

# Bangladesh – Country Focus



# **Bangladesh – Country Focus**

## **Country of Origin Information Report**

**July 2024**





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# Acknowledgements

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- Hungary, National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing
- Norway, Landinfo, the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre
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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
<b>AL</b>	Awami League
<b>BBS</b>	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
<b>BNP</b>	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
<b>CED</b>	Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CHT</b>	Chittagong Hill Tracts
<b>CLO</b>	Certificate of Land Ownership
<b>CSA</b>	Cyber Security Act
<b>CTG</b>	Caretaker government
<b>DSA</b>	Digital Security Act
<b><i>Ejahaar</i></b>	Depiction of a criminal event
<b>FIR</b>	First information report
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>IGP</b>	Inspector General Police
<b>MP</b>	Member of parliament





Term	Definition
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>OCCs</b>	One-stop Crisis Centres
<b>RAB</b>	Rapid Action Battalion
<b><i>Shalish</i></b>	An informal grassroots justice system, typically consisting of village elders or other powerful individuals convening to resolve disputes
<b><i>Taka</i></b>	Local currency
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of reference
<b>VSCs</b>	Victim Support Centres
<b><i>Zila</i></b>	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,<sup>1</sup> as mentioned in the Acknowledgements section.

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

### 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.

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<sup>1</sup> EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland

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

<sup>3</sup> 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. Bangladesh<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 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).<sup>5</sup> The divisions are divided into 64 districts (*zila*).<sup>6</sup> Below district level, rural authorities<sup>7</sup> are divided into 495<sup>8</sup> subdistricts (*upazila*), which are in turn ordered into 4 554 unions.<sup>9</sup> The unions group together tens of thousands of villages.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, urban areas below district level are divided into 12<sup>11</sup> city corporations in the largest cities<sup>12</sup> and into 327 municipalities (*paurashava*)<sup>13</sup> in other towns.<sup>14</sup> City corporations and municipalities are thereafter divided into wards.<sup>15</sup> For the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) there is a third form of local government with a regional council and three hill district councils.<sup>16</sup>

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’).<sup>17</sup> In 2021, the Prime Minister announced plans to form two new divisions, named after the rivers Meghna and Padma.<sup>18</sup> The initiative was however suspended in 2022 as an austerity measure.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2. Ethnic and religious groups

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

<sup>5</sup> UK, PCGN, Bangladesh, July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> UK, PCGN, Bangladesh, July 2023, [url](#)

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

<sup>8</sup> Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Portal, Divisions, n.d., [url](#)

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

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

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

<sup>12</sup> 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

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

<sup>14</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>17</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>19</sup> 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](#)

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

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





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

The Bangladeshi government recognises 50 ethnic groups.<sup>24</sup> Many ethnic minorities identify as indigenous people,<sup>25</sup> but the government does not recognise this concept<sup>26</sup> nor any particular rights relating to it.<sup>27</sup> The largest ethnic minority groups are Chakma, Marma and Tripura.<sup>28</sup> The 2022 census found that only 1 % of the population belonged to an ethnic minority,<sup>29</sup> but the accuracy of the ethnicity data has been questioned by some community members (as well as after the prior census of 2011<sup>30</sup>), estimating the actual number of minorities to be twice as high (around 3 million people).<sup>31</sup>

Most ethnic minorities live in Chattogram division,<sup>32</sup> in its districts Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and Bandarban.<sup>33</sup> This area also goes by the name 'Chittagong Hill Tracts' (CHT).<sup>34</sup> Ethnic minorities in the CHT are referred to as *Jumma*.<sup>35</sup> The plains of the north are also common areas of origin of ethnic minorities,<sup>36</sup> commonly referred to as 'plainland ethnic groups'.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup> Religious minorities include Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, animists,<sup>40</sup> Shia Muslims and Ahmaddiyya.<sup>41</sup>

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

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<sup>22</sup> MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)

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

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

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

<sup>26</sup> MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)

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

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

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

<sup>30</sup> MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> 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](#)

<sup>32</sup> MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)

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

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

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

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

<sup>37</sup> 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

<sup>38</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>41</sup> MRG, Bangladesh, June 2019, [url](#)



### 1.2.1. Rohingyas from Myanmar

Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar for decades.<sup>42</sup> Most arrived in 2017,<sup>43</sup> following a violent campaign against the group,<sup>44</sup> including massacres, rape and arson carried out by the Myanmar military.<sup>45</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that about 1 million Rohingyas live in the district Cox's Bazar, and mainly in Kutupalong<sup>46</sup> – the largest refugee camp in the world.<sup>47</sup> As they are not granted citizenship in Myanmar, Rohingyas are in general stateless.<sup>48</sup> Bangladesh has allowed Rohingyas to cross its border on humanitarian grounds,<sup>49</sup> but their stay is temporary as Bangladesh is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the Bangladeshi government has maintained its position that repatriation to Myanmar is the only viable alternative, rather than integrating Rohingyas in Bangladesh.<sup>51</sup> 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,<sup>52</sup> including the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).<sup>53</sup> The Bangladeshi police battalions stationed in the camps have also reportedly subjected Rohingyas to abuse,<sup>54</sup> including arbitrary arrests, extortion, torture,<sup>55</sup> and sexual violence against women and girls.<sup>56</sup> The humanitarian situation in the camps has been described as 'dire', with reported issues such as overcrowding<sup>57</sup> and unsanitary conditions.<sup>58</sup> World Food Programme (WFP) provided monthly food assistance of USD 8 per person in 2023, and USD 10 in 2024.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>42</sup> 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](#)

<sup>43</sup> UNHCR, Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

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

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

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR, Global Focus, Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

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

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

<sup>49</sup> HPN, Special feature Rohingyas refugees in Bangladesh: the humanitarian response, October 2018, [url](#), p. 25

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

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

<sup>52</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>54</sup> 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](#)

<sup>55</sup> 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](#)

<sup>56</sup> 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](#)

<sup>57</sup> International Crisis Group, Rohingyas 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](#)

<sup>58</sup> 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](#)

<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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).<sup>62</sup> Most people can access amenities such as electricity,<sup>63</sup> clean drinking water,<sup>64</sup> sanitation,<sup>65</sup> and housing.<sup>66</sup> 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’.<sup>67</sup> 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,<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup> Individuals living in slums commonly lack access to improved water sources, sanitation facilities, sufficient living space, housing durability and security of tenure.<sup>70</sup> In 2022 and 2023, Bangladesh faced economic difficulties with high inflation, a balance-of-payment deficit, and declining foreign exchange reserves.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> IMF granted Bangladesh loans of about USD 4.7 billion in January 2023.<sup>73</sup> The World Bank lowered its growth projection for Bangladesh from 6.2 %<sup>74</sup> to 5.6 % in 2024.<sup>75</sup>

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.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, the unemployment rate was reportedly 4.2 % in 2023.<sup>77</sup> The main sectors are agriculture, services,

<sup>60</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>63</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>66</sup> 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

<sup>67</sup> Bangladesh, BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022, November 2023, [url](#), pp. Xliiii, 17, 28

<sup>68</sup> UNDP, Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030, [2020], [url](#)

<sup>69</sup> 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.

<sup>70</sup> Bangladesh, BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022, November 2023, [url](#), pp. Xliiii, 27

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

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

<sup>73</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>76</sup> ILO, ILOSTAT, Country Profiles, Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

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



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

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.<sup>83</sup> In 2023, the monthly minimum wage for the garment industry sector was set to 12 500 *taka*.<sup>84</sup> Although this increased the minimum wage from 8 000 *taka* in 2018–2023,<sup>85</sup> two local organisations criticised it for being far below a monthly minimum of a living wage<sup>86</sup> which they estimated respectively at 33 368 *taka* (Bangladeshi Institute of Labour Studies)<sup>87</sup> and 51 000 *taka* (Asia Floor Wage Alliance).<sup>88</sup>

According to the BBS study, people spent approximately 46 % of the household income on food.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, sources reported on food insecurity among parts of the population.<sup>90</sup> The most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup> Malnutrition was reportedly a ‘severe problem’<sup>93</sup> although child malnutrition rates have decreased over time.<sup>94</sup> 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

<sup>78</sup> 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

<sup>79</sup> 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](#)

<sup>80</sup> 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

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

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

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

<sup>84</sup> 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](#)

<sup>85</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>88</sup> AFWA, Living Wage, Living Wage Figures, 2022, [2022], [url](#)

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

<sup>90</sup> 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](#)

<sup>91</sup> 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

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

<sup>93</sup> 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](#)

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



327 859 children being affected.<sup>95</sup> 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.<sup>96</sup>

**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,<sup>97</sup> including flooding,<sup>98</sup> cyclones and landslides.<sup>99</sup> Flood events normally submerge about 20 % of the land area,<sup>100</sup> but occasional extreme floods have submerged far larger territories.<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup> Natural hazards, including the flooding in Sylhet and Sunamganj,<sup>103</sup> have caused death, displacement,<sup>104</sup> and economic loss.<sup>105</sup> The World Bank estimated the average annual losses from tropical cyclones to USD 1 billion (0.7 % of GDP),<sup>106</sup> and the 'risk to assets' of coastal communities to USD 300 million per year.<sup>107</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>100</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>103</sup> 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

<sup>104</sup> 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](#)

<sup>105</sup> 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

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

<sup>107</sup> 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.<sup>108</sup> Submerging not only causes the loss of land,<sup>109</sup> but saltwater intrusion makes agricultural land infertile.<sup>110</sup> Climate change and extreme weather induce migration to urban areas<sup>111</sup> that have been growing rapidly.<sup>112</sup> The influx of internal migrants has put pressure on the cities' infrastructure,<sup>113</sup> and have increased the urban slums.<sup>114</sup> There is a lack of comprehensive data on the number of climate-induced displacements in Bangladesh,<sup>115</sup> and estimated numbers vary from 427 000 people as reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in 2022,<sup>116</sup> to 7.1 million people as reported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) the same year.<sup>117</sup> Natural disasters also triggered internal displacement during the summer monsoon season.<sup>118</sup> According to IDMC, such disasters displace about one million people each year.<sup>119</sup> 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.<sup>120</sup> Nearly 75 % of Bangladesh's territory sits under sea level,<sup>121</sup> and the Ministry of Environment projects that up to 18 % of the coastal areas will be under water by 2100.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, one in seven of the population are expected to be displaced due to climate change by 2050 according to some estimates.<sup>123</sup> 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'.<sup>124</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>110</sup> 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](#)

<sup>111</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>114</sup> 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](#)

<sup>115</sup> 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](#)

<sup>116</sup> IDMC, Country Profile, Bangladesh, 19 May 2022, [url](#)

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

<sup>118</sup> 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](#)

<sup>119</sup> IDMC, Country Profile, Bangladesh, 19 May 2022, [url](#)

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

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

<sup>122</sup> 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]

<sup>123</sup> 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](#)

<sup>124</sup> 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,<sup>125</sup> as hundreds of thousands go abroad to work each year.<sup>126</sup> The country is, moreover, one of the world's top remittance recipients,<sup>127</sup> with migrants bringing in over USD 21 billion (about 5 % of GDP<sup>128</sup>) in the past years.<sup>129</sup> Mainly men go abroad (although thousands of women also do so<sup>130</sup>) to work in Southeast Asia<sup>131</sup> and Middle Eastern countries,<sup>132</sup> such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Gulf states.<sup>133</sup> Many migrate to these regions for temporary low-skilled work under bilateral labour agreements between Bangladesh and relevant states.<sup>134</sup> There is also a large diaspora in, inter alia, the United States (US),<sup>135</sup> where Bangladeshis tend to have higher-skill and -income jobs.<sup>136</sup>

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.<sup>137</sup> Bangladeshi migrants face a relatively high cost of migrating,<sup>138</sup> including fees charged by such intermediaries and recruitment agencies.<sup>139</sup> Many therefore borrow money or take loans to migrate.<sup>140</sup> Although NGOs<sup>141</sup> and the state owned bank Probashi Kallyan Bank<sup>142</sup> offer loans to fund migration, many rely on informal money lenders.<sup>143</sup> Some migrant workers use all their income to recoup the costs of migration,<sup>144</sup> or return to Bangladesh indebted.<sup>145</sup>

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

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

<sup>127</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>129</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>131</sup> 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

<sup>132</sup> 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

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

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

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

<sup>136</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>138</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

<sup>142</sup> 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

<sup>143</sup> 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](#)

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

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





The costs of migration<sup>146</sup> also made people turn to unofficial intermediaries.<sup>147</sup> The slow and deficient official bureaucracy,<sup>148</sup> and lack of information or access to formal migrant channels also contributed to this tendency.<sup>149</sup> Unofficial agencies have engaged in recruitment fraud, contract switching<sup>150</sup> and trafficking in human beings.<sup>151</sup> Traffickers took advantage of people's lack of information,<sup>152</sup> and convinced people of going abroad by deceiving them with false promises.<sup>153</sup> They have also operated under the cover of being a travel agency,<sup>154</sup> 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.<sup>155</sup>

Bangladeshi work migrants faced widespread abuse, particularly in the Middle East.<sup>156</sup> Reports included beatings, torture,<sup>157</sup> unpaid work and lack of food.<sup>158</sup> The UN Special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants stated that some reports amounted to 'contemporary forms of slavery'.<sup>159</sup> 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.<sup>160</sup> There were also reports of female work migrants being exposed to sexual violence and killed.<sup>161</sup> The '*kafala* system', which is common in most Middle Eastern countries, contributed to work migrants' vulnerability.<sup>162</sup> It binds a migrant's immigration status

<sup>146</sup> 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

<sup>147</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>150</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>153</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>156</sup> 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

<sup>157</sup> 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](#)

<sup>158</sup> 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](#)

<sup>159</sup> 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

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

<sup>161</sup> 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](#)

<sup>162</sup> 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.<sup>163</sup> This reduces their possibility to negotiate,<sup>164</sup> change employment and leave the country.<sup>165</sup> Some migrants are also being deprived of their passports in the country of destination.<sup>166</sup>

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](#).

