrust’ of the police and ‘deters many’ from approaching law enforcement and reporting crimes.⁵⁰⁷ Zaman also reported on a general lack of trust and that people only approach the police when ‘they are forced to’ or ‘have no other option’. Those who would approach the police, would do so with ‘much reluctance’, fear and a ‘deep sense of lack of trust’. Other aspects related to mistrust were the small chances of acquiring justice for people without political connections, and without paying bribes, and the risk of getting ‘entangled in the process’.⁵⁰⁸ A local analyst, anonymised out of security reasons, stated that victims and their families avoid approaching the police even for severe crime such as murder or serial rape, also due to exposure to various forms of harassment from perpetrators, and/or their accomplices, ‘including kingpins behind, who are usually powerful, often with direct or indirect political linkages, which also facilitate collusion of a section of law enforcers including police’.⁵⁰⁹

3.2. Prosecution

The prosecution is organised under the Ministry of Law,⁵¹⁰ and shall not engage in the police’s investigations.⁵¹¹ The role of the prosecutor is to lead the prosecution,⁵¹² i.e. presenting the case in court and formulate ‘arguments as to why the accused ought to be convicted’.⁵¹³

Prosecutors were lawyers⁵¹⁴ and, according to BRAC, public prosecutor are to be appointed from advocates having at least ten years of experience from lower courts.⁵¹⁵ However, there were no general recruitment rules for public prosecutors,⁵¹⁶ but the government has been empowered to appoint public prosecutors,⁵¹⁷ and the selection process has been politicised.⁵¹⁸ As the prosecutor’s positions are not permanent,⁵¹⁹ there has been a historical tendency of new governments to switch prosecutors when coming to power.⁵²⁰

⁵⁰⁷ Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Atrocity Crimes Risk Assessment Series, Bangladesh, The University of Queensland, April 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁰⁸ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁵⁰⁹ Local analyst, email communication, 16 April 2024. The local analyst holds expertise on the justice and security sector of Bangladesh. The source has been anonymised for security reasons.

⁵¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh, 11 April 2016, [url](#), p. 16

⁵¹¹ Dhaka Tribune, Why we need an independent public prosecution service, 6 July 2017, [url](#); Uddin, M. M. et al., Reviews on Prosecution Service Framework in Bangladesh, Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, [2018], [url](#), p. 10

⁵¹² Bangladesh, The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1989, Part VI, Chapter XXIII, 22 March 1898, [url](#)

⁵¹³ Daily Star (The), Where is our independent prosecution service?, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁴ BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh, December 2022, [url](#), p. 31; Uddin, M. M. et al., Reviews on Prosecution Service Framework in Bangladesh, Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, [2018], [url](#), p. 10; International Crisis Group, Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh, 11 April 2016, [url](#), p. 16

⁵¹⁵ BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh, December 2022, [url](#), p. 31

⁵¹⁶ BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh, December 2022, [url](#), p. 31; Daily Star (The), Where is our independent prosecution service?, 4 April 2022, [url](#); Uddin, M. M. et al., Reviews on Prosecution Service Framework in Bangladesh, Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, [2018], [url](#), p. 25

⁵¹⁷ Bangladesh, The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, Part IX, Chapter XXXVIII, 22 March 1898, [url](#), para. 492 (1); Daily Star (The), Where is our independent prosecution service?, 4 April 2022, [url](#); International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁵¹⁸ Uddin, M. M. et al., Reviews on Prosecution Service Framework in Bangladesh, Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, [2018], [url](#), p. 25; Daily Star (The), Where is our independent prosecution service?, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁹ International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁵²⁰ International Crisis Group, Political Conflict, Extremism and Criminal Justice in Bangladesh, 11 April 2016, [url](#), p. 16; BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh, December 2022, [url](#), p. 31



According to BRAC, the politicisation of the prosecution service and the poor knowledge among prosecutors of criminal laws ‘hampered legal proceedings’, and also reported on ‘inefficiency and flawed investigations’.⁵²¹ An international organisation, interviewed by the EUAA on 22 April 2024, stated that prosecutors in general lacked the capacity to manage the amount of cases, and also lacked an understanding of their role.⁵²² Sources also reported that the salaries of prosecutors were low, and that they tended to compromise their services.⁵²³ BRAC reported that prosecutors tended to lack accountability, and demonstrated a lack of interest in their jobs.⁵²⁴ The executive director of TIB stated although that the prosecution service had the skills and capacity, and also were reasonably well placed in terms of facilities and logistics, it suffered from integrity issues. The responsiveness depended on the case and the involved person’s status and personal links, according to the same source.⁵²⁵

3.3. Courts

3.3.1. Organisation

Bangladesh has a common law system, with the Supreme Court being the highest instance.⁵²⁶ The Supreme Court is comprised by the High Court Division and the Appellate Division,⁵²⁷ which have original jurisdiction in hearing, inter alia, constitutional matters⁵²⁸ and in assessing the law’s constitutionality.⁵²⁹ Subordinate civil and criminal courts⁵³⁰ are, inter alia, divided by district⁵³¹ and metropolitan area.⁵³² There are also tribunals and special courts,⁵³³ and at local level, the *union parishads* also operate Village Courts.⁵³⁴ The Village Courts are semi-formal justice mechanisms, and people also resort to entirely informal justice institutions.⁵³⁵ More information is available in section [3.4. Village courts and informal justice mechanisms](#).

3.3.2. Capacity issues

There was a large backlog of court cases, and also reportedly delays in the disposal of cases.⁵³⁶ In 2022, the Minister of Law stated that 3.9 million cases were pending in the

⁵²¹ BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh, December 2022, [url](#), p. 34

⁵²² International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁵²³ BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh, December 2022, [url](#), p. 31; Uddin, M. M. et al., Reviews on Prosecution Service Framework in Bangladesh, Bangladesh, Cabinet Division, [2018], [url](#), pp. 14–15

⁵²⁴ BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh, December 2022, [url](#), p. 19

⁵²⁵ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁵²⁶ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁵²⁷ Bangladesh, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, n.d., [url](#)

⁵²⁸ UNHCR, Bangladesh: Supreme Court, n.d., [url](#)

⁵²⁹ Daily Star (The), Explained: The branches of Bangladesh’s government, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

⁵³⁰ Bangladesh, Judicial Portal Bangladesh, Jurisdiction of Court, 2016, [url](#)

⁵³¹ Bangladesh, Judicial Portal Bangladesh, Court structure, 2016, [url](#); Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁵³² Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 6; Bangladesh, Judicial Portal Bangladesh, Court structure, 2016,

⁵³³ Bangladesh, Judicial Portal Bangladesh, Jurisdiction of Court, 2016, [url](#); Hossain, M. M., Outlines of Current Judiciary of Bangladesh: A Study, Creative Connect International Publisher Group, July 2018, [url](#), p. 47

⁵³⁴ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁵³⁵ Bangladesh, Ministry of Planning, Financial Sector, Investment Climate, ICT and Governance, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 210–211; CGS, Challenges with Access to Justice in Bangladesh, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵³⁶ Jaan, A. R., What makes access to Justice elusive in Bangladesh?, South Asia @ LSE, 1 May 2023, [url](#)



courts⁵³⁷ and, by September 2023, the backlog had increased to about 4.05 million cases according to the Chief Justice, as cited by local media New Age.⁵³⁸ There was an insufficient number of judges, both in relation to the case backlog⁵³⁹ and the population size.⁵⁴⁰ According to the Chief Justice, there were 1 900 lower court judges as of January 2022.⁵⁴¹

Digitalisation has been used as a means to decrease court backlogs. This process was accelerated during the pandemic: in May 2020, a presidential decree allowed the justice system to use virtual means for the first time.⁵⁴² An international organisation, interviewed by the EUAA on 22 April 2024, however, stated that cases were not digitalised, as the initiated digitalisation process had not led to a fully digitalised system yet.⁵⁴³ The legal system was described as ‘slow’ by USDOS.⁵⁴⁴ A research study published in 2023 found that the average time among households to receive a judgement from district courts was six years.⁵⁴⁵ A research associate at BRAC University stated that some cases could take 10–20 and, sometimes, 60 years to resolve⁵⁴⁶ while sources consulted by OFPRA also said that cases could reach 20 years.⁵⁴⁷ Another means to solve capacity issues has been to introduce alternative conflict resolution mechanisms⁵⁴⁸ (see [3.4 Village courts and informal justice mechanisms](#)).

There has reportedly been a lack of court infrastructure.⁵⁴⁹ The Daily Star reported on a lack of technical equipment.⁵⁵⁰ Zaman echoed that ‘there could be much more infrastructure development, technological development, advancement and logistic support’.⁵⁵¹

In 2024 the IGP, as reported by local media, stated that the conviction rates of all cases filed in Bangladesh was 17 % in 2022, and had increased to 28 % by December 2023.⁵⁵² A local analyst stated that, due to integrity issues, the administration of justice was sometimes selective, despite the actual skills and capacities available.⁵⁵³ The international organisation stated that there was a need of training judges in case management, due to the large number

⁵³⁷ Bdnews24.com, Chief Justice Siddique sets sight on combating court case backlog crisis, 2 January 2022, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ New Age, Case backlog caught in warp of inaction on several fronts, 9 May 2024, [url](#)

⁵³⁹ Bdnews24.com, Chief Justice Siddique sets sight on combating court case backlog crisis, 2 January 2022, [url](#); Local analyst, email communication, 16 April 2024; International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁵⁴⁰ New Age, No compromise on corruption, expect fair criticism: CJ, 2 January 2022, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Bangladesh has one judge for 95,000 people, 30 August 2023, [url](#); Local analyst, email communication, 16 April 2024

⁵⁴¹ New Age, No compromise on corruption, expect fair criticism: CJ, 2 January 2022, [url](#); Jaan, A. R., What makes access to Justice elusive in Bangladesh?, South Asia @ LSE, 1 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴² CRI, This is how Bangladesh is digitalizing its judiciary, 24 July 2022, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Digital transformation in justice system in Bangladesh, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴³ International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁵⁴⁴ USA, USDOS, 2023 Investment Climate Statements: Bangladesh, 27 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁵ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁴⁶ Jaan, A. R., What makes access to Justice elusive in Bangladesh?, South Asia @ LSE, 1 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁷ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 41

⁵⁴⁸ Karim, M. R., Civil Judicial System of Bangladesh: Trial Level and Jurisdiction, Al-Qamar, 30 September 2023, [url](#), p. 148

⁵⁴⁹ Jaan, A. R., What makes access to Justice elusive in Bangladesh?, South Asia @ LSE, 1 May 2023, [url](#); Karim, M. R., Civil Judicial System of Bangladesh: Trial Level and Jurisdiction, Al-Qamar 30 September 2023, [url](#), p. 158; International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁵⁵⁰ Daily Star (The), e-Judiciary in Bangladesh, 9 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁵⁵² Daily Star (The), ‘Work sincerely to increase conviction rates’, 4 March 2024, [url](#); Daily Messenger (The), GP wants greater rate of conviction in cases, 3 March 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵³ Local analyst, email communication, 16 April 2024



of cases, and that judges sometimes had to ‘think outside the box’ to handle the case load. However, the same source also stressed that there were legal barriers for extraordinary initiatives and called for a legal reform to address the challenges in Bangladeshi courts.⁵⁵⁴ As mentioned, Bangladesh ranked 123 out of 142 countries in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, and scored 0.30 (out of 1) as regards criminal justice. While the effectiveness of the criminal adjudication system scored 0.41 (out of 1), the lower average scoring was due to shortcomings in the criminal justice system’s impartiality, government influence, and the due process of the law and rights of the accused. The prevalence of corruption in the criminal system scored 0.32 (out of 1).⁵⁵⁵

3.3.3. Judicial independence and corruption

Several sources described the judiciary as ‘politicised’.⁵⁵⁶ As mentioned in section [2.1. State structure](#), there have been issues as regards the court’s independence from the government, inter alia due to the latter’s influence over judicial appointments.⁵⁵⁷ According to OFPRA, there were no established procedure for the appointment of judicial personnel, who were often selected on the basis of political loyalty and attendance at AL meetings, rather than competence.⁵⁵⁸ In 2017, the then Chief Justice was put under political pressure after issuing a ruling unfavourable to the government. Eventually, he resigned and fled the country.⁵⁵⁹ According to academics and legal practitioners interviewed by the International Federation for Human Rights (Fidh), this case caused a ‘negative precedent’ among judges fearing that they may face the same fate if they issue rulings unfavourable to the ruling party.⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, the government⁵⁶¹ has been using ‘judicial harassment’ as a means to suppress dissent and harass the opposition.⁵⁶² Targets have included journalists,⁵⁶³ leaders of civil society organisations, human rights defenders and other dissenting voices.⁵⁶⁴ More information is available in section [4. Treatment of specific profiles and groups of the population](#).

Freedom House described corruption in Bangladeshi courts as ‘endemic’⁵⁶⁵ and TIB ranked the judiciary as one of most corrupt institutions.⁵⁶⁶ TIB’s Executive Director, Iftekhar Zaman, described the judiciary as ‘highly vulnerable to corruption’, and pointed out the fact that the institutions mandated to control corruption and to ensure the rule of law are themselves involved in corruption, and have been acting against rule of law.⁵⁶⁷ Through the years, public allegations on rampant corruption within the judiciary have also come from academics,

⁵⁵⁴ International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁵⁵⁵ WJP, Bangladesh, Criminal Justice for Bangladesh, 25 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁶ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024; Daily Star (The), Can the judiciary be free from politicisation?, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁷ USA, USDOS, 2023 Investment Climate Statements: Bangladesh, 27 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁸ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 41

⁵⁵⁹ FIDH, Out of Control, Human rights and rule of law crises in Bangladesh, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 21–22

⁵⁶⁰ FIDH, Out of Control, Human rights and rule of law crises in Bangladesh, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 21–22

⁵⁶¹ Daily Star (The), Can the judiciary be free from politicisation?, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶² OHCHR, UN experts urge Bangladesh to end judicial harassment of journalists, 22 February 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶³ OHCHR, UN experts urge Bangladesh to end judicial harassment of journalists, 22 February 2023, [url](#); CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Government Continues Targeting Activists and Criminalising Opposition Members ahead of UN Human Rights Review, 23 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁴ OHCHR, Bangladesh legal harassment of HRDs and civil society leaders, 5 September 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ Freedom House, Bangladesh, 10 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ TIB, Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2021, Extended Executive Summary, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 37

⁵⁶⁷ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024



supreme court judges and other high-ranking officials, calling on the government to take action.⁵⁶⁸ The current Chief Justice,⁵⁶⁹ as some of his predecessors,⁵⁷⁰ also acknowledged the prevalence of corruption in the judiciary, but pointed out that it is prevalent in all sectors of society.⁵⁷¹

3.3.4. Court costs and bribes

Sources pointed out court costs as an obstacle to access justice,⁵⁷² including the need to pay bribes.⁵⁷³ According to an academic article, published in 2023, district courts were ‘very expensive’ and therefore inaccessible to most of the rural population.⁵⁷⁴ The concentration of courts in urban areas further disadvantaged rural people when seeking legal assistance.⁵⁷⁵

Corruption in the form of bribery was present in courts.⁵⁷⁶ An academic article published in 2023, pointed out that litigants in lower courts were demanded bribes by judges, magistrates, lawyers and other court officials.⁵⁷⁷ Zaman added that there was ‘hardly any chance of getting justice without paying bribes’.⁵⁷⁸ While the research article described existing incentives to ‘purchase’ or ‘sell’ judges’ decisions’,⁵⁷⁹ USDOS referred to unnamed observers alleging that this was sometime taking place for ‘bail or acquittal in criminal cases’ as well.⁵⁸⁰

3.3.5. Public trust

In a survey from 2022, carried out by the Asia Foundation and partner organisations, 45 % of respondents trusted the judicial system – which constituted a six-point increase since 2019.⁵⁸¹ Zaman stated that people in general avoid reporting crimes, and do it as a last resort.⁵⁸² This fact was also acknowledged by the Supreme Court in a verdict from 2019 describing the

⁵⁶⁸ Solaiman, S. M., Prevention of Judicial Corruption in Bangladesh: Cutting the Gordian Knot by Ensuring Accountability, Penn Carey Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, 2023, [url](#), pp. 30–35

⁵⁶⁹ Business Standards (The), Corruption pervades country’s all levels like cancer, including the judiciary: Chief justice designate, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁰ Solaiman, S. M., Prevention of Judicial Corruption in Bangladesh: Cutting the Gordian Knot by Ensuring Accountability, Penn Carey Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, 2023, [url](#), pp. 30–35

⁵⁷¹ Business Standards (The), Corruption pervades country’s all levels like cancer, including the judiciary: Chief justice designate, 13 September 2023, [url](#); New Age, Corruption spreads in many sectors like cancer: new CJ, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁷² Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 2; USA, USAID, Assessment of Rule of Law and Justice Sector in Bangladesh, 12 March 2022, [url](#), p. iii

⁵⁷³ Solaiman, S. M., Prevention of Judicial Corruption in Bangladesh: Cutting the Gordian Knot by Ensuring Accountability, Penn Carey Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, 2023, [url](#), p. 39; USA, USAID, Assessment of Rule of Law and Justice Sector in Bangladesh, 12 March 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁵⁷⁴ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁷⁵ Jaan, A. R., What makes access to Justice elusive in Bangladesh?, South Asia @ LSE, 1 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁶ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024; Solaiman, S. M., Prevention of Judicial Corruption in Bangladesh: Cutting the Gordian Knot by Ensuring Accountability, Penn Carey Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, 2023, [url](#), p. 39

⁵⁷⁷ Solaiman, S. M., Prevention of Judicial Corruption in Bangladesh: Cutting the Gordian Knot by Ensuring Accountability, Penn Carey Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, 2023, [url](#), p. 39

⁵⁷⁸ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁵⁷⁹ Solaiman, S. M., Prevention of Judicial Corruption in Bangladesh: Cutting the Gordian Knot by Ensuring Accountability, Penn Carey Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, 2023, [url](#), p. 39

⁵⁸⁰ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 1. e

⁵⁸¹ Asia Foundation (The), The State of Bangladesh’s Political Governance, Development and Society: According to Its Citizens, 2022, [url](#), p. 51

⁵⁸² Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024



judiciary as ‘the last resort of the people’. It further referred to verdicts being sold, which made people seek alternative ways of seeking justice by approaching ‘goons, terrorists and mafias’ instead.⁵⁸³ The long processing times reportedly also made people lose confidence in the judiciary.⁵⁸⁴

3.4. Village courts and informal justice mechanisms

The village courts (also referred to as *Gram Adalat*⁵⁸⁵) were created to ease the burden of the formal justice system,⁵⁸⁶ and to improve the access to justice of marginalised groups.⁵⁸⁷ It was also introduced as an alternative to the traditional practice of *shalish*⁵⁸⁸ – an ‘informal grassroots justice system’⁵⁸⁹ typically consisting of powerful village elders or other powerful individuals convening to resolve disputes.⁵⁹⁰ The village court system was first created in 1976 through the Village Court Ordinance, but it was later replaced with the 2006 Village Courts Act,⁵⁹¹ which empowered the administrative unions to resolve petty issues within their jurisdiction.⁵⁹² Despite the creation of the village courts, the practice of *shalish* is still active and the preferred dispute resolution mechanism according to a research article.⁵⁹³

The village courts handle both criminal and civil cases,⁵⁹⁴ but only minor issues that do not exceed a compensation of 75 000 *taka* [about EUR 594].⁵⁹⁵ According to the UNDP such issues may be ‘stolen property, recovery of movable property, compensation for destroyed property and loss of crops due to livestock’.⁵⁹⁶ The cases should not involve formal justice mechanisms.⁵⁹⁷ A draft law, however suggests to increase the compensation amount to

⁵⁸³ Business Standard (The), It is time to revamp the judiciary: HC, 5 October 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁴ Hossain, M. M., Outlines of Current Judiciary of Bangladesh: A Study, Creative Connect International Publisher Group, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 61–62