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

<sup>164</sup> 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

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

<sup>166</sup> 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,<sup>167</sup> with the separation of powers between the judiciary and the executive branches of the state.<sup>168</sup> The legislative power rests with the parliament which is called *Jatiya Sangsad* ('House of the Nation'). It consists of 350 seats, whereof 300 seats<sup>169</sup> are filled through direct elections every five years.<sup>170</sup> The parliament elects the remaining 50 members<sup>171</sup> which are reserved for women.<sup>172</sup>

The parliament elects the president<sup>173</sup> as the head of state<sup>174</sup> to serve for a five-year term.<sup>175</sup> Although the president's role is mainly ceremonial,<sup>176</sup> it includes appointing the prime minister, which shall be the leader of the parliament's majority party, or the coalition in majority.<sup>177</sup> The prime minister is the head of government.<sup>178</sup> The president also formally appoints the ministers, although they are selected by the prime minister.<sup>179</sup>

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

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,<sup>182</sup> which inter alia have original jurisdiction in hearing constitutional matters<sup>183</sup> and in assessing the law's constitutionality.<sup>184</sup> The president appoints the Chief Justice, as well as other supreme court judges after consultation with the Chief Justice.<sup>185</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>185</sup> 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.<sup>186</sup> Sheikh Hasina has held the position since 2009, and has also served an earlier term in 1996–2001.<sup>187</sup> Checks and balances of the government have been limited as the opposition’s representation in parliament is minimal.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, there are no effective checks and balances in place between the government and the court<sup>189</sup> – as the executive has gradually been able to intrude on the formal independence of the judiciary.<sup>190</sup> This has included political pressure on rulings,<sup>191</sup> and politically-motivated appointments of lower level judges and other court staff.<sup>192</sup> Court proceedings have also been used to serve political ends,<sup>193</sup> including to undermine the opposition and silence critical voices.<sup>194</sup> Although Bangladesh has the formal accoutrements of a democracy,<sup>195</sup> several sources reported on democratic backsliding<sup>196</sup> and the situation approaching an authoritarian one-party system.<sup>197</sup> In global democracy indexes, Bangladesh’s ranking has gradually worsened in recent years.<sup>198</sup> Among others, the indexes of Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Economist Intelligence Unit, classified Bangladesh as a ‘hybrid regime’.<sup>199</sup>

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,<sup>200</sup> and her party, the Awami League (AL), has been in power for the past 15 years.<sup>201</sup> The opposition, including the main opposition party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has called on Hasina to step down,<sup>202</sup> and also boycotted the elections of 2014 and 2024, requesting an

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>194</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>196</sup> 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

<sup>197</sup> 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](#)

<sup>198</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>200</sup> 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](#)

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

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



independent caretaker government (CTG) to call the elections.<sup>203</sup> 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,<sup>204</sup> and as a Supreme Court ruling had found the system unconstitutional.<sup>205</sup> As a result, the tradition of AL and BNP changing office every five years was broken.<sup>206</sup>

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

As the BNP boycotted the 2024 parliamentary election, the voter turnout was low.<sup>215</sup> 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.<sup>216</sup> The AL secured the vast majority of seats in parliament, also through independent candidates who were mainly party affiliates.<sup>217</sup> The Jatiya Party (JP) is the main opposition party as regards the number of parliamentary seats,<sup>218</sup> but they could only secure 11 out of 350 seats in 2024.<sup>219</sup> The Bangladesh Workers Party (*Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal*) and the Bangladesh Kalyan Party won one seat each.<sup>220</sup> According to local media Prothom Alo, there was no true opposition, as all elected parties and individual

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

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

<sup>205</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>207</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>210</sup> 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](#)

<sup>211</sup> 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](#)

<sup>212</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>214</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>220</sup> 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.<sup>221</sup> CIVICUS also reported that all the independent candidates had been asked to ‘stand as “dummy candidates” to give the election a competitive veneer’.<sup>222</sup>

Jamaat e-Islami is the largest Islamist party,<sup>223</sup> 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.<sup>224</sup> 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.<sup>225</sup> The party has remained active although to a lesser extent, but reportedly resurged in 2023<sup>226</sup> when it organised a large protest in Dhaka.<sup>227</sup> This was the first time in 10 years that the party was permitted to stage a protest.<sup>228</sup>

## 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.<sup>229</sup> Civil society has however been highly politicised for a long time<sup>230</sup> and generally divided alongside party lines.<sup>231</sup> This has also applied to sectors such as media, academia,<sup>232</sup> and civil society organisations.<sup>233</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>223</sup> 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](#)

<sup>224</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>226</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>228</sup> 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](#)

<sup>229</sup> 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

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

<sup>231</sup> 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

<sup>232</sup> 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

<sup>233</sup> 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.<sup>234</sup> 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.<sup>235</sup> 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.<sup>236</sup>

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.<sup>237</sup> For example, the prominent local human rights organisation Odhikar was denied a renewal of its registration in 2022,<sup>238</sup> and the organisation’s director and secretary were sentenced to two years imprisonment and a fine in 2023.<sup>239</sup> This case dates back to 2013 when the organisation released a report on extrajudicial killings.<sup>240</sup> Some legal acts also give vast powers to state authorities, opening up for repression of critical voices.<sup>241</sup> 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.<sup>242</sup> As of January 2023, over 7 000 cases had been filed under the act according to Bangladeshi authorities,<sup>243</sup> and the accused have included (among others) journalists,<sup>244</sup> activists and educators.<sup>245</sup> Later in 2023, the act was replaced by the Cyber Security Act (CSA) which removed some abusive elements,<sup>246</sup> although many problematic aspects were

<sup>234</sup> 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

<sup>235</sup> Hossain, N. and Lewis, D, email communication, 26 April 2024

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

<sup>237</sup> 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

<sup>238</sup> 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](#)

<sup>239</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

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

<sup>244</sup> 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](#)

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

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





retained<sup>247</sup> – including an extensive mandate for the police to operate without judicial supervision.<sup>248</sup>

In addition, dissidents and critics have been suppressed through harassment, surveillance, arbitrary arrest, and enforced disappearance.<sup>249</sup> State authorities have also reportedly harassed family members of such individuals.<sup>250</sup> Journalists moreover described that they were facing a 'hostile environment',<sup>251</sup> and self-censorship has become part of the media climate following government abuse.<sup>252</sup> Those reporting on sensitive topics (such as human rights abuse and corruption) have experienced threats, harassment and violence<sup>253</sup> from state actors<sup>254</sup> and political activists.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, addressing sensitive topics such as secularism and religious minorities was 'off limits' according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF).<sup>256</sup> Before the 2024 election, the government reportedly increased their repression, and targeted media, the opposition, and human rights defenders.<sup>257</sup> The CIVICUS monitoring project downgraded civic space in Bangladesh from 'repressed' to 'closed' in 2024,<sup>258</sup> which is the worst ranking on their five point scale.<sup>259</sup> The silencing of critics reportedly created an atmosphere of self-censorship and fear, that hinders civil society from holding the government accountable.<sup>260</sup>

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

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

<sup>248</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>251</sup> 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](#)

<sup>252</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>255</sup> 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](#)

<sup>256</sup> RSF, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

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

<sup>258</sup> CIVICUS, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

<sup>259</sup> CIVICUS, Ratings, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>260</sup> 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’<sup>261</sup> and widely present at all levels of society.<sup>262</sup> This included the business sectors,<sup>263</sup> as well as public sectors,<sup>264</sup> such as healthcare<sup>265</sup> and law enforcement.<sup>266</sup> Bribery is reportedly common practice to access public services.<sup>267</sup> 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.<sup>268</sup> 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.<sup>269</sup>

## 2.3. Security situation

Bangladesh is not engaged in any international or non-international armed conflict.<sup>270</sup>

There were, however, some protracted domestic political instability and tensions in the CHT,<sup>271</sup> including skirmishes between Bangladeshi security forces and militant rebel groups,<sup>272</sup> and also violence between the local indigenous population and Bengali settlers.<sup>273</sup> 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.<sup>274</sup> The conflict was settled in 1997 through a peace

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

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

<sup>263</sup> 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](#)

<sup>264</sup> 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](#)

<sup>265</sup> 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](#)

<sup>266</sup> 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

<sup>267</sup> 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

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

<sup>269</sup> TI, Corruption Perceptions Index, Bangladesh, 2023, 2024, [url](#)

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

<sup>271</sup> 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

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

<sup>273</sup> 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](#)

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



accord,<sup>275</sup> but most aspects of the agreement have not been implemented.<sup>276</sup> There are still land ownership issues,<sup>277</sup> and the local indigenous population face continuous land eviction by state and non-state actors.<sup>278</sup> Reports of a militant group called the Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA) emerged in mid-2022.<sup>279</sup> It is reportedly a wing of the banned<sup>280</sup> separatist group Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF),<sup>281</sup> which reportedly seeks to create a separate state for subgroups of the Kuki-Chin ethnic group.<sup>282</sup> KNA has carried out attacks against Bangladeshi security forces,<sup>283</sup> has killed military personnel<sup>284</sup> and has also abducted civilians.<sup>285</sup> 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.<sup>286</sup> It has not been possible to corroborate these figures. In October 2022, Bangladeshi authorities launched an operation against the KNA,<sup>287</sup> and claimed to also target the terrorist organisation Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiy (JAHS).<sup>288</sup> The operation caused hundreds of displacements into India.<sup>289</sup> Due to the security situation, travel bans were issued for parts of the district of Bandarban on 18 October 2022.<sup>290</sup> Several subdistricts were imposed a travel ban until 14 July 2023.<sup>291</sup> The last travel restriction was lifted on 22 January 2024, and concerned the subdistrict of Rowangchhari.<sup>292</sup> However, on 2–3 April 2024,<sup>293</sup> a series of bank robberies took place, during which the robbers looted both

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

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

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

<sup>278</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>280</sup> 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](#)

<sup>281</sup> 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](#)

<sup>282</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>284</sup> 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](#)

<sup>285</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

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

<sup>290</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>292</sup> 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](#)

<sup>293</sup> 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.<sup>294</sup> Travel bans were therefore imposed anew in April 2024, due to operations targeting the KNF.<sup>295</sup> While local media Dhaka Tribune only reported on a travel ban in the district of Ruma between 9–13 April 2024,<sup>296</sup> another local media outlet, Bdnews24.com, reported on bans being imposed in Ruma, and also in the districts of Rowangchhari and Thanchi.<sup>297</sup> According to the Hill Voice, an online newspaper reporting on the CHT and indigenous rights,<sup>298</sup> 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.<sup>299</sup> There were also reports of villagers fleeing their homes due to the fear of harassment during the operation.<sup>300</sup> Security operations targeting KNF continued later in April and in May 2024, as reported by International Crisis Group.<sup>301</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>294</sup> 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](#)

<sup>295</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>298</sup> Hill Voice, n.d., [url](#)

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

<sup>300</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>302</sup> 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](#)

<sup>303</sup> 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](#)

<sup>304</sup> 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

<sup>305</sup> 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](#)

<sup>306</sup> 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-Islam<sup>307</sup> [also known as Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), affiliated with AQ] being the most prominent.<sup>308</sup> 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.<sup>309</sup> During ‘a wave of terrorism’<sup>310</sup> taking place in the early and mid-2010s, several secular bloggers and LGBTIQ activists were killed.<sup>311</sup> This period of violence culminated in a terrorist attack referred to as the ‘Holey Artisan attack’ in 2016<sup>312</sup> in which 22 people were killed.<sup>313</sup> After this event, the government initiated an intense counterterrorism campaign<sup>314</sup> and the number of terrorist attacks has since declined.<sup>315</sup> The campaign has however been criticised as alleged Islamic militants have been tortured and forcibly disappeared.<sup>316</sup> Particularly the elite paramilitary force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), operative since 2004, has committed severe human rights violations.<sup>317</sup> Among those forcibly disappeared were reportedly activists and dissidents labelled as ‘Islamic militants’.<sup>318</sup> 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.<sup>319</sup> 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.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> 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](#)

<sup>308</sup> 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

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

<sup>310</sup> 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](#)

<sup>311</sup> 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

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

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

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

<sup>315</sup> 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](#)

<sup>316</sup> 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](#)

<sup>317</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>320</sup> 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),<sup>321</sup> and the second optional protocol to ICCPR that seeks to abolish the death penalty.<sup>322</sup>

Bangladesh's constitution enshrines the principle of secularism<sup>323</sup> and religious freedom,<sup>324</sup> although Islam is the designated state religion.<sup>325</sup> There is, however, a long history of radical Islamists targeting Hindus and Buddhists,<sup>326</sup> and such attacks continued to be reported in 2023.<sup>327</sup> 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.<sup>328</sup> 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.<sup>329</sup> Such provisions have frequently been used to detain government critics.<sup>330</sup> 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,<sup>331</sup> including to undermine the political opposition.<sup>332</sup> The RAB has committed human rights abuses,<sup>333</sup> such as extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture.<sup>334</sup> Such reports made the US issue sanctions for the RAB,<sup>335</sup> as well as for its current and past officers on 10 December 2021.<sup>336</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>329</sup> 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

<sup>330</sup> 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](#)

<sup>331</sup> 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](#)

<sup>332</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

<sup>336</sup> 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.<sup>337</sup> The death penalty applies to 33 offences,<sup>338</sup> including several non-lethal crimes such as rape,<sup>339</sup> certain drug offences,<sup>340</sup> and kidnapping of children under the age of 10 years.<sup>341</sup> The age of criminal responsibility is 9 years, but the Children Act of 2013 prohibits children from being sentenced to death<sup>342</sup> '[n]otwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other law'.<sup>343</sup>

In 2022, Odhikar reported that people are being sentenced to death every year.<sup>344</sup> In 2022, over 2 000 persons were on death row,<sup>345</sup> and at least 2 400 persons by the end of 2023, according to Amnesty International.<sup>346</sup> In 2022–2023, both Odhikar and Amnesty International recorded 9 executions.<sup>347</sup> While Odhikar recorded 728 death sentences,<sup>348</sup> Amnesty International recorded 417 – but the source indicated that it believed that more sentences had been handed down.<sup>349</sup> The method of execution is hanging<sup>350</sup> or shooting<sup>351</sup> – although shooting has never been enforced as punishment according to a 2020 article of the University of Dhaka.<sup>352</sup>

### 2.4.2. Enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings

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

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

<sup>338</sup> 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](#)

<sup>339</sup> 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](#)

<sup>340</sup> 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](#)

<sup>341</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

<sup>345</sup> 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

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

<sup>347</sup> 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

<sup>348</sup> 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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>354</sup> 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](#)

<sup>355</sup> 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 disappearances<sup>356</sup> and extrajudicial killings.<sup>357</sup> Local and regional human rights organisations have counted around 2 600 extrajudicial killings since 2009.<sup>358</sup> 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.<sup>359</sup>

The government has reportedly been using enforced disappearance as a tool to suppress dissent and spread fear.<sup>360</sup> Human Rights Watch described enforced disappearances as a ‘hallmark’ of Sheikh Hasina’s rule,<sup>361</sup> and among those forcibly disappeared were leaders and supporters of opposition parties,<sup>362</sup> alleged Islamic militants,<sup>363</sup> and seemingly ordinary people.<sup>364</sup> Family members of forcibly disappeared individuals have been put under surveillance,<sup>365</sup> threatened and harassed after seeking justice.<sup>366</sup> 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.<sup>367</sup> 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.<sup>368</sup> Sometimes victims have been deprived of their liberty repeated times, sometimes directly after being released from jail,<sup>369</sup> finding themselves in a continuous cycle of arrests.<sup>370</sup> In 2022 and 2023, Odhikar recorded 73 enforced disappearances in total carried out by law enforcement agencies.<sup>371</sup> Meanwhile, the United States Department of State (USDOS), citing an anonymous local human rights organisation, reported on 16 enforced

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

<sup>357</sup> 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

<sup>358</sup> 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](#)

<sup>359</sup> 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](#)

<sup>360</sup> 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](#)

<sup>361</sup> HRW, Decade of Disappearances, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>362</sup> 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](#)

<sup>363</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>365</sup> 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

<sup>366</sup> 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

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

<sup>368</sup> 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

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

<sup>370</sup> Himal, 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](#)

<sup>371</sup> 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,<sup>372</sup> and 32 enforced disappearances in January–September 2023.<sup>373</sup> 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.<sup>374</sup>

Extrajudicial executions committed by the RAB have reportedly been deliberate, planned<sup>375</sup> and covered up.<sup>376</sup> In 2022 and 2023, Odhikar recorded 55 extrajudicial killings in total committed by law enforcement agencies,<sup>377</sup> while another local human rights organisation, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), recorded 39 extrajudicial killings and custodial deaths in the same period.<sup>378</sup> Both sources report on eight individuals being tortured to death in 2023,<sup>379</sup> while in 2022, Odhikar recorded 10 cases,<sup>380</sup> and ASK 8 cases.<sup>381</sup>

Public lynching of suspected criminals has also been reported.<sup>382</sup> 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.<sup>383</sup> Odhikar recorded a total of 97 deaths due to public lynching in 2022–2023,<sup>384</sup> while ASK recorded 87 deaths due to public lynching in the same period.<sup>385</sup> 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.<sup>386</sup>

### 2.4.3. Torture and physical abuse

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

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

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

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

<sup>375</sup> 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

<sup>376</sup> 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](#)

<sup>377</sup> 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

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

<sup>379</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>382</sup> 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](#)

<sup>383</sup> 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

<sup>384</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>387</sup> 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](#)

<sup>388</sup> 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.<sup>389</sup>

Torture and other forms of abuse were reportedly widespread practice within law enforcement;<sup>390</sup> inter alia as a means to extract forced confessions<sup>391</sup> but also to humiliate the victims, and instil fear according to AHRC and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).<sup>392</sup> Victims of detention and subsequent torture have included opposition members<sup>393</sup> and other critics,<sup>394</sup> alleged ‘militants’,<sup>395</sup> and ordinary citizens.<sup>396</sup> Law enforcement agencies have reportedly enjoyed extensive impunity,<sup>397</sup> and have harassed torture victims and relatives filing cases against law enforcement officers.<sup>398</sup> 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.<sup>399</sup>

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.<sup>400</sup> 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’.<sup>401</sup>

#### 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’<sup>402</sup> The government permitted government and non-government observers to visit prisons, but no reports from such inspections were published.<sup>403</sup> Available reports indicated that Bangladesh’s prisons are

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

<sup>390</sup> 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](#)

<sup>391</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>393</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>395</sup> 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

<sup>396</sup> 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](#)

<sup>397</sup> 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](#)

<sup>398</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

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

<sup>403</sup> 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.<sup>404</sup> As of December 2023, the prison population stood at 84 851 inmates according to figures of the Bangladesh Prison Directorate,<sup>405</sup> which is nearly twice as many inmates as the maximum capacity of the prison system.<sup>406</sup> The USDOS reported on overcrowding, inadequate facilities, physical abuse and lack of sanitation.<sup>407</sup> Odhikar referred to overcrowding as a ‘humanitarian crisis’ impacting the possibilities for inmates to eat, sleep and move.<sup>408</sup> 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’.<sup>409</sup> There were moreover not enough physicians to provide healthcare to the prison population.<sup>410</sup>

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

There were reports of political activists being tortured while being imprisoned.<sup>417</sup> 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).<sup>418</sup> In the same period, ASK recorded 106 deaths in jail and custody, whereof 64 awaited their trial.<sup>419</sup> After a grand rally on 28 October 2023, several BNP leaders and activists were detained.<sup>420</sup> Odhikar reported that eight of the arrested BNP leaders had died in custody before the end of the year.<sup>421</sup> According to a joint

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<sup>404</sup> Himal, 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

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

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

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

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

<sup>409</sup> 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

<sup>410</sup> 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](#)

<sup>411</sup> WPB, Bangladesh, n.d, [url](#)

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

<sup>413</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>416</sup> 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](#)

<sup>417</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>420</sup> 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](#)

<sup>421</sup> 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’.<sup>422</sup>

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.<sup>423</sup> 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.<sup>424</sup>

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

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

<sup>424</sup> 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).<sup>425</sup> Below the IGP there are several units,<sup>426</sup> divided by district or metropolitan area and specialisation.<sup>427</sup> The administrative divisions and their subdistricts are covered by the Range Police,<sup>428</sup> while urban areas are under the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police (including Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, and Barisal).<sup>429</sup> Specialised branches include the Criminal Investigation Department (CID),<sup>430</sup> which has designated units to combat trafficking in human beings, financial crimes, and terrorism.<sup>431</sup> 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’.<sup>432</sup>

According to the Prime Minister, as cited by local media, there were 659 police stations across Bangladesh in 2022.<sup>433</sup> Meanwhile, UNFPA stated that there were 630 police stations as of March 2024.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> 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

<sup>426</sup> Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Police, 2024, [url](#); Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Units Police Headquarters, 2024, [url](#)

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

<sup>428</sup> 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

<sup>429</sup> Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Metropolitan Police, 2024, [url](#)

<sup>430</sup> 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

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

<sup>432</sup> Bangladesh, Bangladesh Police, Units Armed Police Battalion (APBN), 2024, [url](#)

<sup>433</sup> 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](#)

<sup>434</sup> 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.<sup>435</sup> Women made up approximately 8 % of the total force.<sup>436</sup> 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.<sup>437</sup> An NGO representative however told OFPRA that minorities were ‘poorly represented’ within the police.<sup>438</sup>

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.<sup>439</sup> 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’.<sup>440</sup> 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.<sup>441</sup>

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.<sup>442</sup> Other sources confirmed that individuals connected to the Prime Minister’s home districts had been recruited or speedily promoted.<sup>443</sup> One example is Benazir

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<sup>435</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>437</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

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

<sup>439</sup> Iftekhar Zaman, Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

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

<sup>441</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

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

<sup>443</sup> 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,<sup>444</sup> a former senior police officer, who has been accused of corruption by local media.<sup>445</sup> 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.<sup>446</sup>

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.<sup>447</sup> 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'.<sup>448</sup> A professor of criminology, as cited in the Daily Star, also pointed out that police officials got 'transferred or promoted in exchange for bribes'.<sup>449</sup> 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'.<sup>450</sup>

### 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.<sup>451</sup> The police, in turn, establishes a First Information Report (FIR).<sup>452</sup> If the crime is serious<sup>453</sup> and thus considered 'cognisable', it falls under the police station's jurisdiction and the police may initiate an investigation<sup>454</sup> without a warrant as per the Code of Criminal Procedure.<sup>455</sup> This law does not, however, provide examples of crimes qualifying as 'cognisable'.<sup>456</sup> Sources consulted by IRB Canada, described cognisable offences as 'serious', and among the examples provided were rape, murder, theft and kidnapping.<sup>457</sup> The government of Bangladesh has stated that torture qualifies as a cognisable offence, as

<sup>444</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

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

<sup>446</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

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

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

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

<sup>450</sup> 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

<sup>451</sup> 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

<sup>452</sup> 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](#)

<sup>453</sup> 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](#)

<sup>454</sup> 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)

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

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

<sup>457</sup> 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.<sup>458</sup> The CSA adopted in 2023 also identifies ‘cognisable’ offences:<sup>459</sup> 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’.<sup>460</sup>

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

In principle, a FIR is to be filed at the police station responsible for the area in which the crime was committed.<sup>462</sup> 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.<sup>463</sup>

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.<sup>464</sup> 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.<sup>465</sup>

Some sources reported that the police demanded bribes in order to file a report.<sup>466</sup> 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].<sup>467</sup>

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

<sup>459</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>461</sup> 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](#)

<sup>462</sup> 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

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

<sup>464</sup> আইন বিভাগ, ফার্স্ট ক্যাপিটাল ইউনিভার্সিটি [Facebook], posted on: 15 August 2020, [url](#)

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

<sup>466</sup> 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](#)

<sup>467</sup> 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.<sup>468</sup> 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.<sup>469</sup> 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.<sup>470</sup>

In the 2023 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, Bangladesh ranked 123 out of 142 countries, and scored 0.30 (out of 1)<sup>471</sup> 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).<sup>472</sup>

The police is the entity responsible for crime investigation in the criminal justice system.<sup>473</sup> 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’.<sup>474</sup> The Daily Star also reported that influential individuals could impact the outcomes of cases.<sup>475</sup> 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’.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> 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

<sup>469</sup> 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

<sup>470</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

<sup>471</sup> ‘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

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

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

<sup>474</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

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

<sup>476</sup> 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 victim<sup>477</sup> or witness protection.<sup>478</sup> There have been draft bills addressing the issue, but no legislation has been passed.<sup>479</sup> Neither is there any protection mechanism in place for victims and witnesses.<sup>480</sup> According to the Business Standard, the absence of a protection mechanism was reportedly one reason why many victims and witnesses refrained from reporting crimes.<sup>481</sup> 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’.<sup>482</sup> 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,<sup>483</sup> such as the right to camera trials in closed-doors settings,<sup>484</sup> and the specific criminalisation of threatening a victim or witness.<sup>485</sup> 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.<sup>486</sup> A joint research report by the Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, however, identified the need to expand victim protection structures.<sup>487</sup> 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’.<sup>488</sup> 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 complaints<sup>489</sup> or refrained from testifying in court fearing for their or their family members safety.<sup>490</sup> According to Arafat Reza Jaan,

<sup>477</sup> 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](#)

<sup>478</sup> 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

<sup>479</sup> 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

<sup>480</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

<sup>484</sup> 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](#)

<sup>485</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>488</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>490</sup> 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.<sup>491</sup> 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’.<sup>492</sup> 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’.<sup>493</sup>

### 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,<sup>494</sup> and involved in human rights abuse<sup>495</sup> and other irregularities such as demanding bribes from the public,<sup>496</sup> and there have also been reported cases of police personnel being involved in crimes such as robbery,<sup>497</sup> drug trade,<sup>498</sup> and rape.<sup>499</sup>

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.<sup>500</sup> Although many police officers are involved in crimes, disciplinary action is rarely taken<sup>501</sup> and some sources noted a culture of impunity.<sup>502</sup> 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’.<sup>503</sup>

Irregularities within law enforcement negatively impacted the public trust.<sup>504</sup> 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.<sup>505</sup> 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.<sup>506</sup> According to the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, the

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

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

<sup>493</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

<sup>494</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>496</sup> 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](#)

<sup>497</sup> 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](#)

<sup>498</sup> 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](#)

<sup>499</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>502</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

<sup>506</sup> 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.<sup>507</sup> 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’.<sup>508</sup> 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’.<sup>509</sup>

## 3.2. Prosecution

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

Prosecutors were lawyers<sup>514</sup> and, according to BRAC, public prosecutor are to be appointed from advocates having at least ten years of experience from lower courts.<sup>515</sup> However, there were no general recruitment rules for public prosecutors,<sup>516</sup> but the government has been empowered to appoint public prosecutors,<sup>517</sup> and the selection process has been politicised.<sup>518</sup> As the prosecutor’s positions are not permanent,<sup>519</sup> there has been a historical tendency of new governments to switch prosecutors when coming to power.<sup>520</sup>

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

<sup>508</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

<sup>509</sup> 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.