⁵⁸⁵ Dhaka Tribune, Bill enabling village courts to impose fine up to 3L placed in parliament, 5 March 2024, [url](#); Bangladesh, Activating Village Court in Bangladesh Phase II Project, Results Reflection, July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁸⁶ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 9; Bangladesh, Activating Village Court in Bangladesh Phase II Project, Results Reflection, July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁸⁷ Bangladesh, Activating Village Court in Bangladesh Phase II Project, Results Reflection, July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁸⁸ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 2; Islam, M. T., Rural dispute resolution in Bangladesh: how do village courts safeguard justice?, January 2019, Contemporary South Asia, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁹⁰ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), pp. 2, 23; Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁵⁹¹ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 8; Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Portal, Urpha Union, 7 May 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁹² Bangladesh, Activating Village Court in Bangladesh Phase II Project, Results Reflection, July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁹³ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁹⁴ Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Portal, Urpha Union, 7 May 2024, [url](#); Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁵⁹⁵ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 8; Daily Observer, The village courts of Bangladesh, 1 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁶ UNDP, Village courts: An end to the woes of common people, 1 October 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁷ Uddin, N. and Ara, I., Governance Assessment of Local Restorative Justice System: A case Study of Village Courts in Bangladesh, Millennial Asia, 4 December 2023, [url](#); UNDP, Village courts: An end to the woes of common people, 1 October 2022, [url](#)



300 000 *taka*.⁵⁹⁸ The village courts can only impose such financial punishments, and do not have jurisdiction to hand down prison sentences.⁵⁹⁹ UNDP reported that the purpose of the village court system has been for it to be a ‘quasi-judicial dispute resolution mechanism’, but that ‘it has never functioned fully in compliance with the law’.⁶⁰⁰

OFpra reported that the village courts were much less used than the tradition of *shalish*.⁶⁰¹ This claim was supported by a research study from Yale University, surveying the use of village courts in 107 randomly selected unions. It found that the village courts rather served as a supplement to the tradition of *shalish*, which remained the dominant dispute resolution mechanism. While this research study did not find evidence of households benefitting from ties to the heads of the village courts, it found that the *shalish* was widely perceived to be biased in favour of ‘the rich and powerful’ due to their social or financial connections with the elders.⁶⁰² The executive director of TIB, Iftekhar Zaman, however stated that although village courts functioned relatively well at times, politics have been influencing those who play the role of mediators.⁶⁰³ OFpra also reported that the village courts suffer from the same politicisation as the *shalish* and other judicial institutions.⁶⁰⁴

In addition to village court and *shalish*, informal justice was provided by other mechanisms such as NGO-organised mediation⁶⁰⁵ as well as community legal services according to CGS⁶⁰⁶ and community leaders, arbitration councils, and alternative dispute resolution by religious leaders as reported by USAID.⁶⁰⁷

Fatwa is a way to settle matters of religious practices and may only be issued by Muslim religious scholars.⁶⁰⁸ In 2011, Bangladesh’s Supreme Court ruled that *fatwas* may be issued, but prohibited their enforcement.⁶⁰⁹ Nevertheless, AFP reported on a woman being caned and stoned to death in 2023 due to accusations of an extramarital affair. The punishment was reportedly enforced on the order of a Muslim scholar and village elders.⁶¹⁰ Moreover, USDOS reported that ‘[i]ncidents of vigilantism against women occurred, sometimes led by religious leaders enforcing fatwas. The incidents included whipping, beating, and other forms of physical violence.’⁶¹¹

⁵⁹⁸ Dhaka Tribune, Bill enabling village courts to impose fine up to 3L placed in parliament, 5 March 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁹ Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), p. 8; Daily Observer, The village courts of Bangladesh, 1 March 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁰ UNDP, Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh Phase III, [2023], [url](#)

⁶⁰¹ France, OFpra, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 50

⁶⁰² Mattsson, M. and Mobarak, A. M., Formalizing Dispute Resolution: Effects of Village Courts in Bangladesh, EliScholar, Yale University, 2023, [url](#), pp. 2–3, 6–7, 10, 16, 21

⁶⁰³ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁶⁰⁴ France, OFpra, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 51

⁶⁰⁵ USA, USAID, Assessment of Rule of Law and Justice Sector in Bangladesh, 12 March 2022, [url](#), p. iii; CGS, Challenges with Access to Justice in Bangladesh, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁶ CGS, Challenges with Access to Justice in Bangladesh, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁷ USA, USAID, Assessment of Rule of Law and Justice Sector in Bangladesh, 12 March 2022, [url](#), p. iii

⁶⁰⁸ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁰⁹ Al Jazeera, Bangladesh arrests four for caning, stoning woman over affair, 11 April 2023, [url](#); Amnesty International USA, Bangladesh Must Take Action to Protect Women Against Fatwa Violence, [2011], [url](#)

⁶¹⁰ Al Jazeera, Bangladesh arrests four for caning, stoning woman over affair, 11 April 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹¹ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 6



3.5. Response to certain types of crime

3.5.1. Trafficking in human beings

The 2012 Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act criminalises trafficking in human beings for the purposes of sexual and labour exploitation.⁶¹² Penalties range from five years to life imprisonment and fines.⁶¹³ The government has been implementing five-year national action plans to combat trafficking in human beings, and has also been developing a National Referral Mechanism to extend services to victims (which had not yet been launched as of June 2023).⁶¹⁴ Bangladeshi police cooperated with INTERPOL on trafficking cases⁶¹⁵ and the USDOS reported on ‘at least one’ embassy coordinating with foreign law enforcement to ‘remove Bangladeshi nationals from trafficking situation in the Middle East’.⁶¹⁶ After a visit to Bangladesh in late 2022, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons stated that the role of embassy and consular officials in supporting victims could be further strengthened.⁶¹⁷

There are specialised Anti-Human Trafficking Tribunals in seven districts.⁶¹⁸ They are comprised of judges and specialised prosecutors assigned to hear cases of trafficking in human beings.⁶¹⁹ Police,⁶²⁰ prosecutors⁶²¹ and judges undergo anti-trafficking training⁶²² but sources called for further training efforts.⁶²³ There was reportedly a lack of expertise in trafficking in human beings.⁶²⁴ USDOS explained that some officials conflated it with other crimes such as migrant smuggling and fraudulent labour practices. The same source also

⁶¹² USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 59; Bangladesh, The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012, [url](#), para. 3, 6

⁶¹³ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012, [url](#), para. 6 (2)

⁶¹⁴ Bangladesh, National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 2018–2022, (Updated to 2023 - 2025), 2023, [url](#), pp. 17, 19

⁶¹⁵ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 45; INTERPOL, INTERPOL operation reveals further insights into ‘globalization’ of cyber scam centres, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹⁶ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹⁷ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 23

⁶¹⁸ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 26; USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁶¹⁹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); CBGA, CBGA Commentary, Bali Process and Bangladesh: New Collaboration to Combat Human Trafficking, March 2024, [url](#)

⁶²⁰ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); UNODC, Bangladesh: UNODC and Police Staff College join hands to strengthen anti-human trafficking training, 25 January 2024, [url](#)

⁶²¹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); USA, USAID and Winrock International, Training on the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and Protection and Implementation of Rights for the Victims of Human Trafficking, February 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 5

⁶²² USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 26

⁶²³ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Human trafficking cases: Only 1.5pc see conviction, 8 October 2022, [url](#); Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), pp. 61–62

⁶²⁴ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 63; Daily Star (The), Human trafficking cases: Only 1.5pc see conviction, 8 October 2022, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)



reported on weak cases and delays due to the tendency of law enforcement to rely too much on testimonies of victim and witness as evidence, as well as issues in collaborating with the prosecution service.⁶²⁵ The Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons stated that there was a ‘continuing prevalence of discriminatory attitudes’ and violence against sex workers from ‘parts of the police, health care workers, social services, and the wider society’. Complaints by sex workers, including trafficking, were ‘rarely investigated by police’.⁶²⁶ According to USDOS, some officials denied the existence of internal trafficking – particularly child sex trafficking.⁶²⁷ The Special Rapporteur further expressed her ‘urgent concern’ regarding reports on ‘ill-treatment, physical and sexual abuse, including rape of migrant women workers, recruited for domestic work particularly to the Gulf region’, and stated that returning migrant women workers ‘often face stigma and discrimination within society’.⁶²⁸ Other sources also reported on female victims of trafficking facing social stigma by the surrounding community.⁶²⁹ As reported by OFPRA, ‘Domestic workers, especially those returning from abroad, are particularly stigmatised, especially if they have been sexually abused or are suspected of having been [sexually abused], but also because of the social prohibitions linked to the mobility of a single woman in Bangladeshi patriarchal society. Women have been forbidden to return home by their families, husbands, or in-laws for fear of being the subject of rumours’.⁶³⁰

The criminal justice system experienced a lack of resources for processing cases of trafficking in human beings.⁶³¹ For victims returning from abroad, the police faced difficulties in collecting evidence as the crime took place in a foreign country.⁶³² Criminal justice professionals told the UNODC that victims returning from abroad oftentimes had been ‘deceived into signing declarations that they had been overseas voluntarily’. At the same time, Bangladeshi criminal justice actors lacked the resources to travel abroad and lacked ‘standing and operational agreements’ for exchanging evidence with foreign authorities.⁶³³

There were also reported challenges in finalising cases, and only a limited number of cases led to convictions.⁶³⁴ The Daily Star analysed cases of the Anti-Human Trafficking Tribunal in Dhaka, disposed in the period March 2020–August 2022, and found that only 1.5 % (13 cases out of 858 cases) had led to convictions, and only 20 convicted persons had received prison sentences.⁶³⁵ During the reporting period of the USDOS report Trafficking in Human Beings

⁶²⁵ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶²⁶ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 12; 23

⁶²⁷ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 12; 23

⁶²⁹ Justice and Care, A virtuous cycle of survivor recovery, 2023, [url](#), p. 3; USA, USAID, Barriers and Opportunities for More Effective Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking, 5 June 2023, [url](#) p. 17

⁶³⁰ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 91

⁶³¹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), pp. 62–63

⁶³² Daily Star (The), Human trafficking cases: Only 1.5pc see conviction, 8 October 2022, [url](#); Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 63

⁶³³ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 63

⁶³⁴ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), pp. 12–13; Daily Star (The), Human trafficking cases: Only 1.5pc see conviction, 8 October 2022, [url](#)

⁶³⁵ Daily Star (The), Human trafficking cases: Only 1.5pc see conviction, 8 October 2022, [url](#)



2023, 1 April 2022–31 March 2023,⁶³⁶ 94 traffickers were convicted in 35 cases, and most were sentenced with fines.⁶³⁷ As of 2022, the courts had thousands of trafficking cases in their backlog.⁶³⁸ The figures of the actual size ranged from 4 732 cases in mid-2022, as reported by the USDOS,⁶³⁹ to 5 781 as reported by the Daily Star at the same time.⁶⁴⁰ Dhaka Tribune reported that 2 729 cases were pending trial and 517 investigation as of March 2023, encompassing 31 523 suspects, out of which about half (14 541) had been arrested.⁶⁴¹

Corruption was reportedly an issue for trafficking cases as well.⁶⁴² The political connections of the accused influenced the processing of cases,⁶⁴³ as well as bribing.⁶⁴⁴ Sources also reported on public official's being involved in trafficking,⁶⁴⁵ and official complicity 'remained pervasive' according to the USDOS.⁶⁴⁶ The same source noted that the government did not seem to have launched any investigations against government employees complicit in trafficking crimes, and that sub-agents conducting illegal recruitment were not held accountable in a consistent manner.⁶⁴⁷ This information could not be corroborated by other sources. However, as mentioned, there is a general culture of impunity within law enforcement.⁶⁴⁸ USDOS further reported that the authorities did not investigate or prosecute trafficking cases involving Rohingyas, and that some officials facilitated trafficking of Rohingyas by letting traffickers access the camps in exchange of bribes.⁶⁴⁹ This information could not be corroborated through other sources.

State support for victims' assistance and protection was reportedly limited.⁶⁵⁰ NGOs and international organisations have been offering support programs to assist sex workers and returned victims of trafficking in human beings, including accommodation, psycho-social assistance and counselling, and legal assistance for accessing compensation and in filing police complaints. The capacity to provide longer term assistance was however reportedly limited.⁶⁵¹

⁶³⁶ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶³⁷ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶³⁸ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), pp. 61–62

⁶³⁹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁰ Daily Star (The), Human trafficking cases: Only 1.5pc see conviction, 8 October 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴¹ Dhaka Tribune, Mountain of human trafficking cases await trial in Bangladesh, 11 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴² USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴³ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); Ara, F. and Rahman Khan, M. M., Trafficking in Women and Children in Bangladesh: Laws and Strategies for Prevention, June 2022, [url](#), pp. 140, 143

⁶⁴⁴ Prothom Alo, Human trafficking cases: What a cruel rule of law!, 12 January 2024, [url](#); Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), pp. 62–63

⁶⁴⁵ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Disappointing CPI score: What trajectory is Bangladesh on, 26 January 2022, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, DB chief: Airport officials have links with gang in human trafficking in Europe, 22 February 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁶ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁷ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁸ Uddin, M. K., Human rights abuses and criminal justice in policing practices in Bangladesh, Criminology & Criminal Justice, 25 September 2022, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Article 19: Culture of impunity declines confidence in rule of law, 25 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 24; USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵¹ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 12; 23–24



3.5.2. Illegal money lending

Bangladeshis face high costs of migration, including fees of recruitment agencies and other intermediaries,⁶⁵² and many Bangladeshi migrants are indebted.⁶⁵³ Among these, there are victims of trafficking in human beings.⁶⁵⁴ Some have been facing exploitative labour conditions to repay loans taken from legal recruitment agencies or unlicensed brokers,⁶⁵⁵ who have sometimes been conveying false and misleading information about work prospects abroad.⁶⁵⁶ More information in this topic is available in section [1.5. International migration](#).

After a visit to Bangladesh in 31 October 2022–9 November 2022, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Ms Mullally, stated that ‘returned migrant workers with significant debts are at continued risk of exploitation and face reprisals and threats because of difficulties in repaying debts and securing new employment’.⁶⁵⁷ The NGO Justice and Care reported that ‘failure to pay can have severe economical, reputational and physical’ consequences for migrants and their families.⁶⁵⁸ Ms Mullally further stated that there is limited access to legal remedies due to significant delays, and that the access to compensation was ‘extremely limited’.⁶⁵⁹ Other sources also reported on illegal recruiters not consistently being held accountable.⁶⁶⁰

More information on state response to trafficking in human beings is provided in the previous section [3.5.1. Trafficking in human beings](#).

3.5.3. Violence against women and girls

Information on the prevalence of domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, acid attacks, and other types of crimes against women and girls is available in section [4.2.3. Violence and other forms of abuse against women and girls](#).

Information on general victim and witness protection is available in section [3.1.5. Victim and witness protection](#).

⁶⁵² OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 21; Walk Free, Modern slavery in Bangladesh, 14 November 2023, [url](#), p. 2; Justice and Care, Issue Brief – Labour migration and modern slavery victimisation: Bangladesh as a case study, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁵³ Justice and Care, Issue Brief – Labour migration and modern slavery victimisation: Bangladesh as a case study, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1; IOM and Samuel Hall, Returning to Debt: Examining the Effects of Indebtedness on Reintegration Outcomes Final Report, 6 February 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁵⁴ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 23; Walk Free, Modern slavery in Bangladesh, 14 November 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁵⁵ Walk Free, Modern slavery in Bangladesh, 14 November 2023, [url](#), p. 2; Justice and Care, Issue Brief – Labour migration and modern slavery victimisation: Bangladesh as a case study, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁵⁶ Walk Free, Modern slavery in Bangladesh, 14 November 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁵⁷ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 21

⁶⁵⁸ Justice and Care, Issue Brief – Labour migration and modern slavery victimisation: Bangladesh as a case study, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁵⁹ OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 25

⁶⁶⁰ Justice and Care, Issue Brief – Labour migration and modern slavery victimisation: Bangladesh as a case study, June 2023, [url](#), p. 2; USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)



The police reportedly underwent training courses to handle violence against women.⁶⁶¹ There is, moreover, a specialised Women Support and Investigation Division of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police⁶⁶² and every police station reportedly had a special service desks for women.⁶⁶³ According to UNICEF, trained women police personnel have been deployed to manage these desks.⁶⁶⁴ To address the issue of violence against women, in 2009 the Bangladesh Police introduced the first Victim Support Centre (VSC) in Dhaka.⁶⁶⁵ VSCs provide legal assistance to women and children subjected to violence,⁶⁶⁶ as well as counselling and medical help in collaboration with a number of NGOs.⁶⁶⁷ Eight of the VSC also provide short-term accommodation.⁶⁶⁸ There are also One-stop crisis centres (OCCs) available for rape victims, offering multiple services at the same place.⁶⁶⁹ Local media outlet, the Daily Star, described the admission process to access the VSCs and the OCCs as ‘very complicated’ as victims needed to acquire police referrals or court orders.⁶⁷⁰ Sources consulted by OFPRA, also stated that there were not enough OCCs across the country, that few knew about them, and that there was a lack of resources for the OCCs to be fully operational.⁶⁷¹

Due to social stigma connected to gender-based violence many victims refrain from reporting crimes.⁶⁷² Social norms reportedly also impacted service delivery of the police,⁶⁷³ making them deprioritise and sometimes ignore cases of domestic violence, and also disqualify complains and ask the victim to resolve the issue ‘within the family’, as reported in a research study of the IDS.⁶⁷⁴ There was a reported need of gender sensitivity training.⁶⁷⁵ In a round table discussion organised by BRAC, a police officer stressed the need to enhance the force’s capacity in collecting evidence, and strengthen the ability to identify admissible evidence for different types of offences against women and girls.⁶⁷⁶ The study by IDS also noted a lack of human and financial resources to handle domestic violence.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁶¹ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁶⁶² UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 19

⁶⁶³ UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 20; BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), p. 17

⁶⁶⁴ UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 20

⁶⁶⁵ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024; Bangladesh, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Victim Support, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶⁶ UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 19

⁶⁶⁷ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024; Bangladesh, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Victim Support, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 66

⁶⁶⁹ UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 19

⁶⁷⁰ Daily Star (The), Too few shelters for domestic violence victims, 11 December 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷¹ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 66

⁶⁷² BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 5, 13; UNDP, Gender-based violence: taking stock of Bangladesh’s shadow pandemic, 10 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷³ Sultan, M. and Mahpara, P., Backlash in Action? Or Inaction? Stalled Implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 in Bangladesh, IDS, June 2023, [url](#), p. 9; UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 18

⁶⁷⁴ Sultan, M. and Mahpara, P., Backlash in Action? Or Inaction? Stalled Implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 in Bangladesh, IDS, June 2023, [url](#), pp. 9, 33, 35–36.

⁶⁷⁵ UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 21; New Age, Police harassment of women raises concern, 30 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁶ BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁷⁷ Sultan, M. and Mahpara, P., Backlash in Action? Or Inaction? Stalled Implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 in Bangladesh, IDS, June 2023, [url](#), p. 34

Special tribunals are tasked with handling gender-based violence.⁶⁷⁸ In 2022, the director of the Judicial Administration and Training institute stated that, although they offered training on gender sensitivity, they did not have enough capacity to train all judges and prosecutors in the country.⁶⁷⁹ Victims of gender-based violence who filed cases faced delays in investigations and trials,⁶⁸⁰ and few cases led to convictions.⁶⁸¹ According to USAID, women predominantly sought redress in the informal *shalish*.⁶⁸²

The Daily Star reported that there were around 36 shelters for victims of domestic violence in 2022, including 15 run by NGOs. There were too few shelters in relation to the existing demand. The Daily Star further reported that most shelters were located in urban areas, making them hard for rural women to access. Women wanting to leave an abusive situation therefore face the risk of becoming homeless.⁶⁸³ This information could not be corroborated by other sources.

3.5.4. Land disputes

Land scarcity is a ‘significant issue’ in Bangladesh.⁶⁸⁴ The situation is aggravated by deforestation⁶⁸⁵ and climate change, causing the loss of fertile land.⁶⁸⁶ More information on climate change and its impact on the population is available in section [1.4. Floodings and other natural hazards](#).

Land disputes are widespread⁶⁸⁷ and stem from various reasons – one being the lack of land records, making it difficult to identify the actual owner.⁶⁸⁸ Land has been illegally occupied, including private and government-owned land⁶⁸⁹ as well as protected forests.⁶⁹⁰ Influential individuals have been involved in land-grabbing,⁶⁹¹ including members of the current political party in power.⁶⁹² USDOS reported that land disputes disproportionately impacted members of minority communities.⁶⁹³ An NGO representative engaged in protecting the rights of Christian

⁶⁷⁸ BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), p. 5; Daily Star (The), Crimes against women and the issue of justice, 8 October 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁹ BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), p. 17

⁶⁸⁰ BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 2–3; Prothom Alo, Rape, domestic violence dominate in violence against women, 3 September 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸¹ BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 2–3; Daily Star (The), How much have we achieved in eliminating gender-based violence?, 26 November 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁸² SA, USAID, Assessment of Rule of Law and Justice Sector in Bangladesh, 12 March 2022, [url](#), p. 35

⁶⁸³ Daily Star (The), Too few shelters for domestic violence victims, 11 December 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁴ Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, Land Portal Foundation, 29 June 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Is agrivoltaics the solution to Bangladesh’s energy challenges?, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁵ Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, Land Portal Foundation, 29 June 2023, [url](#); Global Resilience Partnership, Mongla, Bangladesh: A model of successful adaptability, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶ Dialogue Earth, Rising tides, ruined fields show how Bangladesh’s farmers grapple with climate change, 11 January 2024, [url](#); ALDR, Bangladesh: Country Overview Paper, October 2023, [url](#), p. 7

⁶⁸⁷ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 52

⁶⁸⁸ International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁶⁸⁹ Bangladesh Post, New land management law coming, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁰ Land Portal Foundation, How much of Bangladesh’s protected forests are really protected?, 17 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁹¹ Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, 29 June 2023, Land Portal Foundation, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹² Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); Odhikar, Annual Human Rights Report 2022 Bangladesh, 30 January 2023, [url](#), paras. 16, 79

⁶⁹³ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 1. g

Bangladeshis, told OFPRA that minorities were disadvantaged in land disputes, due to their lack of representation within the police, and small political influence.⁶⁹⁴ According to Bertelsmann Stiftung, a large number of political leaders have been accused of ‘involvement in, or at least tolerance of, the land grabbing from the Hindu minorities’. The same source reported that land disputes were ‘a major source of violence’ between ethnic minorities and Bengali settlers in the CHT, and that it was ‘commonly observed’ that Bengali settlers ‘with the involvement of influential political leaders’, grabbed land of indigenous people.⁶⁹⁵ According to representatives of an NGO interviewed by OFPRA, the Bangladeshi security forces in the CHT continued to support Bengali settlers, and they further stated that the Land Dispute Resolution Commission set up to handle disputes between indigenous people and Bengali settlers were under the influence of the military.⁶⁹⁶

More information on the situation of ethnic and religious minorities is available in sections [4.3. Ethnic and religious minorities](#).

Land disputes were ‘extremely’ difficult to solve according to the US embassy in Dhaka.⁶⁹⁷ Applicable laws were described as ‘scattered’,⁶⁹⁸ for example the practices in inheritance of private property varied depending on religious laws and customary laws of different ethnic groups.⁶⁹⁹ Furthermore, the administrative system set up to handle land registration and ownership was reportedly ineffective,⁷⁰⁰ and struggled to address land disputes according to the Association for Land Reform and Development (ALDR).⁷⁰¹ According to a 2023 article of the Land Portal Foundation, there was a lack of coordination between responsible bodies, and issues in implementing the applicable laws.⁷⁰² The formal process to handle land disputes was lengthy, oftentimes taking several years to resolve⁷⁰³ – and sometimes generations according to a lawyer interviewed by OFPRA in June 2023.⁷⁰⁴

In order to address challenges related to land-disputes and increase tenure security⁷⁰⁵ the parliament passed the Land Crime Prevention and Remedy Act in 2023.⁷⁰⁶ It identifies crimes such as ‘claiming ownership of more land than the actual size; tricking someone into registering more land than the actual size; secretly selling land after prior sale or transfer or after taking advance payment for sale; and cheating with inheritors and co-inheritors’. Punishments set out by the new law include fines and imprisonment up to five years

⁶⁹⁴ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 53

⁶⁹⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁶ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 55

⁶⁹⁷ USA, US embassy in Bangladesh, Property Disputes, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁹⁸ Bangladesh Post, New land management law coming, 9 January 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Proposed Bangladesh Land Act 2020: what legal experts say, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁰ Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, 29 June 2023, Land Portal Foundation, [url](#); Rahman, M. Z. and Korobi, S. A., Unraveling Rural Land Conflicts in Bangladesh: Stakeholders, Power Dynamics, and Paths to Resolution, March 2024, [url](#), pp. 2–3

⁷⁰¹ ALDR, Bangladesh: Country Overview Paper, October 2023, [url](#), p. 7

⁷⁰² Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, 29 June 2023, Land Portal Foundation, [url](#)

⁷⁰³ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 52, 58; Rahman, M. Z. and Korobi, S. A., Unraveling Rural Land Conflicts in Bangladesh: Stakeholders, Power Dynamics, and Paths to Resolution, March 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁰⁴ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 58

⁷⁰⁵ Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, 29 June 2023, Land Portal Foundation, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁶ Daily Star (The), ‘A potentially harmful law’, 26 November 2023, [url](#)



depending on the crime. As per this act, citizens are to be handed Certificates of Land Ownership (CLO), and those in possession of a CLO are not required to prove ownership of land.⁷⁰⁷ A lawyer interviewed by OFPRA pointed out that illiteracy is a ‘major obstacle’ to acquire such documents,⁷⁰⁸ and the international organisation interviewed by the EUAA stated that although the government has initiated the development of digital land registration and records, it is in a preliminary stage and such initiatives have not had any significant impact on land disputes.⁷⁰⁹

Corruption has been prevalent also in the land administration sector.⁷¹⁰ A lawyer consulted by OFPRA, stated that land disputes between private citizens, in theory, could be solved through the formal justice mechanisms, but that politics may influence the process, and that the police in general do not intervene against important persons – unless the victim is supported by an equally influential person. Moreover, influential persons may have the resources to drag out a court procedure, and to intimidate their opponents through ‘henchmen’.⁷¹¹ USDOS referred to minority groups stating that the ‘local police, civil authorities, and political leaders were sometimes involved in evictions or shielded politically influential land grabbers from prosecution’.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁷ Bangladesh Post, New land management law coming, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁸ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 56

⁷⁰⁹ International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁷¹⁰ Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, 29 June 2023, Land Portal Foundation, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); TIB, Corruption in Service Sectors: National Household Survey 2021, Extended Executive Summary, 31 August 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁷¹¹ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 53

⁷¹² USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 1. g



4. Treatment of specific profiles and groups of the population

4.1. Political activists, journalists, and human rights defenders

4.1.1. Legislation on freedom of speech, assembly and the press

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, and to ‘peacefully’ participate in public meetings and processions (article 37), and freedom of association (article 38).⁷¹³ Article 39 furthermore guarantees the freedom of thought and conscience, and the freedom of speech and expression of every citizen, as well as press freedom. However, the same article also outlines that the freedoms of speech, expression and the press are subject to ‘any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence’.⁷¹⁴

Some legal acts limit the freedoms outlined in the constitution.⁷¹⁵ The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was adopted in 2006, and inter alia prohibited publishing or transmitting ‘false and obscene’ material (Section 57).⁷¹⁶ The ICT was replaced⁷¹⁷ on 8 October 2018 by the DSA.⁷¹⁸ The DSA was described as ‘draconian’,⁷¹⁹ and as of January 2023, over 7 000 cases had been filed under the act according to Bangladeshi authorities.⁷²⁰ Individuals who have had charges brought against them under the DSA included (among others) journalists,⁷²¹ activists and educators.⁷²² According to BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD),⁷²³ the accused were ‘[i]ndividuals from all walks of life, ranging from children to government employees’.⁷²⁴ Following criticism,⁷²⁵ the DSA was replaced by the

⁷¹³ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 37–38

⁷¹⁴ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 39

⁷¹⁵ OHCHR, Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, 28 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 3–4; TI Bangladesh, Digital Security Act 2018 and the draft Cyber Security Act 2023 : A Comparative Analysis, [2023], [url](#), pp. 5–7, 26

⁷¹⁶ Daily Star (The), Amended Information Technology and Communication Act, 1 January 2014, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, How Section 57 morphed into Digital Security Act provisions, 10 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹⁷ HRW, Bangladesh: Scrap Draconian Elements of Digital Security Act, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹⁸ Bangladesh, Bangladesh Parliament, Digital Security Act 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁷¹⁹ Al Jazeera, Bangladesh to tone down ‘draconian’ digital security law, 7 August 2023, [url](#)

⁷²⁰ Business Standard (The), Over 7,000 cases filed under DSA: Law minster, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷²¹ Riaz, A., How Bangladesh’s Digital Security Act Is Creating a Culture of Fear, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 9 December 2021, [url](#); CGS, Digital Security Act: 147 sued, 67 arrests a month, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷²² Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); CGS, CGS: Nearly 1,500 DSA cases in 20 months, [2021], [url](#)

⁷²³ BIGD ‘is a Bangladesh-based social science research and academic institute, dedicated to generating and sharing knowledge through education, research, and public and policy engagement in equitable partnerships with national and global actors.’ See: BIGD, our work, n.d., [url](#)

⁷²⁴ BRAC, Freedom (Fear) of Expression in a Free Country, 10 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷²⁵ VOA, Bangladesh Criticized Over Plan to Replace Controversial Law with One Considered Equally Repressive, 21 August 2023, [url](#)



CSA on 13 September 2023.⁷²⁶ Some abusive elements were removed,⁷²⁷ including a reduction in the number of cognisable⁷²⁸ and non-bailable offences.⁷²⁹ Moreover, the sentence for ‘defamation’ was changed into fine instead of imprisonment, and the offence of ‘holding, transferring data-information illegally’ was removed.⁷³⁰ The CSA however retained many restrictive elements of the DSA,⁷³¹ including criminalising ‘propaganda or campaign against liberation war, the spirit of liberation war, father of the nation, national anthem of national flag’ (Section 21), publishing information that is ‘false’ or ‘offensive’ (Section 25), ‘that hurts the religious values or sentiment’ (Section 28), that is ‘defamatory’ (Section 29), and information that ‘deteriorates law and order’ (Section 31).⁷³² Sources also criticised the CSA for retaining vague formulations of the DSA opening up for its misuse, as well as the possibility for law enforcement to search, seizure, and arrest without a warrant.⁷³³

The Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act of 2016 require NGOs receiving foreign funding to register with the NGO Affairs Bureau and receive prior approval of projects before accepting foreign funds. The same act authorises this bureau to make inspections, monitor and review ‘voluntary activities’ by individuals and NGOs. It further requires NGOs to apprise the bureau of ‘any official tour abroad’ in relation to approved projects, submit to inspections, and regularly submit reports and attend coordination meetings. The act further outlines that the violation of ‘any provision’ of the act by an NGO or individual is an offence, liable to fines, the cancellation of projects run by the individual or the NGO, as well as the deregistration of the NGO concerned.⁷³⁴ As stated in the Article 14 of the Foreign Donations Act, ‘any NGOs or Individual’ that ‘pass any malicious and indecent (derogatory and reproachful) comments regarding the constitution of Bangladesh or any constitutional institutions or engage in any anti state activities [...] shall be treated to be an offence’.⁷³⁵

⁷²⁶ Dhaka Tribune, Parliament passes Cyber Security Bill 2023, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

⁷²⁷ Al Jazeera, Bangladesh to tone down ‘draconian’ digital security law, 7 August 2023, [url](#)

⁷²⁸ AI, Bangladesh: Open letter to the government: Feedback on proposed “Cyber Security Act”, 22 August 2023, [url](#), p. 3; TIB, Digital Security Act 2018 and the draft Cyber Security Act 2023 : A Comparative Analysis, 2023, [url](#), pp. 9–10

⁷²⁹ AI, Bangladesh: Open letter to the government: Feedback on proposed “Cyber Security Act”, 22 August 2023, [url](#), p. 3; Daily Star (The), What does the proposed Cyber Security Act offer?, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

⁷³⁰ AI, Bangladesh: Open letter to the government: Feedback on proposed “Cyber Security Act”, 22 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 17; TIB, Digital Security Act 2018 and the draft Cyber Security Act 2023 : A Comparative Analysis, 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁷³¹ AI, Bangladesh: Open letter to the government: Feedback on proposed “Cyber Security Act”, 22 August 2023, [url](#), p. 1; Hossain, N. and Lewis, D., Draft for discussion, Revisiting civil society in Bangladesh, January 2024, [url](#), p. 11; HRW, World Report 2024: Bangladesh, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷³² AI, Bangladesh: Open letter to the government: Feedback on proposed “Cyber Security Act”, 22 August 2023, [url](#), p. 2–3; TIB, Digital Security Act 2018 and the draft Cyber Security Act 2023 : A Comparative Analysis, 2023, [url](#), pp. 5–7

⁷³³ TIB, Digital Security Act 2018 and the draft Cyber Security Act 2023 : A Comparative Analysis, 2023, [url](#), p. 23, 29; AI, Bangladesh: Open letter to the government: Feedback on proposed “Cyber Security Act”, 22 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 2–3

⁷³⁴ Bangladesh: Act No. 8 of 2016, Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 8 October 2016, [url](#), art. 3, 6, 8(3), 10, 14, 15; See also: Hossain N. and Lewis D., Draft for discussion, Revisiting civil society in Bangladesh, January 2024, [url](#), p. 11

⁷³⁵ Bangladesh, Act No. 8 of 2016, Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 8 October 2016, [url](#), art. 14



Other laws that impact the freedom of expression and press freedom⁷³⁶ include the Telecommunications Act (2001) which allows state agencies to tap telephone and mobiles⁷³⁷ to protect national security and public order.⁷³⁸ In 2024, the government proposed a new draft act, with additional provisions that included other telecommunication means under the purview of the law; such as social media, online platforms, and other internet services.⁷³⁹ Also, the Pornography Control Act (2012) prohibits making or selling pornographic material,⁷⁴⁰ and defines pornography as ‘any material that is likely to increase sexual sensation or desires’ and ‘includes nude or half nude video and still pictures’, as reported by local media New Age.⁷⁴¹

4.1.2. State reactions to opposition and critique

Sheikh Hasina and her government have shown a growing intolerance of dissent.⁷⁴² Before the 2024 election, the government reportedly increased their repression, and targeted the opposition, human rights defenders and media.⁷⁴³

Dissidents and critics have been suppressed through harassment, surveillance, arbitrary arrest, and enforced disappearance.⁷⁴⁴ State authorities have also reportedly harassed family members of such individuals⁷⁴⁵ for example through arrests⁷⁴⁶ or showing up at their houses in the middle of the night to interrogate them.⁷⁴⁷ In a joint statement, a group of twelve local and international human rights organisation said that the government had been using enforced disappearance as ‘a tool to suppress political movements and silence dissenting voices, creating a climate of fear’.⁷⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Bertelsmann Stiftung reported that enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings had been ‘instrumentalized’ in order to ‘spread fear and muzzle criticism’,⁷⁴⁹ while Human Rights Watch described enforced disappearances as a ‘hallmark’ of Sheikh Hasina’s rule.⁷⁵⁰ More information is available in section [2.4.2 Enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings](#).

⁷³⁶ Haque, E., Balancing Freedom of the Press and Reasonable Restrictions in Bangladesh: An Appraisal. Business Ethics and Leadership, 3(1), 80-100, 2019, [url](#), pp. 87, 89

⁷³⁷ Haque, E., Balancing Freedom of the Press and Reasonable Restrictions in Bangladesh: An Appraisal. Business Ethics and Leadership, 3(1), 80-100, 2019, [url](#), p. 87; Odhikar, “Bangladesh Telecommunication (amendment) Ordinance, 2005: National Security or Infringement on Civil Rights?”, September 2009, [url](#), p. 1

⁷³⁸ Haque, E., Balancing Freedom of the Press and Reasonable Restrictions in Bangladesh: An Appraisal. Business Ethics and Leadership, 3(1), 80-100, 2019, [url](#), p. 87; CLFR, Bangladesh, October 2018, [url](#)

⁷³⁹ Daily Star (The), Govt drafts fresh telecom act, 25 March 2024, [url](#); Prothom Alo, Question arises over the necessity of new telecommunication act with little change, 30 April 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁰ BBC, Bangladesh cabinet approves anti-pornography law, 2 January 2012, [url](#); New Age, The Pornography Control Act, 2012, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁴¹ New Age, The Pornography Control Act, 2012, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁴² BBC News, Muhammad Yunus: Leaders urge Bangladesh to end attack on Nobel laureate, 1 September 2023, [url](#); France24, Sheikh Hasina: Bangladesh democracy icon-turned-iron lady, 7 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁴³ CIVICUS, People Power Under Attack 2023, December 2023, [url](#), p. 34; HRW, World Report 2024: Bangladesh, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁴ CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁵ HRW, Bangladesh: Stop Reprisals Against Victims, Activists, 7 April 2022, [url](#); New Age, Families face harassment, arrest, 4 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁶ New Age, Families face harassment, arrest, 4 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁷ HRW, Bangladesh: Stop Reprisals Against Victims, Activists, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁸ ADPAN et al., Bangladesh, Government must cease enforced disappearances, stop harassment of the victims’ families and hold perpetrators accountable, 29 August 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁰ HRW, Decade of Disappearances, n.d., [url](#)



Authorities reportedly monitored foreign funding of human rights organisations,⁷⁵¹ and dissenting voices have been targeted through legal proceedings,⁷⁵² through so called ‘judicial harassment’.⁷⁵³ As mentioned, over 7 000 cases were filed during the years that the DSA was in effect.⁷⁵⁴ Under the CSA (adopted on 13 September 2023⁷⁵⁵) a total of 18 cases had been recorded as of 1 March 2024 by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), including 10 journalists and 8 politicians.⁷⁵⁶ According to OMCT, both the DSA and CSA have been used to arbitrarily detain government critics.⁷⁵⁷

The CGS reported that, under the ICT and the DSA, individuals were tried and convicted for social media posts. In one case in August 2023, the mother of a Bangladeshi student residing in the USA was arrested, as her son had posted critical comments about the government in social media.⁷⁵⁸ In another case, reported by New Age, the police arrested a local leader of the BNP for a social media post by his brother who was based in the UK.⁷⁵⁹ In 2022, Odhikar recorded a total of 62 cases where individuals had been arrested under the DSA for critical posts in social media about the prime minister, high-ranking officials of the government and their family members, the Indian prime minister’s visit to Bangladesh, and other ‘anti-government’ posts.⁷⁶⁰ The same source recorded 48 such cases in 2023.⁷⁶¹

In January 2022, the government officials declared that passports of Bangladeshi citizens might be cancelled due to alleged anti-government activity, including spreading false information about the country.⁷⁶²

4.1.3. Political activists

Political activists have been subjected to different forms of violence ahead of elections,⁷⁶³ and sources reported on a crackdown on political activism and protests of BNP supporters.⁷⁶⁴ Some protests have turned violent, leading to deaths and injuries when supporters of different

⁷⁵¹ RFK Human Rights, Bangladesh: Stop reprisals against victims, activists, 7 April 2022, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2023: Bangladesh, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵² OHCHR, Bangladesh legal harassment of HRDs and civil society leaders, 5 September 2023, [url](#); CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Government Continues Targeting Activists and Criminalising Opposition Members Ahead of UN Human Rights Review, 23 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵³ HRW, Bangladesh: Quash Conviction and Release Rights Defenders, 14 September 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁴ Business Standard (The), Over 7,000 cases filed under DSA: Law minister, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁵ Dhaka Tribune, Parliament passes Cyber Security Bill 2023, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁶ CGS, From Digital to Cyber Security Act: Thoughts of the Politicians, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁷ OMCT, Bangladesh: Arbitrary detention and impunity for torture continues after elections, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁸ Riaz, A., The Ordeal Five Years of the Digital Security Act 2018-2023, CGS, April 2024, [url](#), p. 37