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

<sup>511</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>514</sup> 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

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

<sup>516</sup> 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

<sup>517</sup> 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

<sup>518</sup> 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](#)

<sup>519</sup> International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

<sup>520</sup> 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’.<sup>521</sup> 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.<sup>522</sup> Sources also reported that the salaries of prosecutors were low, and that they tended to compromise their services.<sup>523</sup> BRAC reported that prosecutors tended to lack accountability, and demonstrated a lack of interest in their jobs.<sup>524</sup> 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.<sup>525</sup>

## 3.3. Courts

### 3.3.1. Organisation

Bangladesh has a common law system, with the Supreme Court being the highest instance.<sup>526</sup> The Supreme Court is comprised by the High Court Division and the Appellate Division,<sup>527</sup> which have original jurisdiction in hearing, inter alia, constitutional matters<sup>528</sup> and in assessing the law’s constitutionality.<sup>529</sup> Subordinate civil and criminal courts<sup>530</sup> are, inter alia, divided by district<sup>531</sup> and metropolitan area.<sup>532</sup> There are also tribunals and special courts,<sup>533</sup> and at local level, the *union parishads* also operate Village Courts.<sup>534</sup> The Village Courts are semi-formal justice mechanisms, and people also resort to entirely informal justice institutions.<sup>535</sup> 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.<sup>536</sup> In 2022, the Minister of Law stated that 3.9 million cases were pending in the

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

<sup>522</sup> International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

<sup>523</sup> 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

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

<sup>525</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

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

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

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

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

<sup>530</sup> Bangladesh, Judicial Portal Bangladesh, Jurisdiction of Court, 2016, [url](#)

<sup>531</sup> 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

<sup>532</sup> 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,

<sup>533</sup> 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

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

<sup>535</sup> 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](#)

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





courts<sup>537</sup> 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.<sup>538</sup> There was an insufficient number of judges, both in relation to the case backlog<sup>539</sup> and the population size.<sup>540</sup> According to the Chief Justice, there were 1 900 lower court judges as of January 2022.<sup>541</sup>

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.<sup>542</sup> 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.<sup>543</sup> The legal system was described as ‘slow’ by USDOS.<sup>544</sup> A research study published in 2023 found that the average time among households to receive a judgement from district courts was six years.<sup>545</sup> A research associate at BRAC University stated that some cases could take 10–20 and, sometimes, 60 years to resolve<sup>546</sup> while sources consulted by OFPRA also said that cases could reach 20 years.<sup>547</sup> Another means to solve capacity issues has been to introduce alternative conflict resolution mechanisms<sup>548</sup> (see [3.4 Village courts and informal justice mechanisms](#)).

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

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.<sup>552</sup> A local analyst stated that, due to integrity issues, the administration of justice was sometimes selective, despite the actual skills and capacities available.<sup>553</sup> The international organisation stated that there was a need of training judges in case management, due to the large number

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

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

<sup>539</sup> 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

<sup>540</sup> 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

<sup>541</sup> 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](#)

<sup>542</sup> 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](#)

<sup>543</sup> International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>549</sup> 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

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

<sup>551</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

<sup>552</sup> 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](#)

<sup>553</sup> 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.<sup>554</sup> 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).<sup>555</sup>

### 3.3.3. Judicial independence and corruption

Several sources described the judiciary as ‘politicised’.<sup>556</sup> 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.<sup>557</sup> 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.<sup>558</sup> 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.<sup>559</sup> 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.<sup>560</sup> Moreover, the government<sup>561</sup> has been using ‘judicial harassment’ as a means to suppress dissent and harass the opposition.<sup>562</sup> Targets have included journalists,<sup>563</sup> leaders of civil society organisations, human rights defenders and other dissenting voices.<sup>564</sup> 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’<sup>565</sup> and TIB ranked the judiciary as one of most corrupt institutions.<sup>566</sup> 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.<sup>567</sup> Through the years, public allegations on rampant corruption within the judiciary have also come from academics,

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<sup>554</sup> International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

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

<sup>556</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>563</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>565</sup> Freedom House, Bangladesh, 10 March 2023, [url](#)

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

<sup>567</sup> 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.<sup>568</sup> The current Chief Justice,<sup>569</sup> as some of his predecessors,<sup>570</sup> also acknowledged the prevalence of corruption in the judiciary, but pointed out that it is prevalent in all sectors of society.<sup>571</sup>

### 3.3.4. Court costs and bribes

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

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

### 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.<sup>581</sup> Zaman stated that people in general avoid reporting crimes, and do it as a last resort.<sup>582</sup> This fact was also acknowledged by the Supreme Court in a verdict from 2019 describing the

<sup>568</sup> 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

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

<sup>570</sup> 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

<sup>571</sup> 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](#)

<sup>572</sup> 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

<sup>573</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>576</sup> 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

<sup>577</sup> 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

<sup>578</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

<sup>579</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>582</sup> 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.<sup>583</sup> The long processing times reportedly also made people lose confidence in the judiciary.<sup>584</sup>

### 3.4. Village courts and informal justice mechanisms

The village courts (also referred to as *Gram Adalat*<sup>585</sup>) were created to ease the burden of the formal justice system,<sup>586</sup> and to improve the access to justice of marginalised groups.<sup>587</sup> It was also introduced as an alternative to the traditional practice of *shalish*<sup>588</sup> – an ‘informal grassroots justice system’<sup>589</sup> typically consisting of powerful village elders or other powerful individuals convening to resolve disputes.<sup>590</sup> 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,<sup>591</sup> which empowered the administrative unions to resolve petty issues within their jurisdiction.<sup>592</sup> 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.<sup>593</sup>

The village courts handle both criminal and civil cases,<sup>594</sup> but only minor issues that do not exceed a compensation of 75 000 *taka* [about EUR 594].<sup>595</sup> 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’.<sup>596</sup> The cases should not involve formal justice mechanisms.<sup>597</sup> A draft law, however suggests to increase the compensation amount to

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

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

<sup>585</sup> 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

<sup>586</sup> 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

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

<sup>588</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>590</sup> 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

<sup>591</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>594</sup> 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

<sup>595</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>597</sup> 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*.<sup>598</sup> The village courts can only impose such financial punishments, and do not have jurisdiction to hand down prison sentences.<sup>599</sup> 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’.<sup>600</sup>

OFpra reported that the village courts were much less used than the tradition of *shalish*.<sup>601</sup> 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.<sup>602</sup> 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.<sup>603</sup> OFpra also reported that the village courts suffer from the same politicisation as the *shalish* and other judicial institutions.<sup>604</sup>

In addition to village court and *shalish*, informal justice was provided by other mechanisms such as NGO-organised mediation<sup>605</sup> as well as community legal services according to CGS<sup>606</sup> and community leaders, arbitration councils, and alternative dispute resolution by religious leaders as reported by USAID.<sup>607</sup>

*Fatwa* is a way to settle matters of religious practices and may only be issued by Muslim religious scholars.<sup>608</sup> In 2011, Bangladesh’s Supreme Court ruled that *fatwas* may be issued, but prohibited their enforcement.<sup>609</sup> 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.<sup>610</sup> 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.’<sup>611</sup>

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

<sup>599</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>602</sup> 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

<sup>603</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

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

<sup>605</sup> 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](#)

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

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

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

<sup>609</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>611</sup> 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.<sup>612</sup> Penalties range from five years to life imprisonment and fines.<sup>613</sup> 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).<sup>614</sup> Bangladeshi police cooperated with INTERPOL on trafficking cases<sup>615</sup> 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’.<sup>616</sup> 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.<sup>617</sup>

There are specialised Anti-Human Trafficking Tribunals in seven districts.<sup>618</sup> They are comprised of judges and specialised prosecutors assigned to hear cases of trafficking in human beings.<sup>619</sup> Police,<sup>620</sup> prosecutors<sup>621</sup> and judges undergo anti-trafficking training<sup>622</sup> but sources called for further training efforts.<sup>623</sup> There was reportedly a lack of expertise in trafficking in human beings.<sup>624</sup> USDOS explained that some officials conflated it with other crimes such as migrant smuggling and fraudulent labour practices. The same source also

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<sup>612</sup> 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

<sup>613</sup> 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)

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

<sup>615</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>618</sup> 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

<sup>619</sup> 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](#)

<sup>620</sup> 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](#)

<sup>621</sup> 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

<sup>622</sup> 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

<sup>623</sup> 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

<sup>624</sup> 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.<sup>625</sup> 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’.<sup>626</sup> According to USDOS, some officials denied the existence of internal trafficking – particularly child sex trafficking.<sup>627</sup> 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’.<sup>628</sup> Other sources also reported on female victims of trafficking facing social stigma by the surrounding community.<sup>629</sup> 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’.<sup>630</sup>

The criminal justice system experienced a lack of resources for processing cases of trafficking in human beings.<sup>631</sup> For victims returning from abroad, the police faced difficulties in collecting evidence as the crime took place in a foreign country.<sup>632</sup> 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.<sup>633</sup>

There were also reported challenges in finalising cases, and only a limited number of cases led to convictions.<sup>634</sup> 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.<sup>635</sup> During the reporting period of the USDOS report Trafficking in Human Beings

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

<sup>626</sup> 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

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

<sup>628</sup> 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

<sup>629</sup> 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

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

<sup>631</sup> 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

<sup>632</sup> 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

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

<sup>634</sup> 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](#)

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



2023, 1 April 2022–31 March 2023,<sup>636</sup> 94 traffickers were convicted in 35 cases, and most were sentenced with fines.<sup>637</sup> As of 2022, the courts had thousands of trafficking cases in their backlog.<sup>638</sup> The figures of the actual size ranged from 4 732 cases in mid-2022, as reported by the USDOS,<sup>639</sup> to 5 781 as reported by the Daily Star at the same time.<sup>640</sup> 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.<sup>641</sup>

Corruption was reportedly an issue for trafficking cases as well.<sup>642</sup> The political connections of the accused influenced the processing of cases,<sup>643</sup> as well as bribing.<sup>644</sup> Sources also reported on public official's being involved in trafficking,<sup>645</sup> and official complicity 'remained pervasive' according to the USDOS.<sup>646</sup> 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.<sup>647</sup> This information could not be corroborated by other sources. However, as mentioned, there is a general culture of impunity within law enforcement.<sup>648</sup> 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.<sup>649</sup> This information could not be corroborated through other sources.

State support for victims' assistance and protection was reportedly limited.<sup>650</sup> 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.<sup>651</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>643</sup> 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

<sup>644</sup> 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

<sup>645</sup> 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](#)

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

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

<sup>648</sup> 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](#)

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

<sup>650</sup> 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](#)

<sup>651</sup> 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,<sup>652</sup> and many Bangladeshi migrants are indebted.<sup>653</sup> Among these, there are victims of trafficking in human beings.<sup>654</sup> Some have been facing exploitative labour conditions to repay loans taken from legal recruitment agencies or unlicensed brokers,<sup>655</sup> who have sometimes been conveying false and misleading information about work prospects abroad.<sup>656</sup> 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’.<sup>657</sup> The NGO Justice and Care reported that ‘failure to pay can have severe economical, reputational and physical’ consequences for migrants and their families.<sup>658</sup> 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’.<sup>659</sup> Other sources also reported on illegal recruiters not consistently being held accountable.<sup>660</sup>

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](#).

<sup>652</sup> 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

<sup>653</sup> 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

<sup>654</sup> 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

<sup>655</sup> 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

<sup>656</sup> Walk Free, Modern slavery in Bangladesh, 14 November 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>657</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 21

<sup>658</sup> Justice and Care, Issue Brief – Labour migration and modern slavery victimisation: Bangladesh as a case study, June 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>659</sup> OHCHR, Preliminary observations of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Siobhán Mullally, 9 November 2022, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>660</sup> 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.<sup>661</sup> There is, moreover, a specialised Women Support and Investigation Division of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police<sup>662</sup> and every police station reportedly had a special service desks for women.<sup>663</sup> According to UNICEF, trained women police personnel have been deployed to manage these desks.<sup>664</sup> To address the issue of violence against women, in 2009 the Bangladesh Police introduced the first Victim Support Centre (VSC) in Dhaka.<sup>665</sup> VSCs provide legal assistance to women and children subjected to violence,<sup>666</sup> as well as counselling and medical help in collaboration with a number of NGOs.<sup>667</sup> Eight of the VSC also provide short-term accommodation.<sup>668</sup> There are also One-stop crisis centres (OCCs) available for rape victims, offering multiple services at the same place.<sup>669</sup> 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.<sup>670</sup> 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.<sup>671</sup>

Due to social stigma connected to gender-based violence many victims refrain from reporting crimes.<sup>672</sup> Social norms reportedly also impacted service delivery of the police,<sup>673</sup> 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.<sup>674</sup> There was a reported need of gender sensitivity training.<sup>675</sup> 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.<sup>676</sup> The study by IDS also noted a lack of human and financial resources to handle domestic violence.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

<sup>662</sup> UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>663</sup> 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

<sup>664</sup> UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>665</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024; Bangladesh, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Victim Support, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>666</sup> UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>667</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024; Bangladesh, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Victim Support, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>668</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 66

<sup>669</sup> UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>670</sup> Daily Star (The), Too few shelters for domestic violence victims, 11 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>671</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 66

<sup>672</sup> 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](#)

<sup>673</sup> 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

<sup>674</sup> 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.

<sup>675</sup> UNICEF, Justice Accountability and Support, 2023, [url](#), p. 21; New Age, Police harassment of women raises concern, 30 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>676</sup> BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>677</sup> 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.<sup>678</sup> 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.<sup>679</sup> Victims of gender-based violence who filed cases faced delays in investigations and trials,<sup>680</sup> and few cases led to convictions.<sup>681</sup> According to USAID, women predominantly sought redress in the informal *shalish*.<sup>682</sup>

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.<sup>683</sup> This information could not be corroborated by other sources.