⁷⁵⁹ New Age, UP members arrested for expatriate brother’s FB comment on PM, 10 September 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁰ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁶¹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁶² Business Standard (The), Passports of anti-state activists may be scrapped: Hasan, 13 January 2022, [url](#); Daily Star (The), ‘Anti-state activities from abroad will result in passport being cancelled’, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶³ HRW, Bangladesh: Crackdown on Political Opposition, 10 October 2022, [url](#); OMCT, Bangladesh: The government must stop killing protestors and silencing dissent, 6 November 2023, [url](#); CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Criminalisation of activists and crackdown on protests continue following one-sided elections, 12 April 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁴ CIVICUS, Bangladesh government brutally cracks down on opposition rallies as well as journalists and dissidents, 22 December 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh: Authorities must end repression of demonstrations, 8 December 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bans and boycotts: The troubled history of Bangladesh’s elections, 5 January 2024, [url](#)



parties have clashed with each other⁷⁶⁵ and also with the police.⁷⁶⁶ Protesters have been met with excessive use of force by the police,⁷⁶⁷ and there were also reports of the police coordinating attacks against the opposition together with supporters of the ruling party.⁷⁶⁸ Protests have been followed by extensive arrests of opposition members and supporters,⁷⁶⁹ while AL affiliates have seemingly enjoyed impunity for their part in the violence.⁷⁷⁰ In 2022, ASK recorded 70 deaths and 6 914 injured due to political violence, and 45 deaths and 7 121 injured 2023. ASK further recorded 27 deaths and 2 471 injured in January–April 2024.⁷⁷¹

Starting in 2022, several big rallies were organised for the 2024 election⁷⁷² and such protests continued in 2023.⁷⁷³ One of the largest demonstrations was organised in Dhaka on 28 October 2023⁷⁷⁴ with more than 100 000 persons participating.⁷⁷⁵ According to the Armed Conflict Location and Events Data Project (ACLED), the protest was the most violent demonstration recorded in Bangladesh between January 2018 and November 2023.⁷⁷⁶ A police officer died during violent clashes,⁷⁷⁷ and the police reportedly used excessive force.⁷⁷⁸ The protest triggered the detention of several BNP leaders,⁷⁷⁹ alongside thousands of BNP supporters.⁷⁸⁰ Eight of the arrested BNP leaders had reportedly died in custody before the end of 2023.⁷⁸¹ In the months leading to the election, the BNP reported on arrest of over 20 000

⁷⁶⁵ HRW, Bangladesh: Crackdown on Political Opposition, 10 October 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, One dead as Bangladesh opposition rallies to demand PM's removal, 19 July 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), One killed, 29 hurt in clashes, attacks, 8 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁶ HRW, Bangladesh: Crackdown on Political Opposition, 10 October 2022, [url](#); Business Standard (The), 1 killed, scores hurt in clashes as BNP holds countrywide anti-govt processions, 24 December 2022, [url](#); BBC News, Bangladesh clashes: Two killed in anti-government protests, 31 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁷ OMCT, Bangladesh: The government must stop killing protestors and silencing dissent, 6 November 2023, [url](#); HRW, Bangladesh: Excessive Force Against Political Protesters, 2 August 2023, [url](#); Al, Bangladesh: Unlawful use of force against protestors must end immediately, 4 August 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁸ HRW, Bangladesh: Violent Autocratic Crackdown Ahead of Elections, 26 November 2023, [url](#); RFK Human Rights et al., Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, August 2023, [url](#), para. 37; HRW, Bangladesh's Brutal Crackdown on Political Opposition, 9 December 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁹ HRW, Bangladesh: Violent Autocratic Crackdown Ahead of Elections, 26 November 2023, [url](#); RFK Human Rights et al., Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, August 2023, [url](#), para. 40

⁷⁷⁰ HRW, Bangladesh: Violent Autocratic Crackdown Ahead of Elections, 26 November 2023, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷¹ ASK, Political violence (Jan-April 2024), 7 May 2024, [url](#); ASK, Political violence (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#); ASK, Political violence (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷² International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷³ HRW, Bangladesh: Excessive Force Against Political Protesters, 2 August 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh opposition protest in Dhaka, demand PM's resignation, 29 July 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁴ Al Jazeera, Bangladesh opposition leader Alamgir detained after anti-government rally, 29 October 2023, [url](#); Al, Bangladesh: Repeated cycle of deaths, arrests and repression during protests must end, 30 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁵ Al Jazeera, Bangladesh opposition leader Alamgir detained after anti-government rally, 29 October 2023, [url](#); RSF, Bangladeshi government asked to protect reporters after 30 are attacked during protest, 3 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ ACLED, The Violent Politics of Bangladesh's 2024 Elections, 4 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁷ International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#); BBC News, Bangladesh opposition chief Alamgir arrested after clashes, 29 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁸ HRW, Bangladesh: Violence Erupts Amid Demands for Fair Election, 1 November 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh opposition leader Alamgir detained after antigovernment rally, 29 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 55, p. 32

⁷⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#); BBC News, Bangladesh opposition chief Alamgir arrested after clashes, 29 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸¹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 32



opposition leaders and activists,⁷⁸² while a group of UN experts reported, in January 2024, that 25 000 opposition leaders and supporters had been arrested. The UN experts further reported that some arrested activists were tortured and denied treatment.⁷⁸³ In 2024, BNP published a list of 15 deaths of its leaders and activists in custody, claiming that it was a result of denied medical treatment or torture.⁷⁸⁴

According to OMCT, the police went to the homes of BNP officials after protests, and arrested BNP members and supporters. The same source stated, on 6 November 2023, that allegations of torture and ill-treatment by security officials and law enforcement officers had ‘multiplied’ in recent weeks.⁷⁸⁵

Political activists have had cases brought against them under the DSA.⁷⁸⁶ A study carried out by CGS looked into arrests made under the five years that the DSA was in effect (October 2018–September 2023). During this period 495 politicians were accused under the DSA (out of 2 986), and 143 were arrested (out of 1 549). Looking only at cases where the profession of the accused was known, about 32 % were politicians, while they made up 9 % of all accused. The same study found that the share of politicians had increased with over 10 percentage points by September 2023, compared to the previous study covering October 2018 – August 2022.⁷⁸⁷ There were reports of arrests of political activists under the CSA.⁷⁸⁸ Out of the 18 cases recorded by CGS as of 1 March 2024, 8 were politicians.⁷⁸⁹

In 2023, USDOS reported on kidnappings and disappearances of activists.⁷⁹⁰ According to a joint statement of civil society organisation citing statistics of Odhikar, between January and June 2023, at least 16 persons were subjected to enforced disappearance. 15 of the victims later resurfaced alive. Most of the victims were opposition party activists and dissidents that had participated in the protests against the government, according to the statement.⁷⁹¹

According to a local human rights organisations interviewed by OFPRA in June 2023, extrajudicial executions have primarily targeted the most active political activists ‘known enough to launch a mobilisation’. According to one interviewed NGO such killings took place on the order of the top of the state. However, executions also targeted less visible activists according to this source, to create a ‘climate of terror.’⁷⁹² In a joint investigation by Deutsche Welle (DW) and Netra News, insiders from the RAB suggested that ‘key figures in the ruling

⁷⁸² Daily Star (The), Over 20,000 opposition men arrested since Oct 28, 30 November 2023, [url](#); Le Monde, Bangladesh's prime minister has plunged her country into authoritarianism, 18 December 2023, [url](#); AP, Thousands of opposition activists languish in prison as Bangladesh gears up for national election, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸³ UN News, Bangladesh: Citing ‘dangerous decline’ of human rights, experts urge key reforms, 24 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁴ Dhaka Tribune, Rizvi: 15 BNP men died in custody for torture or lack of medical care, 11 February 2024, [url](#); Business Standard (The), 15 BNP men died in police custody ‘for lack of care or torture’: Rizvi, 11 February 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁵ OMCT, Bangladesh: The government must stop killing protestors and silencing dissent, 6 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁶ Riaz, A., The Ordeal Five Years of the Digital Security Act 2018-2023, CGS, April 2024, [url](#), p. 39; Himel, A tool for oppression, 25 October 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁷ Riaz, A., The Ordeal Five Years of the Digital Security Act 2018-2023, CGS, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 10, 12

⁷⁸⁸ Dhaka Tribune, Pinaki Bhattacharya sued under Cyber Security Act, 18 February 2024, [url](#); Business Standard (The), Adam Tamizi Haque gets bail in CSA case, 4 April 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁹ CGS, From Digital to Cyber Security Act: Thoughts of the Politicians, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁰ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 1. b

⁷⁹¹ FIDH, Bangladesh: Government must cease enforced disappearances, stop harassment of the victims’ families and hold perpetrators accountable, 30 August 2023, [url](#); CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Government ramps up persecution, smear campaign against activists while attacks on the opposition persist, 8 September 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹² France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 27



government may be harnessing the elite force for political gain, with tacit approval, at the very least, from the highest offices'. The same article stated that '[if] targets are political in nature, the operation only goes ahead when explicitly sanctioned from above [...] at least from the Ministry of Home Affairs', and targets specified from such high-level officials were prioritised.⁷⁹³

OFPPRA further referred to members of the opposition, describing continued violence against activists and even sympathiser – including 'presumed' BNP sympathisers. Activist from the BNP student branch in Sylhet told OFPPRA that they were not allowed to organise rallies or other political activities in public spaces. When they ignored this ban, the police could at times be conciliatory, but imposed restrictions such as time limitations to the gatherings. The police's attitude depended on the number of participants and the location of the event.⁷⁹⁴

Ahead of the national election, Prothom Alo reported on intra-party conflicts of the AL, with at least twelve leaders and activists dead between January and May 2023, due to clashes 'over leadership, establishing supremacy and local government elections.'⁷⁹⁵ Several interlocutors interviewed by OFPPRA, also emphasised that Bangladeshi politics should not be reduced to the polarisation between AL and BNP, as allegiances are fluid, and as counter-intuitive alliances between local officials of rivaling parties have regularly been observed.⁷⁹⁶

More information relevant for this profile is available in sections [2.2. Political context](#) and [2.4. Respect of human rights](#).

4.1.4. Journalists

In their annual report over press freedom in the world, RSF ranked Bangladesh on place 165 out of 180 countries in 2024.⁷⁹⁷ This constituted a decrease from place 150 in 2019.⁷⁹⁸ RSF expressed concern about the censorship by the government,⁷⁹⁹ and self-censorship impacted the work of media outlets.⁸⁰⁰ Moreover, civic space has been shrinking in general with, inter alia, journalists facing a 'hostile environment'⁸⁰¹ and being targeted by state actors and political party supporters.⁸⁰² Those reporting on sensitive topics (such as human rights abuse and corruption) have experienced threats, harassment and violence⁸⁰³ from state actors⁸⁰⁴ and

⁷⁹³ DW, 'Death squad': Inside Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion, 4 March 2023, [url](#);

⁷⁹⁴ France, OFPPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 27, 29–30

⁷⁹⁵ Prothom Alo, Infighting, killing at grassroots a headache for Awami League, 7 May 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁶ France, OFPPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 13–14

⁷⁹⁷ RSF, 2024 World Press Freedom Index: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁸ RSF, 2019 World Press Freedom Index: Bangladesh, 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁹ RSF, Bangladesh: general elections put journalists at risk, 6 January 2024, [url](#);

⁸⁰⁰ HRW, Bangladesh: End Crackdown Against Journalists and Critics, 3 May 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 2. A; CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 May 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰¹ IFJ, Bangladesh: 30 journalists attacked while covering protests, 6 November 2023, [url](#); RSF, Alarming surge of press freedom violations in Bangladesh, 5 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰² Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 3–4, paras. 16, 40–41

⁸⁰³ CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁴ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Crackdown on the opposition and critical journalists escalates as elections loom, 14 June 2023, [url](#)

political activists,⁸⁰⁵ while addressing sensitive topics such as secularism and religious minorities was ‘off limits’ according to RSF.⁸⁰⁶

In March 2024, the Minister for Information and Broadcasting stated that the government would ‘secure protection’ from harassment of journalists while they gather information and report.⁸⁰⁷ The same Minister later reiterated the government's aim to create space for free journalism and freedom of expression.⁸⁰⁸ However, according to state media Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), in July 2023, while distributing financial assistance to injured journalists and their families, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina requested ‘the journalist community not to publish any such news or criticise in such a way so that the country's advancement and image are hampered.’⁸⁰⁹ The prime minister has also called one of the leading local media outlets an ‘enemy’ of her party, democracy and the people.⁸¹⁰ Moreover, in January 2023 the government issued a letter informing of a closure of 191 websites accused of publishing ‘anti-state’ information,⁸¹¹ while in February 2023, BNP's only newspaper was shut down by the government according to Agence France-Presse (AFP).⁸¹² Some media outlets (e.g., Netra News) continue to report from abroad despite governmental repercussions, including shutdowns⁸¹³ and surveillance by the security agency.⁸¹⁴

In 2023, Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders expressed concern on the rise of attacks on journalists in Bangladesh,⁸¹⁵ while the Media Freedom Coalition also reported on violent acts and intimidation of journalists taking place.⁸¹⁶ In 2022–2023, ASK recorded 554 cases of violent incidents against journalists.⁸¹⁷ In January–April 2024, ASK recorded 105 such cases.⁸¹⁸ The Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists Monitoring Committee recorded at least four cases of journalists being killed and 292 attacks, lawsuits, arrests, torture, threats, and other forms of aggression against journalists during the first 11 months of 2023. The same source claimed that journalists were subjected to torture, harassment, threats, lawsuits, and obstacles while performing their professional duties.⁸¹⁹ Between 2022 and 2024, Committee

⁸⁰⁵ RSF, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#); RSF, Bangladeshi local daily raided by ruling party activists, 17 February 2022, [url](#); CPJ, At least 27 Bangladeshi journalists attacked, harassed while covering political rallies, 1 November 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁶ RSF, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

⁸⁰⁷ BSS, No harassment of journo while seeking information: Arafat, 18 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁸ BSS, Govt working to create free atmosphere for press: Arafat, 20 April 2024, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Govt working to create free atmosphere for press: info minister, 20 April 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁹ BSS, Don't publish any news that hampers country's image: PM urges journalists, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ Bangladesh Awami League, Prothom Alo is enemy of democracy and people: PM Sheikh Hasina, 11 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹¹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 2. a; Daily Star (The), 191 news sites to be blocked for spreading anti-state propaganda, 31 January 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹² Guardian (The), Bangladesh shuts down main opposition newspaper, 20 February 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh shuts down main opposition party's newspaper, 20 February 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹³ Al Jazeera, Bangladesh blocks news website accusing minister of corruption, 2 January 2020, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 1. f

⁸¹⁴ Reuters Institute, This editor is breaking news on Bangladesh from afar: “The space for independent media is shrinking fast”, 22 March 2024, [url](#); X, Post by Netra News, 25 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁵ AI, Bangladesh 2023, 2023, [url](#); RSF, Alarming surge of press freedom violations in Bangladesh, 5 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹⁶ USA, US Embassy in Bangladesh, Statement from Media Freedom coalition of Bangladesh, 30 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹⁷ ASK, Journalist Harassment (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#); ASK, Journalist Harassment (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁸ ASK, Journalist Harassment Jan-Apr 2024, 7 May 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁹ Business Standard (The), 4 journos killed, 292 others harassed so far this year: BFUJ, 3 December 2023, [url](#); New Age, Four journalists killed, 292 tortured in Bangladesh in 11 months: BFUJ, 3 December 2023, [url](#)

to Protect Journalists (CPJ) recorded one journalist murdered.⁸²⁰ The journalist was reportedly murdered by a group of men who ambushed him, and the family believed that it was an act of retaliation for the journalist's series of reports about the AL chair of a local government unit.⁸²¹ Meanwhile, RSF recorded three cases of journalists being murdered in 2023 alone. One of the cases was the same as reported by CPJ, while another concerned a journalist reporting on a smuggling case which allegedly could have involved local potentates.⁸²²

Sources indicated that journalists and media outlets criticising the government were targeted by the government and its supporters.⁸²³ Journalists have had criminal cases launched against them under the DSA,⁸²⁴ and such cases continued to be reported under the CSA.⁸²⁵ According to CGS, at least 451 journalists were accused and 97 were arrested under the DSA in October 2018–September 2023. The same source reported that out of 451 journalists, 209 were associated with national level media, and 197 were local journalists.⁸²⁶ Out of the 18 CSA cases recorded by CGS as of 1 March 2024, 10 were journalists.⁸²⁷

Bangladeshi journalists reporting from abroad, and their family members living in Bangladesh were also targeted by the state authorities.⁸²⁸ Local media BenarNews reported on expat journalists facing digital threats, threatening text messages and calls, and smearing campaigns.⁸²⁹ Remaining family members have been intimidated through state authorities' visits to their homes⁸³⁰ and some of them have also been arrested.⁸³¹ In one case, the brother of an expat journalists was beaten by a group of men, allegedly accusing the journalist of writing about the prime minister and 'against the government'.⁸³²

Ahead of the 2024 election, Reporters Without Borders expressed concern about the safety of journalists as attacks against them had 'multiplied', with cases of journalists being murdered, imprisoned, and attacked while reporting.⁸³³ Several journalists were attacked by supporters of the AL party and police while covering the political rally on 28 October 2023,⁸³⁴

⁸²⁰ CPJ, 1 Journalists killed in Bangladesh between 2022-2024, 2024, [url](#)

⁸²¹ CPJ, Golam Rabbani Nadim, [2024], [url](#)

⁸²² RSF, 2023 Round-up, Journalists killed, detained, held hostage and missing, 2023, [url](#), p. 11

⁸²³ HRW, Bangladesh: End Crackdown Against Journalists and Critics, 3 May 2023, [url](#); AI, Bangladesh: Press freedom under attack with largest daily newspaper declared an 'enemy' by the Government, 14 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸²⁴ Dhaka Tribune, Paris-based Bangladeshi writer Pinaki Bhattacharya sued under DSA, 17 November 2022, [url](#); OHCHR, Bangladesh: Türk urges immediate suspension of Digital Security Act as media crackdown continues, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸²⁵ CGS, From Digital to Cyber Security Act: Thoughts of the Politicians, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸²⁶ Riaz, A., The Ordeal Five Years of the Digital Security Act 2018-2023, CGS, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 10, 14

⁸²⁷ CGS, From Digital to Cyber Security Act: Thoughts of the Politicians, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸²⁸ BenarNews, Journalists in Bangladeshi diaspora say govt targets them through transnational repression, 21 December 2023, [url](#); CIVICUS, Bangladesh government brutally cracks down on opposition rallies as well as journalists and dissidents, 22 December 2022, [url](#)

⁸²⁹ BenarNews, Journalists in Bangladeshi diaspora say govt targets them through transnational repression, 21 December 2023, [url](#)

⁸³⁰ BenarNews, Journalists in Bangladeshi diaspora say govt targets them through transnational repression, 21 December 2023, [url](#); CPJ, Bangladesh authorities open investigation into exiled journalist Abdur Rab Bhuttow, harass family members, 3 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸³¹ RSF, Bangladeshi government uses relatives of expatriate journalists as hostages, 23 September 2022, [url](#); New Age, Govt targets families of expat critics, 15 September 2022, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 1. f

⁸³² CPJ, Unidentified men attack brother of exiled Bangladesh journalist Zulkarnain Saer Khan, 24 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸³³ RSF, Bangladesh: general elections put journalists at risk, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

⁸³⁴ CPJ, At least 27 Bangladeshi journalists attacked, harassed while covering political rallies, 1 November 2023, [url](#); New Age, 30 journalists injured during police-BNP clash, 29 October 2023, [url](#); Bdnews24.com, Journalists injured



and also by supporters of the BNP.⁸³⁵ Moreover, 18 journalists were assaulted or harassed during the general election coverage.⁸³⁶

Reporters Without Borders further reported on ‘election candidates, militias and student wings of the ruling party, as well as radical religious groups’ attacking journalists.⁸³⁷ RSF reported on ‘extremely violent campaigns that have led to the murders of journalists’, carried out by radical Islamist groups in the past decade. According to the same source such groups ‘use social media to track down and harass journalists who defend secularism, the right to alternative opinions and freedom of religion’.⁸³⁸ There were also cases of ordinary people attacking journalists.⁸³⁹

4.1.5. Human rights defenders

Bangladesh has a tradition of a strong civil society,⁸⁴⁰ with one of the largest NGOs in the world [BRAC] being based in the country.⁸⁴¹ As per the 2016 Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, NGOs are required to register and obtain an approval from the government to receive foreign donations.⁸⁴² More information about this act is available in section [4.1.1. Legislation on freedom of speech, assembly and the press](#).

According to Bangladesh’s NGO Affairs Bureau, as of March 2024, there were 2 615 registered local and foreign NGOs operating in Bangladesh.⁸⁴³ The majority of the registered organisations are development NGOs.⁸⁴⁴ Between January and October 2022, the government ‘cancelled’ the registration of 35 NGOs.⁸⁴⁵

In December 2023, CIVICUS reported that ‘[i]ndependent civil society has virtually no more space to operate’.⁸⁴⁶ The government imposed limits on activities of civil society organisations by enforcing regulations on registration and reporting,⁸⁴⁷ including the 2016 Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act.⁸⁴⁸ Especially organisations working in areas such as human rights experienced obstacles in the shape of state bureaucracy, inter alia in getting

in clashes in Dhaka’s Kakrail, 28 October 2023, [url](#); BJIM, BJIM condemns attacks on journalists covering political events, 28 October 2023, [url](#)

⁸³⁵ CPJ, At least 27 Bangladeshi journalists attacked, harassed while covering political rallies, 1 November 2023, [url](#)

⁸³⁶ CPJ, At least 18 Bangladeshi journalists attacked, harassed during election coverage, 26 January 2024, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Let journalists do their job, 16 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸³⁷ RSF, Bangladesh: general elections put journalists at risk, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

⁸³⁸ RSF, Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

⁸³⁹ RSF, Bangladesh: Journalist attacked and thrown off building for reporting on hill-cutting, 18 April 2023, [url](#); CPJ, Journalists stabbed, assaulted in Bangladesh, 18 May 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁰ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024. Zaman has worked for TIB since 2004, and holds expertise on governance, anti-corruption, people’s engagement, social accountability, politics, development, regional security and cooperation; ICNL, Bangladesh, 21 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴¹ Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

⁸⁴² Bangladesh, Act No. 8 of 2016, Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 8 October 2016, [url](#), art. 3; ICNL, Bangladesh, 21 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴³ Bangladesh, NGO Affairs Bureau, NGO List-All, March 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁴ ICNL, Bangladesh, 21 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁵ Bangladesh National Portal, NGO Affairs Bureau, List of Cancelled NGOs, 4 April 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁶ CIVICUS, CIVICUS Monitor downgrades Bangladesh’s civic space rating amid brutal pre-election crackdown, 6 December 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁷ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: ‘The legal vulnerability of LGBTQI+ people leads to harassment and discrimination’, 4 September 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 2. b

⁸⁴⁸ Hossain N. and Lewis D., Draft for discussion, Revisiting civil society in Bangladesh, January 2024, [url](#), p. 11



their registrations renewed.⁸⁴⁹ As described in section [4.1.1. Legislation on freedom of speech, assembly and the press](#), human rights defenders also had cases filed against them under the DSA.⁸⁵⁰

In 2022, the prominent local human rights organisation Odhikar saw the renewal of its registration rejected after having its case pending since 2014.⁸⁵¹ The NGO Affairs Bureau reportedly claimed that Odhikar had published ‘misleading information’ on enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, and consequently it damaged the image of the state.⁸⁵² The cancellation of Odhikar resulted in criticism and request for reinstatement by local actors and international organisations.⁸⁵³ Moreover, in September 2023, Odhikar’s director and secretary were arrested and sentenced to two years imprisonment and a fine, following a case dating back to 2013⁸⁵⁴ when the organisation released a fact-finding report on extrajudicial killings.⁸⁵⁵ They were charged with ‘publishing false images and information’ and ‘disrupting the law and order situation of the country’⁸⁵⁶ under the ICT act.⁸⁵⁷

As civic space is shrinking in general,⁸⁵⁸ activists have been targeted by state actors and political party supporters.⁸⁵⁹ Several sources reported on civil society activists and human rights defenders facing harassment and intimidation by the government authorities.⁸⁶⁰ According to results from a survey carried out by the CGS in 24 May–25 June 2023, in which 50 human rights defenders from 36 districts were surveyed, only 2 % described the situation for their work as ‘safe’. According to the same report ‘[t]he Human Rights situation in the country is poor and worsening, making Human Rights Defenders and Human Rights Organizations’ work perilous’. 86 % of human rights defenders operating at grassroots level stated that they faced ‘various obstacles’ in their work, including threats and intimidation from law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies and other government officials, and also non-state actors such as activists connected to the ruling party or the opposition party, and

⁸⁴⁹ Daily Star (The), Civil society organisations: Licence renewal, legal complexity big hurdles, 30 December 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 2. b.

⁸⁵⁰ Front Line Defenders, Digital Security Act: A Hanging Sword on Human Rights Defenders in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Riaz, A., The Ordeal Five Years of the Digital Security Act 2018-2023, CGS, April 2024, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁵¹ FIDH, Bangladesh: Stop punishing human rights work, 9 June 2022, [url](#); AI, Bangladesh: Deregistration of NGO Odhikar detrimental to human rights work, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵² FIDH, Bangladesh: Stop punishing human rights work, 9 June 2022, [url](#); AI, Bangladesh: Deregistration of NGO Odhikar detrimental to human rights work, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵³ Daily Star (The), Renew Odhikar’s registration, 13 June 2022, [url](#); AI, Bangladesh: Deregistration of NGO Odhikar detrimental to human rights work, 7 June 2022, [url](#); European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, notably the case of Odhikar, 12 September 2023, [url](#); OMCT, Bangladesh: Stop targeting Odhikar and its leadership, 22 May 2023, [url](#); HRW, Bangladesh: End Political Prosecution of Rights Leaders, 10 August 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁴ HRW, Bangladesh: Quash Conviction and Release Rights Defenders, 14 September 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Odhikar secretary, director jailed for two years, 14 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁵ HRW, Bangladesh: Quash Conviction and Release Rights Defenders, 14 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁶ Front Line Defenders, Human rights defenders Adilur Rahman and A.S.M Nasiruddin Elan sentenced to jail for two years, 2023, [url](#); OMCT, Bangladesh: Prominent defenders sentenced to two years in prison, 14 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁷ Front Line Defenders, Human rights defenders Adilur Rahman and A.S.M Nasiruddin Elan sentenced to jail for two years, 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Odhikar secretary, director jailed for two years, 14 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁸ Asia Foundation (The), A Glass Half-Full: Civic Space and Contestation in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 10, 16

⁸⁵⁹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 3–4, paras. 3–4, 7

⁸⁶⁰ EU Parliament, European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2023 on the human rights situation in Bangladesh, notably the case of Odhikar, 14 September 2023, [url](#); OHCHR, Bangladesh legal harassment of HRDs and civil society leaders, 5 September 2023, [url](#)



religious, extremist or criminal groups. Such threats, harassment and intimidation ‘severely’ impacted their life and work, and made 28.6 % scale down their work, and 10.7 % ‘leave their areas’. The nature of obstacles included threats of harm, restrictions on activities, government repression, physical attacks, judicial harassment and arrests, extortion and bribery and enforced disappearance, and respondents frequently mentioned ‘imparting fear by various means’ as the method of harassment. 10 % also stated that their friend and family members were intimidated.⁸⁶¹ Other sources also reported on human rights defenders facing harassment by the ruling party and state authorities.⁸⁶²

According to Front Line Defenders, local extremist groups often claimed responsibility for attacks against human rights defenders ‘who write about women’s rights, indigenous peoples’ rights, freedom of religion, and other human rights issues’.⁸⁶³

Labour activists were also faced violence from the police, and actors linked to the industry.⁸⁶⁴ On 25 June 2023, the president of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation Gazipur district committee, ‘was beaten to death after he supported factory workers who did not get paid’.⁸⁶⁵

4.2. Women and girls

4.2.1. Legislation and representation

Bangladesh has signed international treaties and agreements related to the rights of women and girls, including CEDAW⁸⁶⁶ and its Optional Protocol.⁸⁶⁷ CEDAW was however adopted with the reservation against article 2 and parts of article 16, which inter alia states that women should have ‘the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution’ as the state of Bangladesh considered these articles being against *sharia*.⁸⁶⁸ Furthermore, the Optional Protocol was signed with the reservation that Bangladesh will not undertake the obligations set out in articles 8 or 9, which authorise the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to examine ‘reliable information indicating grave or systematic violations’ of state parties, and also to conduct inquiries which may include a country visit.⁸⁶⁹

The constitution stipulates that ‘[t]he State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity and participation of women in all spheres of national life’, and that ‘[w]omen shall have equal

⁸⁶¹ Riaz, A., Who Defends the Defenders? The Predicament of Human Rights Activists In Bangladesh, July 2023, CGS, [url](#), pp. 6, 14, 21–22, 29

⁸⁶² RFK Human Rights, Bangladesh: Stop reprisals against victims, activists, 8 April 2022, [url](#); Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 80

⁸⁶³ Front Line Defenders, #Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁴ Hossain N. and Lewis D., Draft for discussion, Revisiting civil society in Bangladesh, January 2024, [url](#), p. 12; France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 27

⁸⁶⁵ OMCT, Bangladesh: Arbitrary detention and impunity for torture continues after elections, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁶ United Nations Treaty Collection, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁷ United Nations Treaty Collection, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1999, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁸ United Nations Treaty Collection, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, [url](#), [footnote 5], art. 16 (c)

⁸⁶⁹ United Nations Treaty Collection, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1999, [url](#)



rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life'.⁸⁷⁰ There are also numerous laws addressing specific forms of violence against women,⁸⁷¹ including dowry-related violence (the Dowry Prohibition Act (2018)), domestic violence (Prevention and Protection Act (2010)),⁸⁷² and acid violence⁸⁷³ (the acts of Acid Offence Control and Acid Crime Prevention (2002)).⁸⁷⁴

Bangladesh ranked highest among South Asian countries in the Gender Gap Index,⁸⁷⁵ ranking 59 globally in 2023.⁸⁷⁶ USAID described Bangladesh as having 'advanced regulation for protecting women's rights and privileges', but noted still existing 'barriers to overcoming inequality'.⁸⁷⁷ Although the leaders of the two main political parties were women,⁸⁷⁸ and although the constitution guarantees 50 seats for women in parliament,⁸⁷⁹ women remained underrepresented in political and public life.⁸⁸⁰ According to the latest Gender Gap Index report there was a 58 % gap as regards women in parliament, and 80 % as regards women in ministerial positions.⁸⁸¹ Seven women judges (out of 95 judges) sit in the High Court and 550 women judges (out of 2 000) serve the lower courts, according to UN Women.⁸⁸²

According to Freedom House, less than 50 % of the labour force were women,⁸⁸³ and the World Bank indicated that women represented around 32 % of the total workforce in 2023.⁸⁸⁴ According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, around 10 million women were entrepreneurs or contributed to small and medium enterprises.⁸⁸⁵ While women represented over 50 % of workers in the garment industry,⁸⁸⁶ most managerial and administrative positions were held by men.⁸⁸⁷ Moreover, women 'generally earned less than male counterparts even when performing similar functions', as reported by USDOS.⁸⁸⁸ Women garment workers also faced sexual harassment at the workplace.⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁷⁰ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 19 (3), 28 (2)

⁸⁷¹ BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh: The Issues of Justice for Violence against Women and Girls, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁷² WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2023, [url](#), p. 40

⁸⁷³ Razzaque, Naimul and Raffat W.S., Acid Violence in Bangladesh: A Burning Issue and Devastating Violence against Women, International Journal of Scientific Research and Management, 8 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 6

⁸⁷⁴ Bangladesh, Acid Offence Control Act, 2002, 2002, [url](#); Bangladesh, Acid Crime Prevention Act 2002, 2002, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁵ Business Standard (The), Gender equality: Bangladesh ranks best in South Asia 9th consecutive time, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁶ WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Benchmarking gender gaps, 20 June 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁷ USA, USAID, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, 5 April 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁸ ACCORD, Bangladesh: COI Compilation, August 2023, [url](#), p. 63

⁸⁷⁹ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), Ar. 65 (3)

⁸⁸⁰ EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 15

⁸⁸¹ WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2023, [url](#), p. 101

⁸⁸² UN Women, Gender Equality Brief: Bangladesh 2024, 2 May 2024, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁸³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁴ WB, Labor force, female (% of total labor force) – Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁵ Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release: "Women Empowerment: A Success Story of Bangladesh:" – A Briefing Session arranged by Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Karachi on the International Women's Day 2024, 10 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁶ Just Style, Declining number of women in Bangladesh ready-made-garment industry – report, 10 March 2023, [url](#); RMG Bangladesh, Women workers declining in Bangladesh ready-made-garment industry, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁷ LightCastle Partners, Early Retirement and Alternative Career Opportunities for Women RMG Workers in Bangladesh, 12 October 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 7. d

⁸⁸⁸ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 7. d

⁸⁸⁹ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 7. d; Solidarity Center, In Our Words: Workers address gender-based violence and harassment in garment factories in Bangladesh, August 2023, [url](#)



Personal laws based on religious beliefs impacted women's possibilities to divorce⁸⁹⁰ and to inherit.⁸⁹¹ For example, under Islamic inheritance law women inherit half of what men inherit in similar situations,⁸⁹² while Hindu inheritance law excludes daughters from inheriting unless it is mentioned in a will.⁸⁹³ More information on divorce is available in section [4.2.3\(e\) Forced marriage](#).

4.2.2. Social attitudes

The Philippine Alliance for Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) and OMCT, described Bangladesh as 'a patriarchal society, underpinned by a culture of misogyny'.⁸⁹⁴ According to the 2023 UN Gender Social Norms Index, over 99 % of Bangladeshis held at least one bias against women, due to norms 'undervaluing women's rights and capabilities'. For example, norms dictated men as 'primary decision-makers and breadwinners', and subordinate roles of women.⁸⁹⁵ The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) also described marriage as a norm, with men being perceived as providers, and women as responsible for maintaining the family reputation.⁸⁹⁶

OMCT and PAHRA further described 'misogyny, stalking, and rape' as normalised by society, and that many young men were 'not equipped with the tools to realize that they perpetrate offences, such as stalking and harassment'. The same sources reported on certain offences such as rape being associated with 'shame' for the victim, and a fear of being perceived as 'immoral'. This may also extend to other family members, such as sisters being considered 'unsuitable for marriage'.⁸⁹⁷ Other sources also reported on social stigma being connected to sexual abuse⁸⁹⁸ and gender-based violence.⁸⁹⁹ The IDS described a 'culture of silence' in which 'women feel ashamed to openly acknowledge their experiences' of domestic violence, and the authorities being reluctant to interfere in the private lives of couples.⁹⁰⁰

⁸⁹⁰ Daily Star (The), The process of getting a divorce, 5 August 2023, [url](#); South Asia State of Minorities Report 2022, [url](#), p. 40

⁸⁹¹ Daily Star (The), Challenging tradition: women's inheritance laws in Bangladesh, 4 March 2024, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 7. d

⁸⁹² Daily Star (The), Challenging tradition: women's inheritance laws in Bangladesh, 4 March 2024, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 7. d

⁸⁹³ Daily Star (The), Challenging tradition: women's inheritance laws in Bangladesh, 4 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁴ OMCT, Women break the silence gender-based torture in Asia, [url](#), p. 112

⁸⁹⁵ UNDP, Over 99 percent of Bangladeshis hold at least one bias against women, 19 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁶ Sultan, M. and Mahpara, P., Backlash in Action? Or Inaction? Stalled Implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 in Bangladesh, 2023, IDS, [url](#), p. 13

⁸⁹⁷ OMCT, Women break the silence gender-based torture in Asia, [url](#), pp. 112–113

⁸⁹⁸ Business Standard (The), Why are we struggling to combat child rape? 9 November 2023, [url](#); Tasnima, T. et al, Women, Technology and Gender-Based Violence in Bangladesh, Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication, December 2023, [url](#), p. 174; USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6.

⁸⁹⁹ UNDP, Gender-based violence: taking stock of Bangladesh's shadow pandemic, 10 April 2022, [url](#); UN Women, Ending violence against women, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁹⁰⁰ Sultan, M. and Mahpara, P., Backlash in Action? Or Inaction? Stalled Implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 in Bangladesh, IDS, 2023, [url](#), p. 14



4.2.3. Violence and other forms of abuse against women and girls

Violence against women remained a prevalent issue in Bangladesh⁹⁰¹ being at ‘alarming’ levels according to several sources.⁹⁰² As reported by the Dhaka Tribune, 54 % of women have experienced physical and sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime,⁹⁰³ and other sources noted that gender-based violence was underreported.⁹⁰⁴

Information on state response is available in section [3.5.3. Violence against women and girls](#).

(a) Domestic violence, including dowry-related abuse

Domestic violence remained one of the most underreported cases of violence against women in Bangladesh.⁹⁰⁵ According to Freedom House, ‘[a]s many as 70 percent of married women are abused by their intimate partners but rarely report those incidents’.⁹⁰⁶ In the period 1 January 2022–April 2024, ASK recorded 461 cases of women being murdered by their husbands.⁹⁰⁷ According to a local media source reporting on 19 September 2022, the National Emergency Service Number (999) indicated a high increase in reports of harassment and domestic violence reported by women ‘in the past few years.’ In the last eight months of 2022, the number received 13 416 calls, and the main complaints were women calling the number due to repression, torture by husbands, and violence.⁹⁰⁸

Dowry is known as *joutuk*,⁹⁰⁹ and is defined as money or any other asset demanded or given as part of a marriage in the Dowry Prohibition Act of 2018. While this act prohibits the dowry practice, and prescribe a penalty of imprisonment of up to five years and/or a fine of up to 50 000 *taka* [about EUR 392],⁹¹⁰ the practice still exists⁹¹¹ and is being disguised as ‘gift-giving’, according to research associates at BRAC University.⁹¹² In the period 1 January 2022–April 2024, ASK recorded 339 incidents of dowry-related violence against women, out of which 230 cases had been filed. 147 women had been physically tortured, 15 had committed suicide after physical torture and 152 women were killed after torture.⁹¹³

⁹⁰¹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); UN Women, Gender Equality Brief: Bangladesh 2024, 2 May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁰² Daily Star (The), 114 women raped in first three months this year, 2 April 2024, [url](#); Financial Express (The), Violence against women, intensity increase alarmingly: speakers, 4 December 2022, [url](#); OMCT, Women break the silence gender-based torture in Asia, [url](#), p. 112

⁹⁰³ Dhaka Tribune, Report: Nearly 10,000 women faced violence in Bangladesh in a year, 8 March 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁴ UNDP, Gender-based violence: taking stock of Bangladesh’s shadow pandemic, 10 April 2022, [url](#); Sweden, UD, Bangladesh – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2021, 22 June 2022, [url](#), p. 13; Prothom Alo, Violence against women: Reluctance in seeking legal remedy, 24 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁵ Prothom Alo, Violence against women: Reluctance in seeking legal remedy, 24 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁷ ASK, Violence Against Women – Domestic Violence (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Women-Domestic Violence (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Women – Domestic Violence Jan-Apr 2024, 7 May 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁸ Bdnews24.com, Why is Bangladesh still seeing a rise in violence against women? 18 September 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁹ Uddin, M. K., The Practices of Dowry in Bangladesh: Issues and Challenges, Journal of Asian and African Social Science and Humanities, 30 September 2023, [url](#), p. 19

⁹¹⁰ Bangladesh, Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018, [url](#)

⁹¹¹ Bangladesh Post, Dowry still exists in country, 11 October 2023, [url](#)

⁹¹² Daily Star (The), Dowry still exists in the guise of ‘gifts’, 29 January 2023, [url](#)

⁹¹³ ASK, Violence Against Women-Dowry (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Women (Dowry related violence) Jan-Apr 2024, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Women (Dowry related violence) January-December 2022, [url](#)



(b) Sexual harassment

The Prevention of Oppression Against Women and Children Act (2000) outlines punishments for offences including ‘sexual oppression’. The definition includes the illegal touching of ‘the sexual organ or other organ of a woman or child’ and sexual assault or indecent gestures’.⁹¹⁴ In 2009, the Supreme Court issued a judgement prohibiting sexual harassment in workplaces and educational institutions, in both public and private sectors.⁹¹⁵ Sexual harassment against women has however continued.⁹¹⁶ In the period 1 January 2022–April 2024, ASK recorded 364 cases of women being sexually harassed.⁹¹⁷ However, as reported by the Daily Star, sexual abuse is underreported.⁹¹⁸ Sources reported that women face sexual harassment in universities⁹¹⁹ and in the workplace⁹²⁰ as well as in public places,⁹²¹ and public transport.⁹²² According to a joint survey carried out by UNDP together with an autonomous government body and a local not-for-profit policy research organisation, as reported by the Daily Star, 87 % of women had faced some form of harassment at least once, and 36 % regularly faced harassment on public transport.⁹²³ According to OFPRA, ‘sexual harassment is ubiquitous, whether in public transport or in the street or in the workplace, particularly in textile factories, but also in universities and dormitories’ [informal translation].⁹²⁴