### 3.5.4. Land disputes

Land scarcity is a ‘significant issue’ in Bangladesh.<sup>684</sup> The situation is aggravated by deforestation<sup>685</sup> and climate change, causing the loss of fertile land.<sup>686</sup> 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 widespread<sup>687</sup> and stem from various reasons – one being the lack of land records, making it difficult to identify the actual owner.<sup>688</sup> Land has been illegally occupied, including private and government-owned land<sup>689</sup> as well as protected forests.<sup>690</sup> Influential individuals have been involved in land-grabbing,<sup>691</sup> including members of the current political party in power.<sup>692</sup> USDOS reported that land disputes disproportionately impacted members of minority communities.<sup>693</sup> An NGO representative engaged in protecting the rights of Christian

<sup>678</sup> 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](#)

<sup>679</sup> BRAC, Strengthening the Public Prosecution System to Ensure Justice for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, May 2022, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>680</sup> 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](#)

<sup>681</sup> 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](#)

<sup>682</sup> SA, USAID, Assessment of Rule of Law and Justice Sector in Bangladesh, 12 March 2022, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>683</sup> Daily Star (The), Too few shelters for domestic violence victims, 11 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>684</sup> 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](#)

<sup>685</sup> 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](#)

<sup>686</sup> 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

<sup>687</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>688</sup> International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

<sup>689</sup> Bangladesh Post, New land management law coming, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>690</sup> Land Portal Foundation, How much of Bangladesh’s protected forests are really protected?, 17 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>691</sup> 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](#)

<sup>692</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#); Odhikar, Annual Human Rights Report 2022 Bangladesh, 30 January 2023, [url](#), paras. 16, 79

<sup>693</sup> 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.<sup>694</sup> 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.<sup>695</sup> 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.<sup>696</sup>

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.<sup>697</sup> Applicable laws were described as ‘scattered’,<sup>698</sup> for example the practices in inheritance of private property varied depending on religious laws and customary laws of different ethnic groups.<sup>699</sup> Furthermore, the administrative system set up to handle land registration and ownership was reportedly ineffective,<sup>700</sup> and struggled to address land disputes according to the Association for Land Reform and Development (ALDR).<sup>701</sup> 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.<sup>702</sup> The formal process to handle land disputes was lengthy, oftentimes taking several years to resolve<sup>703</sup> – and sometimes generations according to a lawyer interviewed by OFPRA in June 2023.<sup>704</sup>

In order to address challenges related to land-disputes and increase tenure security<sup>705</sup> the parliament passed the Land Crime Prevention and Remedy Act in 2023.<sup>706</sup> 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

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<sup>694</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 53

<sup>695</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>696</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>697</sup> USA, US embassy in Bangladesh, Property Disputes, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>698</sup> 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](#)

<sup>699</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>700</sup> 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

<sup>701</sup> ALDR, Bangladesh: Country Overview Paper, October 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>702</sup> Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, 29 June 2023, Land Portal Foundation, [url](#)

<sup>703</sup> 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

<sup>704</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>705</sup> Hayward, D. and Hennings, A., Bangladesh – Context and Land Governance, 29 June 2023, Land Portal Foundation, [url](#)

<sup>706</sup> 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.<sup>707</sup> A lawyer interviewed by OFPRA pointed out that illiteracy is a ‘major obstacle’ to acquire such documents,<sup>708</sup> 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.<sup>709</sup>

Corruption has been prevalent also in the land administration sector.<sup>710</sup> 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’.<sup>711</sup> 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’.<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>707</sup> Bangladesh Post, New land management law coming, 9 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>708</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 56

<sup>709</sup> International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

<sup>710</sup> 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

<sup>711</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 53

<sup>712</sup> 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).<sup>713</sup> 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’.<sup>714</sup>

Some legal acts limit the freedoms outlined in the constitution.<sup>715</sup> The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was adopted in 2006, and inter alia prohibited publishing or transmitting ‘false and obscene’ material (Section 57).<sup>716</sup> The ICT was replaced<sup>717</sup> on 8 October 2018 by the DSA.<sup>718</sup> The DSA was described as ‘draconian’,<sup>719</sup> and as of January 2023, over 7 000 cases had been filed under the act according to Bangladeshi authorities.<sup>720</sup> Individuals who have had charges brought against them under the DSA included (among others) journalists,<sup>721</sup> activists and educators.<sup>722</sup> According to BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD),<sup>723</sup> the accused were ‘[i]ndividuals from all walks of life, ranging from children to government employees’.<sup>724</sup> Following criticism,<sup>725</sup> the DSA was replaced by the

<sup>713</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 37–38

<sup>714</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 39

<sup>715</sup> 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

<sup>716</sup> 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](#)

<sup>717</sup> HRW, Bangladesh: Scrap Draconian Elements of Digital Security Act, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>718</sup> Bangladesh, Bangladesh Parliament, Digital Security Act 2018, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>719</sup> Al Jazeera, Bangladesh to tone down ‘draconian’ digital security law, 7 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>720</sup> Business Standard (The), Over 7,000 cases filed under DSA: Law minister, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>721</sup> 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](#)

<sup>722</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2022, 23 February 2022, [url](#); CGS, CGS: Nearly 1,500 DSA cases in 20 months, [2021], [url](#)

<sup>723</sup> 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](#)

<sup>724</sup> BRAC, Freedom (Fear) of Expression in a Free Country, 10 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>725</sup> VOA, Bangladesh Criticized Over Plan to Replace Controversial Law with One Considered Equally Repressive, 21 August 2023, [url](#)





CSA on 13 September 2023.<sup>726</sup> Some abusive elements were removed,<sup>727</sup> including a reduction in the number of cognisable<sup>728</sup> and non-bailable offences.<sup>729</sup> Moreover, the sentence for ‘defamation’ was changed into fine instead of imprisonment, and the offence of ‘holding, transferring data-information illegally’ was removed.<sup>730</sup> The CSA however retained many restrictive elements of the DSA,<sup>731</sup> 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).<sup>732</sup> 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.<sup>733</sup>

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.<sup>734</sup> 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’.<sup>735</sup>

<sup>726</sup> Dhaka Tribune, Parliament passes Cyber Security Bill 2023, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>727</sup> Al Jazeera, Bangladesh to tone down ‘draconian’ digital security law, 7 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>728</sup> 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

<sup>729</sup> 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](#)

<sup>730</sup> 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

<sup>731</sup> 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](#)

<sup>732</sup> 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

<sup>733</sup> 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

<sup>734</sup> 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

<sup>735</sup> 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 freedom<sup>736</sup> include the Telecommunications Act (2001) which allows state agencies to tap telephone and mobiles<sup>737</sup> to protect national security and public order.<sup>738</sup> 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.<sup>739</sup> Also, the Pornography Control Act (2012) prohibits making or selling pornographic material,<sup>740</sup> 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.<sup>741</sup>

#### 4.1.2. State reactions to opposition and critique

Sheikh Hasina and her government have shown a growing intolerance of dissent.<sup>742</sup> Before the 2024 election, the government reportedly increased their repression, and targeted the opposition, human rights defenders and media.<sup>743</sup>

Dissidents and critics have been suppressed through harassment, surveillance, arbitrary arrest, and enforced disappearance.<sup>744</sup> State authorities have also reportedly harassed family members of such individuals<sup>745</sup> for example through arrests<sup>746</sup> or showing up at their houses in the middle of the night to interrogate them.<sup>747</sup> 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’.<sup>748</sup> Meanwhile, Bertelsmann Stiftung reported that enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings had been ‘instrumentalized’ in order to ‘spread fear and muzzle criticism’,<sup>749</sup> while Human Rights Watch described enforced disappearances as a ‘hallmark’ of Sheikh Hasina’s rule.<sup>750</sup> More information is available in section [2.4.2 Enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings](#).

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<sup>736</sup> 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

<sup>737</sup> 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

<sup>738</sup> 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](#)

<sup>739</sup> 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](#)

<sup>740</sup> BBC, Bangladesh cabinet approves anti-pornography law, 2 January 2012, [url](#); New Age, The Pornography Control Act, 2012, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>741</sup> New Age, The Pornography Control Act, 2012, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>742</sup> 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](#)

<sup>743</sup> CIVICUS, People Power Under Attack 2023, December 2023, [url](#), p. 34; HRW, World Report 2024: Bangladesh, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>744</sup> CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>745</sup> HRW, Bangladesh: Stop Reprisals Against Victims, Activists, 7 April 2022, [url](#); New Age, Families face harassment, arrest, 4 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>746</sup> New Age, Families face harassment, arrest, 4 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>747</sup> HRW, Bangladesh: Stop Reprisals Against Victims, Activists, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>748</sup> ADPAN et al., Bangladesh, Government must cease enforced disappearances, stop harassment of the victims’ families and hold perpetrators accountable, 29 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>749</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, Bangladesh Country Report 2024, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>750</sup> HRW, Decade of Disappearances, n.d., [url](#)



Authorities reportedly monitored foreign funding of human rights organisations,<sup>751</sup> and dissenting voices have been targeted through legal proceedings,<sup>752</sup> through so called ‘judicial harassment’.<sup>753</sup> As mentioned, over 7 000 cases were filed during the years that the DSA was in effect.<sup>754</sup> Under the CSA (adopted on 13 September 2023<sup>755</sup>) 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.<sup>756</sup> According to OMCT, both the DSA and CSA have been used to arbitrarily detain government critics.<sup>757</sup>

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.<sup>758</sup> 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.<sup>759</sup> 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.<sup>760</sup> The same source recorded 48 such cases in 2023.<sup>761</sup>

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.<sup>762</sup>

### 4.1.3. Political activists

Political activists have been subjected to different forms of violence ahead of elections,<sup>763</sup> and sources reported on a crackdown on political activism and protests of BNP supporters.<sup>764</sup> Some protests have turned violent, leading to deaths and injuries when supporters of different

<sup>751</sup> RFK Human Rights, Bangladesh: Stop reprisals against victims, activists, 7 April 2022, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2023: Bangladesh, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>752</sup> 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](#)

<sup>753</sup> HRW, Bangladesh: Quash Conviction and Release Rights Defenders, 14 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>754</sup> Business Standard (The), Over 7,000 cases filed under DSA: Law minister, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>755</sup> Dhaka Tribune, Parliament passes Cyber Security Bill 2023, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>756</sup> CGS, From Digital to Cyber Security Act: Thoughts of the Politicians, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>757</sup> OMCT, Bangladesh: Arbitrary detention and impunity for torture continues after elections, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>758</sup> Riaz, A., The Ordeal Five Years of the Digital Security Act 2018-2023, CGS, April 2024, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>759</sup> New Age, UP members arrested for expatriate brother’s FB comment on PM, 10 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>760</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>761</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>762</sup> Business Standard (The), Passports of anti-state activists may be scraped: Hasan, 13 January 2022, [url](#); Daily Star (The), ‘Anti-state activities from abroad will result in passport being cancelled’, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>763</sup> 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](#)

<sup>764</sup> 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 other<sup>765</sup> and also with the police.<sup>766</sup> Protesters have been met with excessive use of force by the police,<sup>767</sup> and there were also reports of the police coordinating attacks against the opposition together with supporters of the ruling party.<sup>768</sup> Protests have been followed by extensive arrests of opposition members and supporters,<sup>769</sup> while AL affiliates have seemingly enjoyed impunity for their part in the violence.<sup>770</sup> 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.<sup>771</sup>

Starting in 2022, several big rallies were organised for the 2024 election<sup>772</sup> and such protests continued in 2023.<sup>773</sup> One of the largest demonstrations was organised in Dhaka on 28 October 2023<sup>774</sup> with more than 100 000 persons participating.<sup>775</sup> 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.<sup>776</sup> A police officer died during violent clashes,<sup>777</sup> and the police reportedly used excessive force.<sup>778</sup> The protest triggered the detention of several BNP leaders,<sup>779</sup> alongside thousands of BNP supporters.<sup>780</sup> Eight of the arrested BNP leaders had reportedly died in custody before the end of 2023.<sup>781</sup> In the months leading to the election, the BNP reported on arrest of over 20 000

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<sup>765</sup> 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](#)

<sup>766</sup> 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](#)

<sup>767</sup> OMCT, Bangladesh: The government must stop killing protesters 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 protesters must end immediately, 4 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>768</sup> 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](#)

<sup>769</sup> 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

<sup>770</sup> HRW, Bangladesh: Violent Autocratic Crackdown Ahead of Elections, 26 November 2023, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>771</sup> 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](#)

<sup>772</sup> International Crisis Group, Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, 4 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>773</sup> 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](#)

<sup>774</sup> 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](#)

<sup>775</sup> 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](#)

<sup>776</sup> ACLED, The Violent Politics of Bangladesh's 2024 Elections, 4 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>777</sup> 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](#)

<sup>778</sup> 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](#)

<sup>779</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 55, p. 32

<sup>780</sup> 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](#)

<sup>781</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 32



opposition leaders and activists,<sup>782</sup> 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.<sup>783</sup> 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.<sup>784</sup>

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.<sup>785</sup>

Political activists have had cases brought against them under the DSA.<sup>786</sup> 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.<sup>787</sup> There were reports of arrests of political activists under the CSA.<sup>788</sup> Out of the 18 cases recorded by CGS as of 1 March 2024, 8 were politicians.<sup>789</sup>

In 2023, USDOS reported on kidnappings and disappearances of activists.<sup>790</sup> 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.<sup>791</sup>

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.’<sup>792</sup> In a joint investigation by Deutsche Welle (DW) and Netra News, insiders from the RAB suggested that ‘key figures in the ruling

<sup>782</sup> 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](#)

<sup>783</sup> UN News, Bangladesh: Citing ‘dangerous decline’ of human rights, experts urge key reforms, 24 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>784</sup> 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](#)

<sup>785</sup> OMCT, Bangladesh: The government must stop killing protestors and silencing dissent, 6 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>786</sup> 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](#)