(c) Rape

Rape, as foreseen in the 1860 Penal Code,⁹²⁵ is punishable by life imprisonment⁹²⁶ or death, if the woman dies as a consequence of the rape.⁹²⁷ The law does not apply to marital rape if the wife is over 13 years.⁹²⁸ The definition of rape, as per the Penal Code, includes a requisite of penetration, and defines it as an act carried out by a man against a woman.⁹²⁹ In 2022, the

⁹¹⁴ Bangladesh, Parliament of Bangladesh, Prevention of Oppression against Women and Children 2000, [url](#)

⁹¹⁵ Bangladesh, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Writ Petition No. 5916 of 2008, 2008, [url](#), p. 23

⁹¹⁶ New Age, Violence against women goes unabated in Bangladesh, 7 March 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Harassing the law, 27 December 2023, [url](#)

⁹¹⁷ ASK, Violence Against Women – Sexual Harassment (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Women – Sexual Harassment (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Women – Sexual Harassment (Jan-Dec 2023), 7 May 2024, [url](#)

⁹¹⁸ Daily Star (The), Voicing and challenging workplace sexual harassment in Bangladesh, 6 March 2023, [url](#)

⁹¹⁹ Daily Star (The), Sexual harassment in universities and the struggle for justice, 21 March 2024, [url](#); Prothom Alo, When incidents of sexual harassment come to light, repeatedly, violence begins, 20 March 2024, [url](#)

⁹²⁰ Freedom House, Freedom World 2023: Bangladesh, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2024, Bangladesh: Events of 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Voicing and challenging workplace sexual harassment in Bangladesh, 6 March, 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Harassing the law, 27 December 2023, [url](#)

⁹²¹ UNDP, Women’s Safety in Public Places, March 2023, [url](#), p. 3

⁹²² Kabir, H. and Islam, S., Sexual Harassment in Public Transport in Dhaka City: A Socio-legal Assessment, Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Legal Studies, 2023, [url](#), p. 31; World Banks Blogs, Bangladesh: The need to expand the road safety discourse to stop sexual harassment, 6 December 2022, [url](#)

⁹²³ Daily Star (The), 87% Bangladeshi women harassed at least once; public transport riskiest: Survey, 26 August 2022, [url](#)

⁹²⁴ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 64

⁹²⁵ Bangladesh, The Penal Code 1860, Chapter XVI, [url](#), art. 375

⁹²⁶ Bangladesh, The Penal Code 1860, Chapter XVI, [url](#), art. 376

⁹²⁷ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 6; Bangladesh, Parliament of Bangladesh (The), Prevention of Crime against Women and Children, 2000, Unofficial Translation, [url](#), p. 3

⁹²⁸ Bangladesh, The Penal Code 1860, Chapter XVI, [url](#), art. 375; USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#), section 6

⁹²⁹ Bangladesh, The Penal Code 1860, Chapter XVI, [url](#), art. 375



government repealed a provision in the Evidence Act of 1872 and replaced it with a bill that prohibits questioning of the victims' character during cross-examinations in trials.⁹³⁰

In the period 1 January 2022–April 2024, ASK recorded 1 662 cases of raped women being raped, 323 rape attempts, and 86 deaths and 13 suicides following rape.⁹³¹ The police recorded 4 762 rape cases in 2022 alone, as reported by local media outlet Kaler Kantho.⁹³² According to Odhikar, a 'large number of women and girls were victims of rape and gang rape', and some had been raped by ruling party activists and members of law enforcement.⁹³³ Human Right Watch estimated in 2023 that fewer than 1 % of rape cases investigated by the police lead to conviction, referring to their own investigation from 2020.⁹³⁴

In 2022, the 2022 Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) attributed the increase in rape cases to factors such as the 'lack of proper implementation of laws, weak law enforcement, social stigma, and patriarchal attitudes that perpetuate gender-based violence.'⁹³⁵ USDOS in 2022, noted that many survivors did not report rapes due to lack of access to legal services, social stigma, fear of further harassment, the legal requirement to produce witnesses, or the burden of proof being on the survivor of rape.⁹³⁶ In 2024, the executive director of ASK, cited by the Daily Star, described public lack of confidence in law enforcement agencies and impunity of perpetrators.⁹³⁷ Odhikar further reported on non-cooperation from the police as a significant reason for the lack of prosecution, and noting instances of police harassment of rape victims and their family members at police stations, and allegations of police officers being involved in rape.⁹³⁸

(d) Acid attacks

An acid attack 'involves the intentional throwing of any corrosive onto the face and body of a person to disfigure them', as described by the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF).⁹³⁹ The 'attacks are carried out with the intention of causing harm, inflicting suffering, and in certain instances, taking someone's life'.⁹⁴⁰

Although cases of acid violence continue to be reported, the number of incidents has decreased⁹⁴¹ over the past 20 years.⁹⁴² The majority of acid victims have been women,⁹⁴³ and

⁹³⁰ UN Bangladesh, UN Women docuseries sheds light on global efforts to end violence against women, 12 March 2024, [url](#); AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The state of the world's human rights, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 87

⁹³¹ ASK, Violence Against Women-Rape (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Women-Rape (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Women-Rape (Jan-April 2024), 7 May 2024, [url](#)

⁹³² Kaler Kantho, 27,479 rape cases filed in 5 years, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

⁹³³ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), paras. 81–82

⁹³⁴ HRW, World Report 2024, Bangladesh: Events of 2023, [url](#)

⁹³⁵ HRSS, Annual Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh 2022, August 2023, [url](#), p. 30

⁹³⁶ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

⁹³⁷ Daily Star (The), 114 women raped in first three months this year, 2 April 2024, [url](#)

⁹³⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 82

⁹³⁹ ASF, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁴⁰ Dhaka Tribune, Survivors of the extreme, 11 November 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴¹ ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999-2023, [url](#), p. 1; Business Standard (The), Bangladesh came together to end acid violence, 25 May 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁴² ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999-2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁹⁴³ ASF, n.d., [url](#); Prothom Alo, Acid violence: Bring the perpetrators to book, 1 March 2024, [url](#); British Asian Trust, Mental health support for acid and burn survivors, 2023, [url](#)



many have been young women and girls.⁹⁴⁴ Between January 2022 and May 2024, ASF reported on 34 acid incidents, with 30 victims being women.⁹⁴⁵ The most common motives for acid attacks were family and land disputes,⁹⁴⁶ followed by dowry, marriage disputes, rejected love, marriage, and sexual proposals and business disputes.⁹⁴⁷ In 2023, Odhikar reported that most cases of acid violence were due to property disputes.⁹⁴⁸

According to an academic article victims of acid attacks often faced social stigma and discrimination, due to the disfigurement and scars, and ‘may encounter negative attitudes, prejudice, and misconceptions from others, leading to social isolation and exclusion.’⁹⁴⁹

(e) Forced marriage

As reported by OFPRA, forced marriage per se was not explicitly prohibited by law, but only the kidnapping of women with the aim of forcing to marriage as outlined in article 336 of the penal code.⁹⁵⁰

According to USDOS, forced marriage was one of the ‘significant human rights issues’ that they had received ‘credible reports’ about.⁹⁵¹ OFPRA reported that inter alia victims of forced marriage were vulnerable to labour exploitation, including servile marriage, and women being victims of early marriage were more vulnerable to be exploited ‘within the context of marriage’ [informal translation].⁹⁵² According to X ‘harmful practices perpetrated against women and girls with disabilities, in particular forced marriage, remain common’⁹⁵³

The people most vulnerable to labor exploitation, whether forced labor, domestic servitude or servile marriage, are victims of forced or child marriages, victims of gender-based violence, poor people or marginalized, unemployed or poorly educated people, people affected by climate change and natural disasters, seasonal workers and people migrating illegally

Under the 1869 Divorce Act, women can file for divorce.⁹⁵⁴ The process of filing for and receiving a divorce however differs depending on the religious belief and gender.⁹⁵⁵

According to Minority Rights Group (MRG), ‘[t]he practice of discriminatory personal laws in the name of religion has been demeaning the status of women in the family and other socio-economic institutions’.⁹⁵⁶ In Islam, women face greater barriers than men when seeking

⁹⁴⁴ Razzaque, N. and Raffat W.S., Acid Violence in Bangladesh: A Burning Issue and Devastating Violence against Women, International Journal of Scientific Research and Management, Vol. 11, Issue 8, 8 August 2023, [url](#), p. 1; Dhaka Tribune, Survivors of the extreme, 11 November 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁵ ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999- (May) 2024, 12 June 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁹⁴⁶ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 67; ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999- (May) 2024, 12 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 5, 11, 15

⁹⁴⁷ ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999- (May) 2024, 12 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 5, 11, 15

⁹⁴⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 67

⁹⁴⁹ Razzaque, N. and Raffat W.S., Acid Violence in Bangladesh: A Burning Issue and Devastating Violence against Women, International Journal of Scientific Research and Management, 8 August 2023, [url](#), p. 7

⁹⁵⁰ France, OFPRA, Bangladesh : La traite par l’exploitation par le travail, 26 September 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁵¹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), Executive summary

⁹⁵² France OFPRA, Bangladesh : La traite par l’exploitation par le travail, 26 September 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁵³ UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the initial report of Bangladesh, 11 October 2022, [url](#), para. 35

⁹⁵⁴ Bangladesh, The Divorce Act, 1869, [url](#); USA, US Embassy in Bangladesh, Forced Marriage, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁵⁵ Daily Star (The), The process of getting a divorce, 5 August 2023, [url](#); MRG, South Asia State of Minorities Report 2022 – Weakening Human Rights Commitments and Its Impact on Minorities, 16 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 40–41

⁹⁵⁶ MRG, South Asia State of Minorities Report 2022 – Weakening Human Rights Commitments and Its Impact on Minorities, 16 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 40–41



divorce.⁹⁵⁷ Hindu women can apply for separation, but divorce is not recognised.⁹⁵⁸ According to Christian personal law, divorce is allowed on limited grounds for both men and women with more restrictions placed on women.⁹⁵⁹ According to a 2022 BBS national survey, the divorce rate was 1.4 per one thousand people in 2022⁹⁶⁰ and 1.1 per thousand people in 2023.⁹⁶¹

(f) Child marriage

The 2017 Child Marriage Restraint Act sets the legal age of marriage to 18 years for a female and 21 years for a male.⁹⁶² Children may however marry, under ‘special circumstances as may be prescribed by rules in the best interests of the minor, at the directions of the court and with consent of the parents or the guardian of the minor’.⁹⁶³

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage worldwide.⁹⁶⁴ Statistics indicate that between 41 and 51 % of women married before their turned 18 years,⁹⁶⁵ and 8.2 % had married before they were 15. The practice was reportedly more prevalent in rural areas (44.4 %), although 33.5 % had married before 18 years in urban areas.⁹⁶⁶ According to OFPRA, ‘marriage of minors is practiced by all religious communities and is only registered with the authorities once the girl has reached the age of 18, sometimes with false documents’ [informal translation].⁹⁶⁷

Despite the legal age requirements for marriage being 18 years of age for girls and 21 years for boys,⁹⁶⁸ the 2017 Child Marriage Restraint Act includes a special provision for marriages of minors under ‘special circumstances’ and being ‘in the best interests of the minor’ with the consent of the parents or the guardian of the minor.⁹⁶⁹ However, the law does not specify what the special circumstances are.⁹⁷⁰ According to CARE Tipping Point Initiative, ‘80% of parents inherently believe that their daughters lack the competence to make sound decisions, deeming the process of obtaining their consent unnecessary’ as reported by the Daily Star.⁹⁷¹

⁹⁵⁷ Bangladesh, The Muslim Marriages and Divorces (Registration) Act, 1974, [url](#); MRG, South Asia State of Minorities Report 2022 – Weakening Human Rights Commitments and Its Impact on Minorities, 16 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 40–41; Daily Star (The), The process of getting a divorce, 5 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁸ Bangladesh, The Hindu Married Women's Right to Separate Residence and Maintenance Act, 1946, [url](#); MRG, South Asia State of Minorities Report 2022 – Weakening Human Rights Commitments and Its Impact on Minorities, 16 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 40–41; Daily Star (The), Legal framework on Hindu marriage in Bangladesh, 22 September 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁹ Bangladesh, The Christian Marriage Act, 1872, [url](#); MRG, South Asia State of Minorities Report 2022 – Weakening Human Rights Commitments and Its Impact on Minorities, 16 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 40–41; Daily Star (The), Dissolution of Christian marriages, 3 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁰ Bangladesh, BBS, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2022, Key Findings, [url](#), p. 12; Bdnews24.com, Divorce rate in Bangladesh doubled in 2022: report, 13 June 2023, [url](#); AA, Divorce rate in Bangladesh doubled last year: Survey, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁶¹ Bangladesh, BBS, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, Key Findings, 24 March 2024, [url](#), p. 24

⁹⁶² Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), art. 2 (1)

⁹⁶³ Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), art. 19

⁹⁶⁴ UNFPA, Breaking The Chains: Inspiring Stories of Hope in Ending Child Marriage, 11 October 2023, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁵ UNICEF, Bangladesh: Child Protection, n.d., [url](#); Bangladesh, BBS, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, Key Findings, 24 March 2024, [url](#), p. 24

⁹⁶⁶ Bangladesh, BBS, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, Key Findings, 24 March 2024, [url](#), p. 24

⁹⁶⁷ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 63

⁹⁶⁸ Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), Art. 2

⁹⁶⁹ Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), Art. 19; USA, US Embassy in Bangladesh, Forced Marriage, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁷⁰ Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), Art. 19

⁹⁷¹ Daily Star (The), Consent to marriage and best interest of girls, 10 November 2023, [url](#)

The Daily Star reported that some factors contributing to child marriage in Bangladesh include climate change⁹⁷² and poverty.⁹⁷³ A 2023 study of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) revealed a 39 % surge in child marriage after ‘climate-induced disasters’ in ‘disaster-prone and climate-vulnerable coastal regions’.⁹⁷⁴ According to the Founder of Light shore Foundation Sultana Razia, extreme poverty among some ethnic communities, such as among Garo and Hajong groups, often resulted in child marriages.⁹⁷⁵

(g) Trafficking in human beings

Trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation within Bangladesh⁹⁷⁶ and across its borders remained prevalent.⁹⁷⁷ Sources reported that women and children have been trafficked both overseas and within the country for the purposes of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.⁹⁷⁸ Some of the groups vulnerable to sex trafficking included victims of child marriage and gender-based violence.⁹⁷⁹ In 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally reported on ‘women-headed households as particularly vulnerable, with reports of girls as young as age 12 years being trafficked to Malaysia for purposes of child marriage, sexual exploitation and domestic servitude’.⁹⁸⁰ Sources also reported on Rohingya girls being trafficked within Bangladesh and internationally for forced marriage.⁹⁸¹ In a joint report UNODC and the government of Bangladesh identified economic needs and climate change as two root causes making people vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking. People living in poverty were more vulnerable and traffickers also targeted victims of environmental disasters. The same report stated that ‘[p]eople of all genders and age groups are at risk of domestic and cross-border trafficking’.⁹⁸² The government of Bangladesh further reported that ‘[c]hild marriage, dowry, eve teasing, domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence and discrimination push women and children into a high-risk category’ of trafficking in human beings.⁹⁸³

⁹⁷² Daily Star (The), Climate change is fuelling child marriage in Bangladesh, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁷³ Daily Star (The), An alarming upswing in child marriage, 28 March 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁴ IRC, Bangladesh: IRC study reveals a staggering 39% surge in child marriage due to climate change, 6 December 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁵ Daily Star (The), Strength in solidarity: 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence, 4 December 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Bangladesh - Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally, 28 April 2023, [url](#), para. 19; USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Bangladesh - Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally, 28 April 2023, [url](#), para. 19; Daily Star (The), Lured to India’s red light district, and a lucky escape, 29 December 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Sex Trafficking: The racket on prowl at the border, 30 December 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁹ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Bangladesh - Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally, 28 April 2023, [url](#), p. 15

⁹⁸¹ AP, ‘I feel trapped’: Scores of underage Rohingya girls forced into abusive marriages in Malaysia, 13 December 2023, [url](#); Guardian (The), Death, abuse and torture: traffickers hold fleeing Rohingya to ransom for up to £3,000 a time, 5 March 2024, [url](#); Freedom United, Rohingya girls’ agony deepened by forced child marriages, 13 December 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸² Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 11

⁹⁸³ Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh, National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 2018-2022 (Updated to 2023 - 2025), 2023, [url](#), p. 16

In 2023, the USDOS reported that the government of Bangladesh identified 240 trafficking victims (115 sex trafficking victims, 92 forced labour victims, and 33 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking). The reported numbers were lower than the figures presented by civil society and international organisations which included at least 6 781 trafficking victims (961 for sex trafficking, 3 764 for labour trafficking, and 2 056 for unspecified forms of trafficking).⁹⁸⁴ An estimated 30 000 girls were being exploited in child sex trafficking in Bangladesh, according to USDOS.⁹⁸⁵

Information on state response is available in section [3.5.1. Trafficking in human beings](#).

4.3. Ethnic and religious minorities

Ethnic minorities tend to overlap with religious minorities, including Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians.⁹⁸⁶ More information on demography and minority groups is available in section [1.2. Ethnic and religious groups](#).

4.3.1. Legislation on the rights of ethnic minorities

Bangladesh has ratified CERD,⁹⁸⁷ constitutionally protects ‘the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects, and communities’, and prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of, inter alia, race, caste, or place of birth.⁹⁸⁸ As previously mentioned, many ethnic minorities identify as indigenous people,⁹⁸⁹ but the government does not recognise that concept,⁹⁹⁰ nor any particular rights relating to it.⁹⁹¹

In 2010, the government enacted the Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutions Act, with a commitment to protect the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities.⁹⁹²

In April 2022, the Anti-Discrimination Act was debated in the parliament.⁹⁹³ The Act prohibits discrimination on the ground of inter alia ethnicity, place of birth, and caste, and introduces a complaints mechanism for victims of discrimination to seek remedies, according to Amnesty

⁹⁸⁴ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁵ USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁶ Shah, T. S. Bangladesh Religious Freedom Landscape Report. Religious Freedom Institute, 2020, [url](#), p. 14; USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁸⁷ United Nations Treaty Collection, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1966, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁸ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 23 (A), 28 (1)

⁹⁸⁹ Sweden, UD, Bangladesh – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2021, 22 June 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁹⁹⁰ HRBF and Nagorik Uddyog, Factsheet: Bangladesh, Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2023: Bangladesh, 29 March 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁹¹ Sweden, UD, Bangladesh – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2021, 22 June 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁹⁹² Chistian Aid and BLAST, Laws and Policies that Discriminate against Ethnic Minorities in the Plainlands of Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), p. 54; Business Standard (The), Keeping our ethnic minority languages alive, 21 February 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁹³ BBS, A bill titled ‘Anti-Discrimination act-2022’ placed in parliament, 5 April 2022, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Ensuring equal rights: Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022 placed in parliament, 5 April 2022, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Make anti-discrimination law more inclusive, says think tank, 10 April 2022, [url](#)



International.⁹⁹⁴ In an interview with the EUAA on 22 April 2024, an anonymous source confirmed that the Act is pending adoption by the government.⁹⁹⁵

4.3.2. Legislation on religious rights

According to the constitution, Bangladesh is a secular state,⁹⁹⁶ although article 2A of the constitution stipulates that ‘the state religion [...] is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions.’⁹⁹⁷ Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed.⁹⁹⁸

Under Chapter XV of the Penal Code, ‘deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings’ or ‘uttering words [...] with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings’ are prohibited.⁹⁹⁹ According to an informal translation of the act posted on social media, ‘Publication, broadcast, etc. of information in website or in any electronic format that hurts the religious values or sentiment’ is considered an offence under the 2023 CSA.¹⁰⁰⁰

The Anti-Discrimination Act proposed in 2022¹⁰⁰¹ also prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.¹⁰⁰² More information on this act is available in section [4.3.1. Legislation on the rights of ethnic minorities](#).