<sup>787</sup> Riaz, A., The Ordeal Five Years of the Digital Security Act 2018-2023, CGS, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 10, 12

<sup>788</sup> 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](#)

<sup>789</sup> CGS, From Digital to Cyber Security Act: Thoughts of the Politicians, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>790</sup> USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), section 1. b

<sup>791</sup> 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](#)

<sup>792</sup> 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.<sup>793</sup>

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.<sup>794</sup>

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.'<sup>795</sup> 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.<sup>796</sup>

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.<sup>797</sup> This constituted a decrease from place 150 in 2019.<sup>798</sup> RSF expressed concern about the censorship by the government,<sup>799</sup> and self-censorship impacted the work of media outlets.<sup>800</sup> Moreover, civic space has been shrinking in general with, inter alia, journalists facing a 'hostile environment'<sup>801</sup> and being targeted by state actors and political party supporters.<sup>802</sup> Those reporting on sensitive topics (such as human rights abuse and corruption) have experienced threats, harassment and violence<sup>803</sup> from state actors<sup>804</sup> and

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<sup>793</sup> DW, 'Death squad': Inside Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion, 4 March 2023, [url](#);

<sup>794</sup> France, OFPPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 27, 29–30

<sup>795</sup> Prothom Alo, Infighting, killing at grassroots a headache for Awami League, 7 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>796</sup> France, OFPPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 13–14

<sup>797</sup> RSF, 2024 World Press Freedom Index: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

<sup>798</sup> RSF, 2019 World Press Freedom Index: Bangladesh, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>799</sup> RSF, Bangladesh: general elections put journalists at risk, 6 January 2024, [url](#);

<sup>800</sup> 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](#)

<sup>801</sup> 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](#)

<sup>802</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 3–4, paras. 16, 40–41

<sup>803</sup> CGS, Shrinking Civic Space in Bangladesh: Restoring Dialogue and Collaboration, 25 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>804</sup> CIVICUS, Bangladesh: Crackdown on the opposition and critical journalists escalates as elections loom, 14 June 2023, [url](#)





political activists,<sup>805</sup> while addressing sensitive topics such as secularism and religious minorities was ‘off limits’ according to RSF.<sup>806</sup>

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.<sup>807</sup> The same Minister later reiterated the government's aim to create space for free journalism and freedom of expression.<sup>808</sup> 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.’<sup>809</sup> The prime minister has also called one of the leading local media outlets an ‘enemy’ of her party, democracy and the people.<sup>810</sup> Moreover, in January 2023 the government issued a letter informing of a closure of 191 websites accused of publishing ‘anti-state’ information,<sup>811</sup> while in February 2023, BNP’s only newspaper was shut down by the government according to Agence France-Presse (AFP).<sup>812</sup> Some media outlets (e.g., Netra News) continue to report from abroad despite governmental repercussions, including shutdowns<sup>813</sup> and surveillance by the security agency.<sup>814</sup>

In 2023, Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders expressed concern on the rise of attacks on journalists in Bangladesh,<sup>815</sup> while the Media Freedom Coalition also reported on violent acts and intimidation of journalists taking place.<sup>816</sup> In 2022–2023, ASK recorded 554 cases of violent incidents against journalists.<sup>817</sup> In January–April 2024, ASK recorded 105 such cases.<sup>818</sup> 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.<sup>819</sup> Between 2022 and 2024, Committee

<sup>805</sup> 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](#)

<sup>806</sup> RSF, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

<sup>807</sup> BSS, No harassment of journo while seeking information: Arafat, 18 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>808</sup> 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](#)

<sup>809</sup> BSS, Don't publish any news that hampers country's image: PM urges journalists, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>810</sup> Bangladesh Awami League, Prothom Alo is enemy of democracy and people: PM Sheikh Hasina, 11 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>811</sup> 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](#)

<sup>812</sup> 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](#)

<sup>813</sup> 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

<sup>814</sup> 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](#)

<sup>815</sup> AI, Bangladesh 2023, 2023, [url](#); RSF, Alarming surge of press freedom violations in Bangladesh, 5 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>816</sup> USA, US Embassy in Bangladesh, Statement from Media Freedom coalition of Bangladesh, 30 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>817</sup> ASK, Journalist Harassment (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#); ASK, Journalist Harassment (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>818</sup> ASK, Journalist Harassment Jan-Apr 2024, 7 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>819</sup> 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.<sup>820</sup> 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.<sup>821</sup> 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.<sup>822</sup>

Sources indicated that journalists and media outlets criticising the government were targeted by the government and its supporters.<sup>823</sup> Journalists have had criminal cases launched against them under the DSA,<sup>824</sup> and such cases continued to be reported under the CSA.<sup>825</sup> 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.<sup>826</sup> Out of the 18 CSA cases recorded by CGS as of 1 March 2024, 10 were journalists.<sup>827</sup>

Bangladeshi journalists reporting from abroad, and their family members living in Bangladesh were also targeted by the state authorities.<sup>828</sup> Local media BenarNews reported on expat journalists facing digital threats, threatening text messages and calls, and smearing campaigns.<sup>829</sup> Remaining family members have been intimidated through state authorities' visits to their homes<sup>830</sup> and some of them have also been arrested.<sup>831</sup> 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'.<sup>832</sup>

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.<sup>833</sup> Several journalists were attacked by supporters of the AL party and police while covering the political rally on 28 October 2023,<sup>834</sup>

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<sup>820</sup> CPJ, 1 Journalists killed in Bangladesh between 2022-2024, 2024, [url](#)

<sup>821</sup> CPJ, Golam Rabbani Nadim, [2024], [url](#)

<sup>822</sup> RSF, 2023 Round-up, Journalists killed, detained, held hostage and missing, 2023, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>823</sup> 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](#)

<sup>824</sup> 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](#)

<sup>825</sup> CGS, From Digital to Cyber Security Act: Thoughts of the Politicians, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>826</sup> Riaz, A., The Ordeal Five Years of the Digital Security Act 2018-2023, CGS, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 10, 14

<sup>827</sup> CGS, From Digital to Cyber Security Act: Thoughts of the Politicians, 1 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>828</sup> 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](#)

<sup>829</sup> BenarNews, Journalists in Bangladeshi diaspora say govt targets them through transnational repression, 21 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>830</sup> 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](#)

<sup>831</sup> 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

<sup>832</sup> CPJ, Unidentified men attack brother of exiled Bangladesh journalist Zulkarnain Saer Khan, 24 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>833</sup> RSF, Bangladesh: general elections put journalists at risk, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>834</sup> 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.<sup>835</sup> Moreover, 18 journalists were assaulted or harassed during the general election coverage.<sup>836</sup>

Reporters Without Borders further reported on ‘election candidates, militias and student wings of the ruling party, as well as radical religious groups’ attacking journalists.<sup>837</sup> 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’.<sup>838</sup> There were also cases of ordinary people attacking journalists.<sup>839</sup>

#### 4.1.5. Human rights defenders

Bangladesh has a tradition of a strong civil society,<sup>840</sup> with one of the largest NGOs in the world [BRAC] being based in the country.<sup>841</sup> 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.<sup>842</sup> 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.<sup>843</sup> The majority of the registered organisations are development NGOs.<sup>844</sup> Between January and October 2022, the government ‘cancelled’ the registration of 35 NGOs.<sup>845</sup>

In December 2023, CIVICUS reported that ‘[i]ndependent civil society has virtually no more space to operate.’<sup>846</sup> The government imposed limits on activities of civil society organisations by enforcing regulations on registration and reporting,<sup>847</sup> including the 2016 Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act.<sup>848</sup> Especially organisations working in areas such as human rights experienced obstacles in the shape of state bureaucracy, inter alia in getting

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in clashes in Dhaka’s Kakrail, 28 October 2023, [url](#); BJIM, BJIM condemns attacks on journalists covering political events, 28 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>835</sup> CPJ, At least 27 Bangladeshi journalists attacked, harassed while covering political rallies, 1 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>836</sup> 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](#)

<sup>837</sup> RSF, Bangladesh: general elections put journalists at risk, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>838</sup> RSF, Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>839</sup> 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](#)

<sup>840</sup> 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](#)

<sup>841</sup> Zaman, I., Executive Director of TIB, online interview, 5 April 2024

<sup>842</sup> Bangladesh, Act No. 8 of 2016, Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, 8 October 2016, [url](#), art. 3; ICNL, Bangladesh, 21 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>843</sup> Bangladesh, NGO Affairs Bureau, NGO List-All, March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>844</sup> ICNL, Bangladesh, 21 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>845</sup> Bangladesh National Portal, NGO Affairs Bureau, List of Cancelled NGOs, 4 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>846</sup> CIVICUS, CIVICUS Monitor downgrades Bangladesh’s civic space rating amid brutal pre-election crackdown, 6 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>847</sup> CIVICUS, Bangladesh: ‘The legal vulnerability of LGBTQ+ 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

<sup>848</sup> Hossain N. and Lewis D., Draft for discussion, Revisiting civil society in Bangladesh, January 2024, [url](#), p. 11



their registrations renewed.<sup>849</sup> 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.<sup>850</sup>

In 2022, the prominent local human rights organisation Odhikar saw the renewal of its registration rejected after having its case pending since 2014.<sup>851</sup> 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.<sup>852</sup> The cancellation of Odhikar resulted in criticism and request for reinstatement by local actors and international organisations.<sup>853</sup> 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 2013<sup>854</sup> when the organisation released a fact-finding report on extrajudicial killings.<sup>855</sup> They were charged with ‘publishing false images and information’ and ‘disrupting the law and order situation of the country’<sup>856</sup> under the ICT act.<sup>857</sup>

As civic space is shrinking in general,<sup>858</sup> activists have been targeted by state actors and political party supporters.<sup>859</sup> Several sources reported on civil society activists and human rights defenders facing harassment and intimidation by the government authorities.<sup>860</sup> 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

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<sup>849</sup> 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.

<sup>850</sup> 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

<sup>851</sup> 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](#)

<sup>852</sup> 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](#)

<sup>853</sup> 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](#)

<sup>854</sup> 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](#);

<sup>855</sup> HRW, Bangladesh: Quash Conviction and Release Rights Defenders, 14 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>856</sup> 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](#)

<sup>857</sup> 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](#)

<sup>858</sup> Asia Foundation (The), A Glass Half-Full: Civic Space and Contestation in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 3, 10, 16

<sup>859</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 3–4, paras. 3–4, 7

<sup>860</sup> 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.<sup>861</sup> Other sources also reported on human rights defenders facing harassment by the ruling party and state authorities.<sup>862</sup>

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’.<sup>863</sup>

Labour activists were also faced violence from the police, and actors linked to the industry.<sup>864</sup> 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’.<sup>865</sup>

## 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 CEDAW<sup>866</sup> and its Optional Protocol.<sup>867</sup> 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*.<sup>868</sup> 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.<sup>869</sup>

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

<sup>861</sup> Riaz, A., Who Defends the Defenders? The Predicament of Human Rights Activists In Bangladesh, July 2023, CGS, [url](#), pp. 6, 14, 21–22, 29

<sup>862</sup> 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

<sup>863</sup> Front Line Defenders, #Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>864</sup> 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

<sup>865</sup> OMCT, Bangladesh: Arbitrary detention and impunity for torture continues after elections, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>866</sup> United Nations Treaty Collection, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, [url](#)

<sup>867</sup> United Nations Treaty Collection, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1999, [url](#)

<sup>868</sup> United Nations Treaty Collection, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979, [url](#), [footnote 5], art. 16 (c)

<sup>869</sup> 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'.<sup>870</sup> There are also numerous laws addressing specific forms of violence against women,<sup>871</sup> including dowry-related violence (the Dowry Prohibition Act (2018)), domestic violence (Prevention and Protection Act (2010)),<sup>872</sup> and acid violence<sup>873</sup> (the acts of Acid Offence Control and Acid Crime Prevention (2002)).<sup>874</sup>

Bangladesh ranked highest among South Asian countries in the Gender Gap Index,<sup>875</sup> ranking 59 globally in 2023.<sup>876</sup> USAID described Bangladesh as having 'advanced regulation for protecting women's rights and privileges', but noted still existing 'barriers to overcoming inequality'.<sup>877</sup> Although the leaders of the two main political parties were women,<sup>878</sup> and although the constitution guarantees 50 seats for women in parliament,<sup>879</sup> women remained underrepresented in political and public life.<sup>880</sup> 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.<sup>881</sup> 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.<sup>882</sup>

According to Freedom House, less than 50 % of the labour force were women,<sup>883</sup> and the World Bank indicated that women represented around 32 % of the total workforce in 2023.<sup>884</sup> According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, around 10 million women were entrepreneurs or contributed to small and medium enterprises.<sup>885</sup> While women represented over 50 % of workers in the garment industry,<sup>886</sup> most managerial and administrative positions were held by men.<sup>887</sup> Moreover, women 'generally earned less than male counterparts even when performing similar functions', as reported by USDOS.<sup>888</sup> Women garment workers also faced sexual harassment at the workplace.<sup>889</sup>

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<sup>870</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 19 (3), 28 (2)

<sup>871</sup> BRAC, Public Prosecution System in Bangladesh: The Issues of Justice for Violence against Women and Girls, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>872</sup> WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2023, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>873</sup> 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

<sup>874</sup> Bangladesh, Acid Offence Control Act, 2002, 2002, [url](#); Bangladesh, Acid Crime Prevention Act 2002, 2002, [url](#)

<sup>875</sup> Business Standard (The), Gender equality: Bangladesh ranks best in South Asia 9th consecutive time, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>876</sup> WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Benchmarking gender gaps, 20 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>877</sup> USA, USAID, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, 5 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>878</sup> ACCORD, Bangladesh: COI Compilation, August 2023, [url](#), p. 63

<sup>879</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), Ar. 65 (3)

<sup>880</sup> EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>881</sup> WEF, Global Gender Gap Report 2023, [url](#), p. 101

<sup>882</sup> UN Women, Gender Equality Brief: Bangladesh 2024, 2 May 2024, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>883</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>884</sup> WB, Labor force, female (% of total labor force) – Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

<sup>885</sup> 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](#)

<sup>886</sup> 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](#)

<sup>887</sup> 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

<sup>888</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 7. d

<sup>889</sup> 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 divorce<sup>890</sup> and to inherit.<sup>891</sup> For example, under Islamic inheritance law women inherit half of what men inherit in similar situations,<sup>892</sup> while Hindu inheritance law excludes daughters from inheriting unless it is mentioned in a will.<sup>893</sup> 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’.<sup>894</sup> 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.<sup>895</sup> 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.<sup>896</sup>

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’.<sup>897</sup> Other sources also reported on social stigma being connected to sexual abuse<sup>898</sup> and gender-based violence.<sup>899</sup> 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.<sup>900</sup>

<sup>890</sup> Daily Star (The), The process of getting a divorce, 5 August 2023, [url](#); South Asia State of Minorities Report 2022, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>891</sup> 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

<sup>892</sup> 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

<sup>893</sup> Daily Star (The), Challenging tradition: women's inheritance laws in Bangladesh, 4 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>894</sup> OMCT, Women break the silence gender-based torture in Asia, [url](#), p. 112

<sup>895</sup> UNDP, Over 99 percent of Bangladeshis hold at least one bias against women, 19 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>896</sup> 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

<sup>897</sup> OMCT, Women break the silence gender-based torture in Asia, [url](#), pp. 112–113

<sup>898</sup> 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.