4.3.3. Representation and treatment by state authorities

According to Freedom House, ethnic and religious groups remained underrepresented in politics and state agencies.¹⁰⁰³ According to the EU Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh, indigenous and religious minorities experienced ‘obstacles to full participation in political life’, including fear of reprisals and destruction of property.¹⁰⁰⁴

According to USDOS, some ethnic communities speak only tribal languages which poses a challenge to access government services in Bangla language.¹⁰⁰⁵ Reportedly, the government developed pre-school textbooks in five indigenous languages (including Chakma, Garo, Kokborok, Marma, and Sadri)¹⁰⁰⁶ and distributed around 25 000 books.¹⁰⁰⁷ However, sources indicated a shortage of qualified teachers who speak indigenous languages.¹⁰⁰⁸

⁹⁹⁴ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The state of the world’s human rights, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 88

⁹⁹⁵ International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

⁹⁹⁶ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 8 (1)

⁹⁹⁷ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 2A

⁹⁹⁸ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 41

⁹⁹⁹ Bangladesh, Penal Code, 1860, [url](#), Chapter XV

¹⁰⁰⁰ Tarique Barkatullah [LinkedIn], posted on: 27 October 2023, [url](#), Section 28

¹⁰⁰¹ Business Standard (The), A bill titled ‘Anti-Discrimination act-2022’ placed in parliament, 5 April 2022, [url](#); UPR, UPR Pre-session Statement on Dalit Human Rights in Bangladesh, 28 August-1 September 2023, 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰² Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh pitches sweeping new anti-discrimination bill to uphold equality, 5 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁴ EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁰⁰⁵ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁰⁶ Asia Foundation (The), In Bangladesh, Preserving Indigenous Culture through Storytelling, 15 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁷ IWGIA, Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁸ Daily Star (The), 5 years on, indigenous language books initiative yet to progress, 1 February 2022, [url](#); Asia Foundation (The), In Bangladesh, Preserving Indigenous Culture through Storytelling, 15 November 2023, [url](#)



Sources reported on alleged censorship of indigenous communities by the government.¹⁰⁰⁹ Prior to the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in 2022, the government issued a circular instructing media, universities, and civil society organisations to refrain from using the term *adivasi* ('indigenous') when referring to the constitution's provision on ethnic communities.¹⁰¹⁰ Also, despite a robust rule of law guaranteeing religious freedoms, sources indicated that the state authorities restricted freedom of speech of religious minorities.¹⁰¹¹ According to BenarNews, in 2023, Bangladesh authorities released a circular requesting Hindus to 'stop or limit Durga Puja rituals during the five daily Muslim prayer times.'¹⁰¹²

The government announced the promotion of religious diversity and a 'zero-tolerance' policy against any violence against religious minorities.¹⁰¹³ In 2022, the government pledged to renovate 2 300 Hindu temples and 65 Christian churches, to construct 564 mosques, and to fund a Buddhist monastery.¹⁰¹⁴ Government authorities reportedly deployed law enforcement agencies to ensure safety and security during religious festivities and at religious sites.¹⁰¹⁵

In 2022 and 2023, sources reported on a number of arrests of Hindus on grounds of alleged blasphemy under the 2018 Digital Security Act.¹⁰¹⁶ The alleged acts of blasphemy included, inter alia, a derogatory social media post 'hurting religious sentiment[s]'.¹⁰¹⁷

4.3.4. Violence against ethnic and religious minorities

As reported by Odhikar '[i]n 2023, there were incidents of attacks and vandalism on places of worship and houses belonging to the Hindu community and Ahmadiyya community and members of ethnic minority groups. There were also reports of members of the ruling Awami League attacking minority communities leading up to the 12th parliamentary elections.'¹⁰¹⁸

¹⁰⁰⁹ Netra News, Censoring the indigenous, 1 August 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh and the indigenous people, 10 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁰ Global Voices, Bangladesh government instructs TV channels not to use the word 'Indigenous' when referring to ethnic tribes, 9 August 2022, [url](#); Parbatta News, Bangladesh Govt Asks Not To Use 'Adivashi' Term, Referring To Constitution, 26 July 2022, [url](#); Business Standard (The), Govt asks media to avoid word 'adivasi' for ethnic minorities, 27 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹¹ BenarNews, Bangladesh govt asks Hindus to hush Durga Puja noise during Muslim prayer times, 19 October 2023, [url](#); Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh tribunal jails ex-leader of Hindu group for 7 years, 3 January 2023, [url](#); CSI, Bangladesh: Christian convert jailed over blasphemy allegations, 15 December 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹² BenarNews, Bangladesh govt asks Hindus to hush Durga Puja noise during Muslim prayer times, 19 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹³ UN Human Rights Council, National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, 1 September 2023, [url](#), para. 48; Bdnews24.com, Religious freedom lies in the root of Bangladesh: Foreign minister, 22 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, 1 September 2023, [url](#), para. 48

¹⁰¹⁵ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 12; Business Standard (The), Law enforcers working to ensure peaceful celebration of all religious festivals: IGP, 4 May 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Police chief issues instructions for Christmas and New Year's Eve, 17 December 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁶ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 14; Daily Star (The), DSA Case: Poritosh gets 5 years in jail, 9 February 2023, [url](#); Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh tribunal jails ex-leader of Hindu group for 7 years, 3 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁷ Daily Star (The), DSA Case: Poritosh gets 5 years in jail, 9 February 2023, [url](#); Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh tribunal jails ex-leader of Hindu group for 7 years, 3 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 6



Attacks on religious minorities were continuously reported in 2022 and 2023.¹⁰¹⁹ According to Freedom House, religious minorities, specifically Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and Ahmadis faced harassment and violence, including violence against their places of worship.¹⁰²⁰

According to Odhikar, in 2022, ‘the houses, places of worship and shops of religious and ethnic minority groups were attacked and set on fire in different parts of the country and their homes and lands were seized.’¹⁰²¹ In 2022, ASK recorded 12 violent incidents against religious minorities, all targeting Hindus.¹⁰²² This number increased in 2023, with 22 recorded incidents. Of these, 21 targeted Hindus, while one targeted the Ahmadiyya community. The latter case resulted in one death, 103 houses being attacked, and 29 business centres set on fire.¹⁰²³ Between January and April 2024, ASK recorded 21 incidents, 20 targeted Hindus and one targeted the Buddhist community.¹⁰²⁴ Their attacks resulted in one death, injuries, and homes, businesses and religious places attacked or set on fire.¹⁰²⁵

Mob attacks vandalised and destroyed Hindu homes, businesses, and temples were reported in 2022.¹⁰²⁶ In September 2022 a number of attacks targeted the Hindu community, according to Odhikar some allegations suggested that these attacks were connected to local government elections.¹⁰²⁷ The attacks over the Hindu community and their places of worship continued in 2023,¹⁰²⁸ with ‘calculated looting and then violent destruction ostensibly in response to a social media post’.¹⁰²⁹ Freedom House reported that people with secular and nonconformist views can face harsh criticism and ‘attacks from hardline Islamist groups’.¹⁰³⁰

On 6 January 2024, a Buddhist temple was set on fire in Ramu, Cox’s Bazar.¹⁰³¹ In October 2023, up to 500 people described as activists of the Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo League were sued and 2 people were arrested for carrying out an attack on protesters of the Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad march on 13 October 2023.¹⁰³² Furthermore, there were reports of religious fanatics carrying out attacks against the Ahmadiyya community.¹⁰³³ In 2023, a violent mob attacked an annual convention of Ahmadis

¹⁰¹⁹ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), pp. 1–2; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); Prothom Alo, Attack on Lama Mropara again, house set on fire and looted, 9 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁰ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²¹ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 77

¹⁰²² ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰²³ ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁴ ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-April 2024), 7 May 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁵ ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#); ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-April 2024), 7 May 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁶ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The state of the world’s human rights, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 88; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#); Independent (The), Hindu temple, shops and houses vandalised in Bangladesh over Facebook post, 18 July 2022, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, ‘Communal violence not acceptable under any circumstances’, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁷ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 78

¹⁰²⁸ Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰²⁹ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The state of the world’s human rights, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 88

¹⁰³⁰ Freedom House, Bangladesh: Freedom in the World 2023, 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³¹ Bdnews24.com, Fire at Buddhist temple in Ramu is arson attack: police, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰³² Business Standard (The), 500 sued, 2 arrested over attack on Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad activists, 16 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³³ Dhaka Tribune, Freedom of religion of the Ahmadiyya community, 10 March 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Violence is no solution to ideological differences, 6 March 2023, [url](#)



community, held in Ahmednagar.¹⁰³⁴ The mob reportedly vandalised households and shops belonging to Ahmadis.¹⁰³⁵ According to two international human rights organisations, CAP Freedom of Conscience and International Human Rights Commission (IHRC), there is a lack of political will to protect the rights of Ahmadis.¹⁰³⁶

Attacks on religious minorities tend to increase during electoral campaigns, major religious events, or following alleged ‘blasphemous’ posts on social media as reported by OFPRA.¹⁰³⁷ Sources indicated a rise in number of attacks on religious minorities during the general elections in 2024.¹⁰³⁸ Several sources reported on the ineffective role of the government in preventing communal violence against religious minorities,¹⁰³⁹ and the lack of proper prosecution of perpetrators of sectarian attacks¹⁰⁴⁰ with judicial trials being lengthy or stalled.¹⁰⁴¹ In 2022, nationwide protests were organised by the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council demanding government’s action in addressing violent attacks against religious minorities.¹⁰⁴²

A Christian organisation based in the US stated that Christians faced violence by the Muslim majority.¹⁰⁴³ According to USDOS, referring to human rights NGOs, converts to Christianity from Islam and Hinduism may face isolation and harassment.¹⁰⁴⁴ Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD), ‘a UN ECOSOC NGO’ based in The Hague,¹⁰⁴⁵ also reported that converts may face violence.¹⁰⁴⁶ As indicated by Open Doors in 2024, violence against Christian converts resulted in their exclusion from families and communities.¹⁰⁴⁷

4.3.5. Violence against minorities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

According to the state-owned national news agency BSS, that spread ‘government propaganda’ as described by RSF,¹⁰⁴⁸ the government introduced a digital land survey and created initiatives to ensure security in the CHT under the peace accord, to protect environmental balance and to settle land disputes.¹⁰⁴⁹ Several other sources however reported

¹⁰³⁴ CAP LC and IHRC, 44th WG UPR Session Bangladesh-2023 Persecution of Ahmadis in Bangladesh, November 2023, [url](#), pp. 3–4

¹⁰³⁵ IHRC, Vicious And Fatal Attack Against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community’s Annual Convention in Bangladesh, 4 March 2023, [url](#); Wic News, 180 homes, 50 shops of Ahmadi Muslim community looted in Northern Bangladesh, 10 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁶ CAP LC and IHRC, 44th WG UPR Session Bangladesh-2023 Persecution of Ahmadis in Bangladesh, November 2023, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰³⁷ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 75

¹⁰³⁸ Daily Star (The), Election violence, minorities, and erasure of data, 7 February 2024, [url](#); International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024; Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 74

¹⁰³⁹ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰⁴⁰ Prothom Alo, Attack on Lama Mopara again, house set on fire and looted, 9 September 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴¹ Prothom Alo, Temple-pandal attack: Trial of 42 cases not started in two years, 18 August 2022, [url](#); Prothom Alo, Trial for communal attacks hasn’t started even after a year, 1 October 2022, [url](#); New Age, No justice in two years, 19 October 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Ramu attack: A decade on, trial drags on, 24 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴² ICC, Minorities Protest Government Inaction in Bangladesh, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴³ ICC, New Census Reveals Christian Decline in Bangladesh, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁴ USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁰⁴⁵ GHRD, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁶ GHRD, Religious Persecution / Religion-Based Violence in Bangladesh, 12 July 2022, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁴⁷ Open Doors, World Watch List 20224, Situation of Religious Freedom for Christians: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#), pp. 4, 6

¹⁰⁴⁸ RSF, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁹ Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (National News Agency of Bangladesh), Bangladesh highlights CHT Peace Accord Implementation progress at UN, 20 April 2024, [url](#)



on the lack of implementation of the CHT peace accord,¹⁰⁵⁰ and the continuous deployment and presence of Bangladeshi security forces in the area.¹⁰⁵¹ The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Francisco Cali Tzay, stated on 2 December 2022 that he was ‘continuously receiving news and information from different sources about the gross and systematic human rights violations against the Indigenous Peoples, including the members of the local political party Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) who signed the accord, Indigenous human rights defenders and Indigenous women and girls. The repeated effort over the year to grab Indigenous Peoples’ land in the name of development, tourism, and eco-forest for national and international companies and other vested interests also disrespects the accord.’¹⁰⁵² Some cases of land grabbing in the CHT included arson attacks on land and houses of minorities.¹⁰⁵³

According to the global human rights organisation International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), in 2022, the government set up a camp of the Armed Police Battalion on the land belonging to the indigenous minority.¹⁰⁵⁴ In 2023, IWGIA reported on four indigenous leaders killed in the CHT.¹⁰⁵⁵ In 2022, sources reported on the death of an indigenous rights activist in military custody.¹⁰⁵⁶ As indicated by Human Rights Watch, ‘the activist’s death is part of a pattern of abuses by the Bangladesh military in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.’¹⁰⁵⁷ A 2022 report by PCJSS documented 235 incidents of human rights violations in the CHT, with 1 935 indigenous persons being subjected to human rights violations such as land grabbing, forced eviction, false charges, arbitrary arrest, temporary detention, torture, sexual assault and killings. The same source reported that the main perpetrators included state agencies, ‘army-backed terrorist groups’, ‘communal and fundamentalist quarters’, Bengali settlers, and land grabbers.¹⁰⁵⁸ In June 2023, two social media platforms based in the CHT were closed.¹⁰⁵⁹ According to an anonymous source interviewed by the CPJ, ‘the outlets were being selectively targeted ahead of the [...] 2024 national election due to their coverage of politics and human rights in Chittagong.’¹⁰⁶⁰ The closed platforms were accused of operating ‘illegally’ without licence according to CPJ.¹⁰⁶¹

More information is available in sections [2.3. Security situation](#) and [3.5.4. Land disputes](#).

¹⁰⁵⁰ OHCHR, Bangladesh: UN expert concerned about non-implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, 2 December 2022, [url](#); Bdnews24.com, Peace accord won't be implemented, struggle inevitable: Santu Larma, 23 December 2022, [url](#); Daily Star (The), How long must we wait for CHT Accord implementation?, 2 December 2023, [url](#); Daily Star (The), 2022 proved how far we still are from peace in the CHT, 4 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵¹ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The state of the world's human rights, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 88; Daily Star (The), Can police be deployed in the army-withdrawn camp sites in the CHT?, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵² OHCHR, Bangladesh: UN expert concerned about non-implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, 2 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵³ Business Standard (The), Greed for land burns hills to ashes, 30 April 2022, [url](#); Kapaaeng Foundation, Heinous attack and torching of indigenous Mro houses by Lama Rubber Industries in Bandarban, 5 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁴ IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2023: Bangladesh, 29 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁵ IWGIA, IWGIA condemns killing of four Indigenous leaders killed in Chittagong Hill Tracts, 15 December 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁶ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The state of the world's human rights, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 88; HRW, Bangladesh: Indigenous Activist Dies in Military Custody, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁷ HRW, Bangladesh: Indigenous Activist Dies in Military Custody, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁸ PCJSS, Annual Report of 2022 on Human Rights Situation in CHT, 1 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁹ BJIM, BJIM raises concerns about sudden shutdowns of two social media-based news outfits, 25 June 2023, [url](#); CPJ, CPJ urges Bangladeshi authorities to lift shutdown on 2 social media platforms, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁰ CPJ, CPJ urges Bangladeshi authorities to lift shutdown on 2 social media platforms, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶¹ CPJ, CPJ urges Bangladeshi authorities to lift shutdown on 2 social media platforms, 12 July 2023, [url](#)



4.3.6. Tea garden workers

The majority of tea garden workers belong to minority groups.¹⁰⁶² A survey carried out by a NGO coalition found that 61.4 % of tea workers and their children were considered ‘poor’, and 42.7 % lived in ‘extreme poverty’.¹⁰⁶³ Tea garden workers have reportedly been among the lowest paid in Bangladesh.¹⁰⁶⁴ In 2022, tea garden workers across the country went on strike demanding a raise in the daily wage from 120 *taka* [about EUR 1] to 300 *taka* [about EUR 2.4].¹⁰⁶⁵ As a result of the protests, the minimum wage was increased to 170 *taka* [about EUR 1.3] in 2022.¹⁰⁶⁶ Sources indicated that some tea garden workers benefitted from government assistance, including cash allowance, education incentives and housing.¹⁰⁶⁷

4.4. LGBTIQ persons

4.4.1. Legislation

The constitution stipulates that ‘the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth’.¹⁰⁶⁸ However, as reported by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA) the constitution does not identify sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, as grounds of discrimination.¹⁰⁶⁹ Moreover, the Penal Code criminalises ‘carnal intercourse against the order of nature’ with any man or woman, explaining that penetration ‘is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse’ described. According to the same code, penalties range from ten years to life imprisonment, and fines.¹⁰⁷⁰ Sources reported that this section prohibits same-sex activity,¹⁰⁷¹ although it is rarely enforced according to Human Dignity Trust¹⁰⁷² and not actively enforced according to USDOS.¹⁰⁷³

In 2022, a new Anti-Discrimination Act was introduced in the parliament.¹⁰⁷⁴ The proposed legislation prohibits discrimination on inter alia, gender.¹⁰⁷⁵ However, under the bill,

¹⁰⁶² Daily Star (The), Why are tea garden workers trapped in a cycle of poverty?, 30 November 2022, [url](#); GFOD, The Flavour Bangladeshi Tea Hides Tales of Slavery, 15 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶³ FMSI et al., Joint Stakeholders’ Submission on: Human Rights in Bangladesh: The situation of Children and their families in the Tea Gardens of Sylhet, March 2023, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁶⁴ Global Voices, How can tea workers in Bangladesh survive on a daily wage of less than 2 USD, 5 September 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Why are Bangladesh tea garden workers protesting?, 21 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁵ Al Jazeera, Why are Bangladesh tea garden workers protesting? 21 August 2022, [url](#); Daily Star (The), Tea workers go on indefinite work abstention demanding pay hike, 13 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁶ Global Voices, How can tea workers in Bangladesh survive on a daily wage of less than 2 USD, 5 September 2022, [url](#); FES, New collective bargaining skills help Bangladesh’s tea picker fight for fair conditions, 25 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁷ UN Human Rights Council, National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21*, Bangladesh, 1 September 2023, [url](#), para. 63

¹⁰⁶⁸ Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 28 (1)

¹⁰⁶⁹ ILGA, Rights in Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁰ Bangladesh, The Penal Code, 1860, [url](#), art. 377

¹⁰⁷¹ Human Dignity Trust, Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

¹⁰⁷² Human Dignity Trust, Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷³ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 6

¹⁰⁷⁴ Business Standard (The), A bill titled ‘Anti-Discrimination act-2022’ placed in parliament, 5 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁵ Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh pitches sweeping new anti-discrimination bill to uphold equality, 5 April 2022, [url](#)



discrimination is not a punishable offence.¹⁰⁷⁶ In an interview with the EUAA on 22 April 2024, an anonymous source confirmed that the act is pending adoption by the government.¹⁰⁷⁷

According to ILGA, in 2023, the government introduced a draft of the Transgender Persons Rights and Protection Act, to be adopted by December 2024 despite the law being publicly opposed by prominent government officials.¹⁰⁷⁸ In January 2024, the Minister for Home Affairs denied the government's recognition of transgender individuals, considering their identity forbidden according to Islam.¹⁰⁷⁹ The Minister added that no laws for the legal recognition of transgender individuals' gender will be approved by the government, according to ILGA.¹⁰⁸⁰ The Transgender Persons Rights and Protection Act is also opposed by some Muslim clerics.¹⁰⁸¹

4.4.2. Treatment of LGBTIQ persons by state authorities

In a 2022 report on LGBTIQ Rights in Bangladesh, Global Human Rights Defence indicated that such rights were 'considerably suppressed' in Bangladesh.¹⁰⁸²