<sup>899</sup> 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

<sup>900</sup> 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 Bangladesh<sup>901</sup> being at ‘alarming’ levels according to several sources.<sup>902</sup> As reported by the Dhaka Tribune, 54 % of women have experienced physical and sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime,<sup>903</sup> and other sources noted that gender-based violence was underreported.<sup>904</sup>

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.<sup>905</sup> According to Freedom House, ‘[a]s many as 70 percent of married women are abused by their intimate partners but rarely report those incidents’.<sup>906</sup> In the period 1 January 2022–April 2024, ASK recorded 461 cases of women being murdered by their husbands.<sup>907</sup> 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.<sup>908</sup>

Dowry is known as *joutuk*,<sup>909</sup> 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],<sup>910</sup> the practice still exists<sup>911</sup> and is being disguised as ‘gift-giving’, according to research associates at BRAC University.<sup>912</sup> 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.<sup>913</sup>

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<sup>901</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh*, 2023, [url](#); UN Women, *Gender Equality Brief: Bangladesh 2024*, 2 May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>902</sup> 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

<sup>903</sup> Dhaka Tribune, *Report: Nearly 10,000 women faced violence in Bangladesh in a year*, 8 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>904</sup> 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](#)

<sup>905</sup> Prothom Alo, *Violence against women: Reluctance in seeking legal remedy*, 24 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>906</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh*, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>907</sup> 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](#)

<sup>908</sup> Bdnews24.com, *Why is Bangladesh still seeing a rise in violence against women?* 18 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>909</sup> 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

<sup>910</sup> Bangladesh, *Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018*, [url](#)

<sup>911</sup> Bangladesh Post, *Dowry still exists in country*, 11 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>912</sup> Daily Star (The), *Dowry still exists in the guise of ‘gifts’*, 29 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>913</sup> 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’.<sup>914</sup> In 2009, the Supreme Court issued a judgement prohibiting sexual harassment in workplaces and educational institutions, in both public and private sectors.<sup>915</sup> Sexual harassment against women has however continued.<sup>916</sup> In the period 1 January 2022–April 2024, ASK recorded 364 cases of women being sexually harassed.<sup>917</sup> However, as reported by the Daily Star, sexual abuse is underreported.<sup>918</sup> Sources reported that women face sexual harassment in universities<sup>919</sup> and in the workplace<sup>920</sup> as well as in public places,<sup>921</sup> and public transport.<sup>922</sup> 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.<sup>923</sup> According 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].<sup>924</sup>

## (c) Rape

Rape, as foreseen in the 1860 Penal Code,<sup>925</sup> is punishable by life imprisonment<sup>926</sup> or death, if the woman dies as a consequence of the rape.<sup>927</sup> The law does not apply to marital rape if the wife is over 13 years.<sup>928</sup> 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.<sup>929</sup> In 2022, the

<sup>914</sup> Bangladesh, Parliament of Bangladesh, Prevention of Oppression against Women and Children 2000, [url](#)

<sup>915</sup> Bangladesh, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Writ Petition No. 5916 of 2008, 2008, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>916</sup> New Age, Violence against women goes unabated in Bangladesh, 7 March 2023, [url](#); Dhaka Tribune, Harassing the law, 27 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>917</sup> 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](#)

<sup>918</sup> Daily Star (The), Voicing and challenging workplace sexual harassment in Bangladesh, 6 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>919</sup> 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](#)

<sup>920</sup> 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](#)

<sup>921</sup> UNDP, Women’s Safety in Public Places, March 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>922</sup> 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](#)

<sup>923</sup> Daily Star (The), 87% Bangladeshi women harassed at least once; public transport riskiest: Survey, 26 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>924</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 64

<sup>925</sup> Bangladesh, The Penal Code 1860, Chapter XVI, [url](#), art. 375

<sup>926</sup> Bangladesh, The Penal Code 1860, Chapter XVI, [url](#), art. 376

<sup>927</sup> 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

<sup>928</sup> Bangladesh, The Penal Code 1860, Chapter XVI, [url](#), art. 375; USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#), section 6

<sup>929</sup> 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.<sup>930</sup>

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.<sup>931</sup> The police recorded 4 762 rape cases in 2022 alone, as reported by local media outlet Kaler Kantho.<sup>932</sup> 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.<sup>933</sup> 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.<sup>934</sup>

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.'<sup>935</sup> 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.<sup>936</sup> 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.<sup>937</sup> 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.<sup>938</sup>

#### (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).<sup>939</sup> The 'attacks are carried out with the intention of causing harm, inflicting suffering, and in certain instances, taking someone's life'.<sup>940</sup>

Although cases of acid violence continue to be reported, the number of incidents has decreased<sup>941</sup> over the past 20 years.<sup>942</sup> The majority of acid victims have been women,<sup>943</sup> and

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<sup>930</sup> 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

<sup>931</sup> 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](#)

<sup>932</sup> Kaler Kantho, 27,479 rape cases filed in 5 years, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>933</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), paras. 81–82

<sup>934</sup> HRW, World Report 2024, Bangladesh: Events of 2023, [url](#)

<sup>935</sup> HRSS, Annual Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh 2022, August 2023, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>936</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

<sup>937</sup> Daily Star (The), 114 women raped in first three months this year, 2 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>938</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 82

<sup>939</sup> ASF, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>940</sup> Dhaka Tribune, Survivors of the extreme, 11 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>941</sup> ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999-2023, [url](#), p. 1; Business Standard (The), Bangladesh came together to end acid violence, 25 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>942</sup> ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999-2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>943</sup> 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.<sup>944</sup> Between January 2022 and May 2024, ASF reported on 34 acid incidents, with 30 victims being women.<sup>945</sup> The most common motives for acid attacks were family and land disputes,<sup>946</sup> followed by dowry, marriage disputes, rejected love, marriage, and sexual proposals and business disputes.<sup>947</sup> In 2023, Odhikar reported that most cases of acid violence were due to property disputes.<sup>948</sup>

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.’<sup>949</sup>

### (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.<sup>950</sup>

According to USDOS, forced marriage was one of the ‘significant human rights issues’ that they had received ‘credible reports’ about.<sup>951</sup> 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].<sup>952</sup> According to X ‘harmful practices perpetrated against women and girls with disabilities, in particular forced marriage, remain common’<sup>953</sup>

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.<sup>954</sup> The process of filing for and receiving a divorce however differs depending on the religious belief and gender.<sup>955</sup>

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’.<sup>956</sup> In Islam, women face greater barriers than men when seeking

<sup>944</sup> 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](#)

<sup>945</sup> ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999- (May) 2024, 12 June 2024, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>946</sup> 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

<sup>947</sup> ASF, Acid Attack Statistics 1999- (May) 2024, 12 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 5, 11, 15

<sup>948</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), para. 67

<sup>949</sup> 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

<sup>950</sup> France, OFPRA, Bangladesh : La traite par l’exploitation par le travail, 26 September 2023, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>951</sup> USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), Executive summary

<sup>952</sup> France OFPRA, Bangladesh : La traite par l’exploitation par le travail, 26 September 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>953</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the initial report of Bangladesh, 11 October 2022, [url](#), para. 35

<sup>954</sup> Bangladesh, The Divorce Act, 1869, [url](#); USA, US Embassy in Bangladesh, Forced Marriage, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>955</sup> 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

<sup>956</sup> 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.<sup>957</sup> Hindu women can apply for separation, but divorce is not recognised.<sup>958</sup> According to Christian personal law, divorce is allowed on limited grounds for both men and women with more restrictions placed on women.<sup>959</sup> According to a 2022 BBS national survey, the divorce rate was 1.4 per one thousand people in 2022<sup>960</sup> and 1.1 per thousand people in 2023.<sup>961</sup>

#### (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.<sup>962</sup> 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’.<sup>963</sup>

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage worldwide.<sup>964</sup> Statistics indicate that between 41 and 51 % of women married before their turned 18 years,<sup>965</sup> 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.<sup>966</sup> 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].<sup>967</sup>

Despite the legal age requirements for marriage being 18 years of age for girls and 21 years for boys,<sup>968</sup> 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.<sup>969</sup> However, the law does not specify what the special circumstances are.<sup>970</sup> 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.<sup>971</sup>

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<sup>957</sup> 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](#)

<sup>958</sup> 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](#)

<sup>959</sup> 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](#)

<sup>960</sup> 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](#)

<sup>961</sup> Bangladesh, BBS, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, Key Findings, 24 March 2024, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>962</sup> Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), art. 2 (1)

<sup>963</sup> Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), art. 19

<sup>964</sup> 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](#)

<sup>965</sup> UNICEF, Bangladesh: Child Protection, n.d., [url](#); Bangladesh, BBS, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, Key Findings, 24 March 2024, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>966</sup> Bangladesh, BBS, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, Key Findings, 24 March 2024, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>967</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 63

<sup>968</sup> Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), Art. 2

<sup>969</sup> Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), Art. 19; USA, US Embassy in Bangladesh, Forced Marriage, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>970</sup> Bangladesh, The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, [url](#), Art. 19

<sup>971</sup> 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 change<sup>972</sup> and poverty.<sup>973</sup> 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’.<sup>974</sup> 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.<sup>975</sup>

### (g) Trafficking in human beings

Trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation within Bangladesh<sup>976</sup> and across its borders remained prevalent.<sup>977</sup> Sources reported that women and children have been trafficked both overseas and within the country for the purposes of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation.<sup>978</sup> Some of the groups vulnerable to sex trafficking included victims of child marriage and gender-based violence.<sup>979</sup> 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.’<sup>980</sup> Sources also reported on Rohingya girls being trafficked within Bangladesh and internationally for forced marriage.<sup>981</sup> 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’.<sup>982</sup> 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.<sup>983</sup>

<sup>972</sup> Daily Star (The), Climate change is fuelling child marriage in Bangladesh, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>973</sup> Daily Star (The), An alarming upswing in child marriage, 28 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>974</sup> IRC, Bangladesh: IRC study reveals a staggering 39% surge in child marriage due to climate change, 6 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>975</sup> Daily Star (The), Strength in solidarity: 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence, 4 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>976</sup> 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](#)

<sup>977</sup> 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](#)

<sup>978</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>979</sup> USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>980</sup> 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

<sup>981</sup> 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](#)

<sup>982</sup> Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNODC, First National Study on Trafficking in Persons in Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>983</sup> 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).<sup>984</sup> An estimated 30 000 girls were being exploited in child sex trafficking in Bangladesh, according to USDOS.<sup>985</sup>

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.<sup>986</sup> 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,<sup>987</sup> 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.<sup>988</sup> As previously mentioned, many ethnic minorities identify as indigenous people,<sup>989</sup> but the government does not recognise that concept,<sup>990</sup> nor any particular rights relating to it.<sup>991</sup>

In 2010, the government enacted the Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutions Act, with a commitment to protect the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities.<sup>992</sup>

In April 2022, the Anti-Discrimination Act was debated in the parliament.<sup>993</sup> 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

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<sup>984</sup> USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>985</sup> USA, USDOS, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>986</sup> Shah, T. S. Bangladesh Religious Freedom Landscape Report. Religious Freedom Institute, 2020, [url](#), p. 14; USA, USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>987</sup> United Nations Treaty Collection, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1966, [url](#)

<sup>988</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 23 (A), 28 (1)

<sup>989</sup> Sweden, UD, Bangladesh – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2021, 22 June 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>990</sup> HRBF and Nagorik Uddyog, Factsheet: Bangladesh, Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2023: Bangladesh, 29 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>991</sup> Sweden, UD, Bangladesh – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2021, 22 June 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>992</sup> Christian 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](#)

<sup>993</sup> 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.<sup>994</sup> In an interview with the EUAA on 22 April 2024, an anonymous source confirmed that the Act is pending adoption by the government.<sup>995</sup>

### 4.3.2. Legislation on religious rights

According to the constitution, Bangladesh is a secular state,<sup>996</sup> 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.’<sup>997</sup> Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed.<sup>998</sup>

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.<sup>999</sup> 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.<sup>1000</sup>

The Anti-Discrimination Act proposed in 2022<sup>1001</sup> also prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.<sup>1002</sup> 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.<sup>1003</sup> 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.<sup>1004</sup>