Sources reported on the government's censorship and restrictions of LGBTIQ activism and advocacy.¹⁰⁸³ According to CIVICUS, organisations and activists advocating for LGBTIQ rights 'face legal barriers, limited access to funding and security risks'.¹⁰⁸⁴ Organisations supporting the LGBTIQ community are unable or limited to register with the government¹⁰⁸⁵ and LGBTIQ activists are targets of violence, threats, and murder.¹⁰⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch reported on LGBTIQ people and advocates 'facing violence and threats without adequate protection from the police'.¹⁰⁸⁷ According to the USDOS, police investigation and prosecution of perpetrators 'remained rare'.¹⁰⁸⁸ CIVICUS claimed that 'victims often encounter reluctance from law enforcement agencies to take their complaints seriously'.¹⁰⁸⁹

¹⁰⁷⁶ ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#); Daily Star (The), The Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022: What experts say, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁷ International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

¹⁰⁷⁸ ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁹ Erasing 76 Crimes, Spotlight on Bangladeshi politicians' anti-trans, anti-gay remarks, 9 March 2024, [url](#); ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#); JMBF, Statement: JMBF Condemns Discriminatory Actions Against LGBT Individuals by Major Political Parties in Bangladesh, 26 February 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁰ ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

¹⁰⁸¹ Ajker Patrika, If the transgender law is passed in the parliament, the Imam Parishad threatens to go on strike, 30 January 2024, [url](#); UCA News, Bangladeshi Islamists oppose transgender protection law, 16 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸² GHRD, LGBTQ+ Rights in Bangladesh, June 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁰⁸³ Equaldex, LGBT Rights in Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); Engage Media, In the Shadows of Self-Censorship: The Impact of Cyber Security Act on Bangladesh's LGBTQI+ Movement, 19 December 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁴ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: 'The legal vulnerability of LGBTQI+ people leads to harassment and discrimination, 4 September 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁵ Outright International, Country Overview: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), sections 2. b, 6

¹⁰⁸⁶ Outright International, Country Overview: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6; Lawyers for Lawyers, Statement on the ongoing harassment of lawyer and human rights defender Shahanur Islam, 14 August 2023, [url](#); Erasing 76 Crimes, Anti-gay Bangladesh group seeks ban on LGBT rights activist, 11 July 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁷ HRW, World Report 2023: Bangladesh, 12 January 2023, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2024: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁸ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

¹⁰⁸⁹ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: 'The legal vulnerability of LGBTQI+ people leads to harassment and discrimination, 4 September 2023, [url](#)



4.4.3. Social attitudes and behaviour toward LGBTIQ persons

Homosexuality in Bangladesh is met with societal disapproval and is rooted in religious scriptures and supported by the national law.¹⁰⁹⁰ The stigma around sexuality prevents open discussion on the subject¹⁰⁹¹ and also legitimises the violence against LGBTIQ people by state and non-state actors.¹⁰⁹² Due to legal vulnerability, LGBTIQ persons are prone to discrimination and harassment.¹⁰⁹³ Sources reported that LGBTIQ persons are limited in their ability to participate in politics¹⁰⁹⁴ due to societal discrimination.¹⁰⁹⁵

In 2023, BSS reported on five members of the transgender community receiving new houses as part of the government social project.¹⁰⁹⁶ According to a human rights organisation, JusticeMakers Bangladesh (JMBD), as cited by CIVICU, discrimination and prejudice make LGBTIQ people 'struggle to find and maintain employment', and '[e]conomic exclusion leads to poverty and limited access to social services'.¹⁰⁹⁷

Conversion therapy was a widespread practice¹⁰⁹⁸ and there were no legal consequences¹⁰⁹⁹ and no measures taken to address the issue by the government.¹¹⁰⁰ According to an academic article, 'mental health condition among homosexual males in Bangladesh appeared to be alarming', with many being deprived of family support and love.¹¹⁰¹

Pride events have been organised in recent years according to Outright International,¹¹⁰² but the website Notstr8ight, which collect information in pride events in the world,¹¹⁰³ reported that Bangladesh's sole public pride celebration, Dhaka Pride, is being held online, although the source suggested for participants to 'participate in smaller, localized community gatherings organized by partner organizations' to celebrate 'the spirit of Dhaka Pride despite the limitations'.¹¹⁰⁴ The first LGBTIQ-themed magazine, Roopbaan, began publishing in 2014, but ceased its publication in 2016 as one of its founders was murdered in his home.¹¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁹⁰ Mozumder M. K. et al., Mental health and suicide risk among homosexual males in Bangladesh, PLoS One, 15 August 2023, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁹¹ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

¹⁰⁹² CIVICUS, Bangladesh: 'The legal vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people leads to harassment and discrimination', 4 September 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹³ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: 'The legal vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people leads to harassment and discrimination', 4 September 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁴ EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 16; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁵ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁶ BBS, PM's housing gift makes transgender people dignified in Rajshahi, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁷ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: 'The legal vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people leads to harassment and discrimination', 4 September 2023, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Bangladesh Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally, 31 October-9 November 2022, 28 April 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁸ ILGA, Regional Campaign to End 'Conversion Therapy' in Asia by ILGA Asia, All Out and Local Organisations Launches, 23 March 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

¹⁰⁹⁹ BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44th Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹⁰⁰ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

¹¹⁰¹ Mozumder, M. K. et al., Mental health and suicide risk among homosexual males in Bangladesh, PLoS One, 15 August 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹¹⁰² Outright International, Country Overview: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); Inclusive Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁰³ Notstr8ight, Who we are, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁴ Notstr8ight, Dhaka Pride, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁵ Roopbaan Magazine, n.d., [url](#)



4.4.4. Hijras

As described in an academic article, '[t]he term hijra refers to persons who identify as having the third gender'.¹¹⁰⁶ According to the Daily Star, *hijra* 'is used as an umbrella term that may include intersex individuals, castrated men, and transgender women (assigned male at birth)'.¹¹⁰⁷ The local organisation Bandhu Social Welfare Society, as reported by Prothom Alo, called for a precise definition of *hijra*, as the term refers 'to the culture of a certain group' having been living in a customary way since the 1500s, rather than referring to transgender people in general. The same source explained that some state institutions referred to 'third gender' while others to *hijra*.¹¹⁰⁸ According to a report by the International Republican Institute (IRI), '[i]n official government discourse and the public's common perception, Hijras are intersex—not transgender. Because intersex is not a sexual orientation—intersex people are widely viewed as asexual in Bangladesh—they are not considered "controversial."'¹¹⁰⁹

The Daily Star reported that *hijras* live as a community¹¹¹⁰ and according to Bandhu Social Welfare Society, traditionally, *hijras* have acquired a living by performing *badhai* (clapping money), blessing newborns, dancing, and singing.¹¹¹¹

In 2022, the national census, conducted by the BBS included for the first time¹¹¹² a 'third gender' category.¹¹¹³ According to the 2022 preliminary findings of the census, 12 629 *hijras* were accounted for.¹¹¹⁴ The official number was adjusted to 8 124 in 2023.¹¹¹⁵ However, other sources estimated the number of *hijras* at 1.5 million.¹¹¹⁶

(a) Treatment of *hijras* by state authorities

Sources reported on *hijras* running in official elections and entering politics.¹¹¹⁷ In 2024, the first Bangladeshi diplomat publicly confirmed their *hijra* identity.¹¹¹⁸

¹¹⁰⁶ Al-Mamun, M. et al., Discrimination and social exclusion of third-gender population (Hijra) in Bangladesh: A brief review, Heliyon Society and Politics, October 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁰⁷ Daily Star (The), The twisted plight of Bangladeshi transgender community: A critical error in policymaking, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁸ Prothom Alo, Precise definitions of hijra and transgender are required: Shale Ahmed, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁹ IRI, Understanding the Lives of Bangladesh's LGBTI Community, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁰ Daily Star (The), The twisted plight of Bangladeshi transgender community: A critical error in policymaking, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹¹ Prothom Alo, Precise definitions of hijra and transgender are required: Shale Ahmed, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹² Business Standard (The), Bangladesh includes transgenders in national census for first time, 27 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹³ USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 6

¹¹¹⁴ Business Standard (The), Bangladesh includes transgenders in national census for first time, 27 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁵ BSS, Bangladesh's total population stands at 16.98cr, 28 November 2023, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁶ Reuters, In Bangladesh, new school textbook features transgender people, 24 February 2023, [url](#); News 24, Bangladesh beauty queen brings 'dawn of hope' for trans women, 23 November 2023, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁷ Business Standard (The), Two transgender candidates poised to rattle social and political norms, 26 December 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Mymensingh mosque welcomes hijra community, 29 March 2024, [url](#); EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 16

¹¹¹⁸ New Age, Oalid Islam becomes first Bangladeshi diplomat with hijra identity, 12 January 2024, [url](#); Business Standard (The), The trials of world's 'first Hijra diplomat' from Bangladesh, 12 January 2024, [url](#)



Based on a 2013 Bangladesh cabinet directive, the government recognised *hijras* as a legal third gender category.¹¹¹⁹ The precise definition of *hijra* was not provided¹¹²⁰ and the gender recognition has not been reflected in laws and policies.¹¹²¹ Legal identification documents and voter registration forms include the option to select a third gender.¹¹²² BLAST reported that the use of different 'gender markers' by government authorities include passports¹¹²³ with category of 'other' in addition to 'male' and 'female', while the national identity cards as well as voter registration forms included a 'Hijra' category, and some government forms (e.g., application forms to open a bank account) included the category 'third gender.'¹¹²⁴ 'The differences in gender markers create a gap with no clear guidelines on who has access to these gender marker options and whether non-*hijra* trans and gender-diverse people can be recognised under this other/third gender category' as reported by ILGA.¹¹²⁵ According to Reuters, 'applying, obtaining, and changing official documents remained challenging for members of the *hijra* community.'¹¹²⁶ Sources reported on the government authorities conducting medical examinations to legally recognise individuals as *hijras*.¹¹²⁷ According to JMBF, DNA tests have been performed 'if deemed necessary' in order to 'confirm their biological characteristics.'¹¹²⁸

In 2023, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) introduced a new textbook for school children, featuring a chapter on *hijras*.¹¹²⁹ The new chapter generated protests, organised by an Islamist party Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), known for its position against the transgender-inclusivity in school curriculum.¹¹³⁰ Due to the criticism, the textbook was removed from the curriculum by the NCTB.¹¹³¹ In 2024, the first mosque welcoming members of the *hijra* community was opened in Bangladesh.¹¹³²

¹¹¹⁹ Outright International, Country Overview: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); Bdnews24.com, 'Third gender' gets state recognition, 11 November 2013, [url](#); HRW, Bangladesh: Gender Recognition Process Spurs Abuse, 23 December 2016, [url](#)

¹¹²⁰ Daily Star (The), The twisted plight of Bangladeshi transgender community: A critical error in policymaking, 10 June 2022, [url](#); Prothom Alo, Precise definitions of hijra and transgender are required: Shale Ahmed, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹²¹ BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44th Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹²² USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 6; EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 16

¹¹²³ Bangladesh, Machine Readable Passport Application Form, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹²⁴ BLAST, From Recognition to Realising Rights: Legal Protection of Gender Identity in Bangladesh Law, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 7

¹¹²⁵ ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

¹¹²⁶ Reuters, Feature-Bangladesh disaster response neglects vulnerable trans community, 28 June 2022, [url](#)

¹¹²⁷ ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#); Daily Star (The), The twisted plight of Bangladeshi transgender community: A critical error in policymaking, 10 June 2022, [url](#); JMBF, 2022 Annual report, An updated state of LGBTQI+ in Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), p. 42; HRW, World Report 2024: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

¹¹²⁸ JMBF, 2022 Annual report, An updated state of LGBTQI+ in Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), p. 42

¹¹²⁹ Dhaka Tribune, Minister: Sharifa's Story debate will be fixed if needed, 24 January 2024, [url](#); New Age, Ministry forms committee to review story on transgender, 25 January 2024, [url](#)

¹¹³⁰ Dhaka Tribune, IAB takes to streets over transgender story in textbook, 26 January 2024, [url](#); New Age, IAB brings out procession against transgender, 27 January 2024, [url](#)

¹¹³¹ Bold News, Bangladesh: Govt Withdraws Two Text Books Amid Controversy Over Content, 11 February 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, NCTB to remove, edit controversial sections from withdrawn textbooks, 11 February 2023, [url](#)

¹¹³² Dhaka Tribune, Mymensingh mosque welcomes hijra community, 29 March 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh opens mosque for transgender hijra community, 5 April 2024, [url](#)



Sources indicated that the government introduced training and employment opportunities for *hijras*¹¹³³ and a tax break for companies hiring employees from the third gender community.¹¹³⁴ According to a 2024 OFPRA report, ‘even when *hijras* get a job thanks to these measures, *hijras* can be insulted, discriminated by their colleagues, so several of them quit and went back to their guru and to be recognised as *hijras* and get a job, *hijras* have to go through a medical exam, and they may encounter doctors with a total lack of awareness of gender issues.’¹¹³⁵ According to an academic article, ‘*hijras* lack access to quality services, health care, and employment opportunities.’¹¹³⁶ Restricted from access to government relief,¹¹³⁷ many *hijras* live in poverty and rely on begging and sex work to survive.¹¹³⁸

(b) Social attitudes and behaviour toward *hijras*

According an academic article, ‘the *hijras* are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged minority in Bangladesh.’¹¹³⁹ The same source reported on *hijras* facing social exclusion and stigma.¹¹⁴⁰ However, ‘*hijra* are the least stigmatised of the LGBTIQ community, even though they too are discriminated’ according to the European Union Election Expert Mission.¹¹⁴¹

4.4.5. Violence against LGBTIQ persons including *hijras*

JMBD reported on different types and forms of violence perpetrated against LGBTIQ persons including physical assaults, psychological abuse, job suspensions, kidnappings, detainments, harassment, ransom and extortion, fabrication of cases, arrests, suicides, blackmailing, and killings. In 2022, JMBF documented 51 violent incidents against LGBTIQ persons, involving 204 individuals of ‘sexual minority groups’.¹¹⁴²

(a) Violence against LGBTIQ persons by state authorities

The LGBTIQ community faces various forms of violence, discrimination, and marginalisation,¹¹⁴³ including discrimination in housing, occupation, employment, and access to government services including justice and healthcare as reported by USDOS.¹¹⁴⁴

¹¹³³ Reuters, Feature-Bangladesh disaster response neglects vulnerable trans community, 28 June 2022, [url](#); New Age, Govt schemes fail to change fate of *hijras*, 19 November 2022, [url](#); Daily Star (The), 22 members of transgender community get houses from govt, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹³⁴ Business Standard (The), Transgender rights: Progress made, but still a long way to go, 20 April 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Firms hiring transgender staff could get tax breaks in Bangladesh, 3 June 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Tax rebate for Bangladesh companies hiring transgender people, 4 June 2021, [url](#)

¹¹³⁵ France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

¹¹³⁶ Al-Mamun, M. et al., Discrimination and social exclusion of third-gender population (*Hijra*) in Bangladesh: A brief review, Heliyon Society and Politics, October 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹³⁷ UN Women, LGBTIQ+ Equality and Rights, Internal Resource Guide, 2022, [url](#), p. 48

¹¹³⁸ UN Women, LGBTIQ+ Equality and Rights, Internal Resource Guide, 2022, [url](#), p. 48; Reuters, In Bangladesh, new school textbook features transgender people, 24 February 2023, [url](#)

¹¹³⁹ Al-Mamun, M. et al., Discrimination and social exclusion of third-gender population (*Hijra*) in Bangladesh: A brief review, Heliyon Society and Politics, October 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁴⁰ Al-Mamun, M. et al., Discrimination and social exclusion of third-gender population (*Hijra*) in Bangladesh: A brief review, Heliyon Society and Politics, October 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁴¹ EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 16

¹¹⁴² JMBF, 2022 Annual report, An updated state of LGBTIQ+ in Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), pp. 9, 11

¹¹⁴³ JMBF, 2022 Annual report, An updated state of LGBTIQ+ in Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), p. 7; CIVICUS, Bangladesh: ‘The legal vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people leads to harassment and discrimination’, 4 September 2023, [url](#); Outright International, Country Overview: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Bangladesh Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Siobhán Mullally, 31 October-9 November 2022, 28 April 2023, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁴ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 6



According to JMBF, LGBTIQ persons often face harassment in public spaces and workplaces, and ‘there are no mandated safeguards against sexual harassment of LGBTIQ+ people in workplaces and educational institutions’ as reported by CIVICUS.¹¹⁴⁵

A local organisation Boys of Bangladesh (BoB), working for the rights of LGBTIQ communities in Bangladesh, indicated that ‘LBQT women continue to face many challenges which include [...] a high rate of gender-based violence and domestic abuse, high pressure of marriage at a young age, and a lack of decision-making power.’ The same source reported on cases of forced marriages and marital rape of lesbian and bisexual women.¹¹⁴⁶

(b) Violence against LGBTIQ persons by non-state actors

In 2023, sources reported violence against gay men by criminal gangs.¹¹⁴⁷ Gangs used dating applications to arrange dates with gay men and used physical violence or blackmail against them.¹¹⁴⁸ Earlier reports included the murder of the founder Roopbaan magazine and his friend in 2016¹¹⁴⁹ by the local militant organisation Ansar Al Islam.¹¹⁵⁰ In 2021, six members of the militant group were convicted of murder¹¹⁵¹ and sentenced to death.¹¹⁵² According to USDOS LGBTIQ writers and bloggers ‘continued to receive death threats from extremist organizations’ in 2023.¹¹⁵³ A 2021 report published by ILGA Asia suggested that people ‘identified as gay and bisexual men’ indicated ‘a rise of male rape victims’¹¹⁵⁴ with cases of rape taking place in *madrassas*.¹¹⁵⁵ Victims seeking justice face legal challenges as male rape is not recognised by law.¹¹⁵⁶

More background information on attacks against LGBTIQ persons carried out by Islamist groups is available in section [2.3. Security situation](#).

¹¹⁴⁵ CIVICUS, Bangladesh: ‘The legal vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people leads to harassment and discrimination’, 4 September 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁶ BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44th Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹⁴⁷ BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44th Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 4; Daily Star (The), ‘Blackmailing racket tortured him to death’, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

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¹¹⁵⁰ Global Voices, Xulhaz Mannan, an LGBT Activist in Bangladesh, Is the Latest Victim in a String of Brutal Killings, 26 April 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁵¹ HRW: World Report 2022. Bangladesh – Events of 2021, 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵² Al Jazeera, Six sentenced to death in Bangladesh for killing LGBTQ activists, 31 August 2021, [url](#); BenarNews, Bangladesh Court Condemns 6 Militants to Death in Killings of Gay Rights Activists, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵³ USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 2. a

¹¹⁵⁴ ILGA Asia, An Unsafe Haven: Challenges of Bangladeshi LGBTIQ people inside and outside the community, 2021, [url](#), p. 17

¹¹⁵⁵ ILGA Asia, An Unsafe Haven: Challenges of Bangladeshi LGBTIQ people inside and outside the community, 2021, [url](#), p. 17; Dhaka Tribune, Madrasa teacher lands in jail on charges of raping four boys, 27 January 2024, [url](#);

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The reference period should be 1 January 2022–15 May 2024.

General background: Geography, demography and socio-economy

- administrative division
- ethnic/nationality groups and their location, including Rohingyas
- religious groups and their location
- socio-economic situation of the population: poverty rates, daily subsistence, and impact of climate change
- migratory trends, including climate-induced displacement and international migration

Political system and state institutions

- state structure and legal system
- political context, including civic space and political violence
- security situation and armed actors

Human rights issues

- legal framework, incl. status of international conventions
- death penalty
- corporal punishment, torture and inhuman or degrading treatment
- enforced disappearance
- prison conditions

Political activists, NGO workers and other critics

- treatment of the state
- treatment of society
- treatment of armed groups

Ethnic and religious minorities

- societal and legal position
- discrimination
- ethnic and religious violence

Women and girls

- societal and legal position of women and girls
- violence and other abuse against women and girls, including domestic violence, dowry-related abuse, rape, acid attacks, harassment in the workplace, forced marriage and extrajudicial punishment





LGBTIQ persons

- societal and legal position of LGTIQ persons
- treatment of state authorities
- societal treatment
- attacks of Islamist groups

Justice and security sector

- judiciary
- law enforcement
- other relevant institutions
- capacity issues
- integrity issues, including corruption
- access to justice and legal assistance
- access to justice and legal assistance for certain types of disputes and crime, including personal loans and debts/loan sharks, trafficking and violence against women.





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