According to USDOS, some ethnic communities speak only tribal languages which poses a challenge to access government services in Bangla language.<sup>1005</sup> Reportedly, the government developed pre-school textbooks in five indigenous languages (including Chakma, Garo, Kokborok, Marma, and Sadri)<sup>1006</sup> and distributed around 25 000 books.<sup>1007</sup> However, sources indicated a shortage of qualified teachers who speak indigenous languages.<sup>1008</sup>

<sup>994</sup> AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The state of the world’s human rights, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 88

<sup>995</sup> International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

<sup>996</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 8 (1)

<sup>997</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 2A

<sup>998</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 41

<sup>999</sup> Bangladesh, Penal Code, 1860, [url](#), Chapter XV

<sup>1000</sup> Tarique Barkatullah [LinkedIn], posted on: 27 October 2023, [url](#), Section 28

<sup>1001</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1002</sup> Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh pitches sweeping new anti-discrimination bill to uphold equality, 5 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1003</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

<sup>1004</sup> EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1005</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1006</sup> Asia Foundation (The), In Bangladesh, Preserving Indigenous Culture through Storytelling, 15 November 2023,

[url](#)

<sup>1007</sup> IWGIA, Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1008</sup> 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.<sup>1009</sup> 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.<sup>1010</sup> Also, despite a robust rule of law guaranteeing religious freedoms, sources indicated that the state authorities restricted freedom of speech of religious minorities.<sup>1011</sup> 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.'<sup>1012</sup>

The government announced the promotion of religious diversity and a 'zero-tolerance' policy against any violence against religious minorities.<sup>1013</sup> 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.<sup>1014</sup> Government authorities reportedly deployed law enforcement agencies to ensure safety and security during religious festivities and at religious sites.<sup>1015</sup>

In 2022 and 2023, sources reported on a number of arrests of Hindus on grounds of alleged blasphemy under the 2018 Digital Security Act.<sup>1016</sup> The alleged acts of blasphemy included, inter alia, a derogatory social media post 'hurting religious sentiment[s]'.<sup>1017</sup>

#### 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.'<sup>1018</sup>

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<sup>1009</sup> Netra News, Censoring the indigenous, 1 August 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Bangladesh and the indigenous people, 10 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1010</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1011</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1012</sup> BenarNews, Bangladesh govt asks Hindus to hush Durga Puja noise during Muslim prayer times, 19 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1013</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1014</sup> UN Human Rights Council, National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21, 1 September 2023, [url](#), para. 48

<sup>1015</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1016</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1017</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1018</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh: Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 6



Attacks on religious minorities were continuously reported in 2022 and 2023.<sup>1019</sup> According to Freedom House, religious minorities, specifically Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and Ahmadis faced harassment and violence, including violence against their places of worship.<sup>1020</sup>

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.’<sup>1021</sup> In 2022, ASK recorded 12 violent incidents against religious minorities, all targeting Hindus.<sup>1022</sup> 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.<sup>1023</sup> Between January and April 2024, ASK recorded 21 incidents, 20 targeted Hindus and one targeted the Buddhist community.<sup>1024</sup> Their attacks resulted in one death, injuries, and homes, businesses and religious places attacked or set on fire.<sup>1025</sup>

Mob attacks vandalised and destroyed Hindu homes, businesses, and temples were reported in 2022.<sup>1026</sup> 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.<sup>1027</sup> The attacks over the Hindu community and their places of worship continued in 2023,<sup>1028</sup> with ‘calculated looting and then violent destruction ostensibly in response to a social media post’.<sup>1029</sup> Freedom House reported that people with secular and nonconformist views can face harsh criticism and ‘attacks from hardline Islamist groups’.<sup>1030</sup>

On 6 January 2024, a Buddhist temple was set on fire in Ramu, Cox’s Bazar.<sup>1031</sup> 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.<sup>1032</sup> Furthermore, there were reports of religious fanatics carrying out attacks against the Ahmadiyya community.<sup>1033</sup> In 2023, a violent mob attacked an annual convention of Ahmadis

<sup>1019</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1020</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1021</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 77

<sup>1022</sup> ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-Dec 2022), 3 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1023</sup> ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-Dec 2023), 8 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>1024</sup> ASK, Violence Against Religious Minorities (Jan-April 2024), 7 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>1025</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1026</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1027</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2022, 30 January 2023, [url](#), para. 78

<sup>1028</sup> Odhikar, Bangladesh, Annual Human Rights Report 2023, 4 January 2024, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1029</sup> AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The state of the world’s human rights, 27 March 2023, [url](#), p. 88

<sup>1030</sup> Freedom House, Bangladesh: Freedom in the World 2023, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1031</sup> Bdnews24.com, Fire at Buddhist temple in Ramu is arson attack: police, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>1032</sup> Business Standard (The), 500 sued, 2 arrested over attack on Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad activists, 16 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1033</sup> 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.<sup>1034</sup> The mob reportedly vandalised households and shops belonging to Ahmadis.<sup>1035</sup> 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.<sup>1036</sup>

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.<sup>1037</sup> Sources indicated a rise in number of attacks on religious minorities during the general elections in 2024.<sup>1038</sup> Several sources reported on the ineffective role of the government in preventing communal violence against religious minorities,<sup>1039</sup> and the lack of proper prosecution of perpetrators of sectarian attacks<sup>1040</sup> with judicial trials being lengthy or stalled.<sup>1041</sup> 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.<sup>1042</sup>

A Christian organisation based in the US stated that Christians faced violence by the Muslim majority.<sup>1043</sup> According to USDOS, referring to human rights NGOs, converts to Christianity from Islam and Hinduism may face isolation and harassment.<sup>1044</sup> Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD), ‘a UN ECOSOC NGO’ based in The Hague,<sup>1045</sup> also reported that converts may face violence.<sup>1046</sup> As indicated by Open Doors in 2024, violence against Christian converts resulted in their exclusion from families and communities.<sup>1047</sup>

#### 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,<sup>1048</sup> 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.<sup>1049</sup> Several other sources however reported

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<sup>1034</sup> CAP LC and IHRC, 44th WG UPR Session Bangladesh-2023 Persecution of Ahmadis in Bangladesh, November 2023, [url](#), pp. 3–4

<sup>1035</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1036</sup> CAP LC and IHRC, 44th WG UPR Session Bangladesh-2023 Persecution of Ahmadis in Bangladesh, November 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1037</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 75

<sup>1038</sup> 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

<sup>1039</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1040</sup> Prothom Alo, Attack on Lama Mropara again, house set on fire and looted, 9 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1041</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1042</sup> ICC, Minorities Protest Government Inaction in Bangladesh, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1043</sup> ICC, New Census Reveals Christian Decline in Bangladesh, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1044</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1045</sup> GHRD, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1046</sup> GHRD, Religious Persecution / Religion-Based Violence in Bangladesh, 12 July 2022, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1047</sup> Open Doors, World Watch List 20224, Situation of Religious Freedom for Christians: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#), pp. 4, 6

<sup>1048</sup> RSF, Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

<sup>1049</sup> 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,<sup>1050</sup> and the continuous deployment and presence of Bangladeshi security forces in the area.<sup>1051</sup> 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.’<sup>1052</sup> Some cases of land grabbing in the CHT included arson attacks on land and houses of minorities.<sup>1053</sup>

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.<sup>1054</sup> In 2023, IWGIA reported on four indigenous leaders killed in the CHT.<sup>1055</sup> In 2022, sources reported on the death of an indigenous rights activist in military custody.<sup>1056</sup> 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.’<sup>1057</sup> 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.<sup>1058</sup> In June 2023, two social media platforms based in the CHT were closed.<sup>1059</sup> 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.’<sup>1060</sup> The closed platforms were accused of operating ‘illegally’ without licence according to CPJ.<sup>1061</sup>

More information is available in sections [2.3. Security situation](#) and [3.5.4. Land disputes](#).

<sup>1050</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1051</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1052</sup> OHCHR, Bangladesh: UN expert concerned about non-implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, 2 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1053</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1054</sup> IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2023: Bangladesh, 29 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1055</sup> IWGIA, IWGIA condemns killing of four Indigenous leaders killed in Chittagong Hill Tracts, 15 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1056</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1057</sup> HRW, Bangladesh: Indigenous Activist Dies in Military Custody, 30 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1058</sup> PCJSS, Annual Report of 2022 on Human Rights Situation in CHT, 1 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1059</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1060</sup> CPJ, CPJ urges Bangladeshi authorities to lift shutdown on 2 social media platforms, 12 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1061</sup> 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.<sup>1062</sup> 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’.<sup>1063</sup> Tea garden workers have reportedly been among the lowest paid in Bangladesh.<sup>1064</sup> 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].<sup>1065</sup> As a result of the protests, the minimum wage was increased to 170 *taka* [about EUR 1.3] in 2022.<sup>1066</sup> Sources indicated that some tea garden workers benefitted from government assistance, including cash allowance, education incentives and housing.<sup>1067</sup>

## 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’.<sup>1068</sup> 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.<sup>1069</sup> 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.<sup>1070</sup> Sources reported that this section prohibits same-sex activity,<sup>1071</sup> although it is rarely enforced according to Human Dignity Trust<sup>1072</sup> and not actively enforced according to USDOS.<sup>1073</sup>

In 2022, a new Anti-Discrimination Act was introduced in the parliament.<sup>1074</sup> The proposed legislation prohibits discrimination on inter alia, gender.<sup>1075</sup> However, under the bill,

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<sup>1062</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1063</sup> 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

<sup>1064</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1065</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1066</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1067</sup> 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

<sup>1068</sup> Bangladesh, The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, [url](#), art. 28 (1)

<sup>1069</sup> ILGA, Rights in Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#)

<sup>1070</sup> Bangladesh, The Penal Code, 1860, [url](#), art. 377

<sup>1071</sup> Human Dignity Trust, Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

<sup>1072</sup> Human Dignity Trust, Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1073</sup> USA, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#), section 6

<sup>1074</sup> Business Standard (The), A bill titled ‘Anti-Discrimination act-2022’ placed in parliament, 5 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1075</sup> Bdnews24.com, Bangladesh pitches sweeping new anti-discrimination bill to uphold equality, 5 April 2022, [url](#)



discrimination is not a punishable offence.<sup>1076</sup> In an interview with the EUAA on 22 April 2024, an anonymous source confirmed that the act is pending adoption by the government.<sup>1077</sup>

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.<sup>1078</sup> In January 2024, the Minister for Home Affairs denied the government's recognition of transgender individuals, considering their identity forbidden according to Islam.<sup>1079</sup> The Minister added that no laws for the legal recognition of transgender individuals' gender will be approved by the government, according to ILGA.<sup>1080</sup> The Transgender Persons Rights and Protection Act is also opposed by some Muslim clerics.<sup>1081</sup>

#### 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.<sup>1082</sup>

Sources reported on the government's censorship and restrictions of LGBTIQ activism and advocacy.<sup>1083</sup> According to CIVICUS, organisations and activists advocating for LGBTIQ rights 'face legal barriers, limited access to funding and security risks.'<sup>1084</sup> Organisations supporting the LGBTIQ community are unable or limited to register with the government<sup>1085</sup> and LGBTIQ activists are targets of violence, threats, and murder.<sup>1086</sup> Human Rights Watch reported on LGBTIQ people and advocates 'facing violence and threats without adequate protection from the police'.<sup>1087</sup> According to the USDOS, police investigation and prosecution of perpetrators 'remained rare'.<sup>1088</sup> CIVICUS claimed that 'victims often encounter reluctance from law enforcement agencies to take their complaints seriously.'<sup>1089</sup>

<sup>1076</sup> ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#); Daily Star (The), The Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022: What experts say, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1077</sup> International organisation, online interview, 22 April 2024

<sup>1078</sup> ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1079</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1080</sup> ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

<sup>1081</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1082</sup> GHRD, LGBTQ+ Rights in Bangladesh, June 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1083</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1084</sup> CIVICUS, Bangladesh: 'The legal vulnerability of LGBTQI+ people leads to harassment and discrimination, 4 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1085</sup> Outright International, Country Overview: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), sections 2. b, 6

<sup>1086</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1087</sup> HRW, World Report 2023: Bangladesh, 12 January 2023, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2024: Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1088</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

<sup>1089</sup> 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.<sup>1090</sup> The stigma around sexuality prevents open discussion on the subject<sup>1091</sup> and also legitimises the violence against LGBTIQ people by state and non-state actors.<sup>1092</sup> Due to legal vulnerability, LGBTIQ persons are prone to discrimination and harassment.<sup>1093</sup> Sources reported that LGBTIQ persons are limited in their ability to participate in politics<sup>1094</sup> due to societal discrimination.<sup>1095</sup>

In 2023, BSS reported on five members of the transgender community receiving new houses as part of the government social project.<sup>1096</sup> 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'.<sup>1097</sup>

Conversion therapy was a widespread practice<sup>1098</sup> and there were no legal consequences<sup>1099</sup> and no measures taken to address the issue by the government.<sup>1100</sup> 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.<sup>1101</sup>

Pride events have been organised in recent years according to Outright International,<sup>1102</sup> but the website Notstr8ight, which collect information in pride events in the world,<sup>1103</sup> 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'.<sup>1104</sup> 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.<sup>1105</sup>

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<sup>1090</sup> Mozumder M. K. et al., Mental health and suicide risk among homosexual males in Bangladesh, PLoS One, 15 August 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1091</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

<sup>1092</sup> CIVICUS, Bangladesh: 'The legal vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people leads to harassment and discrimination', 4 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1093</sup> CIVICUS, Bangladesh: 'The legal vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people leads to harassment and discrimination', 4 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1094</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1095</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1096</sup> BBS, PM's housing gift makes transgender people dignified in Rajshahi, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1097</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1098</sup> 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

<sup>1099</sup> BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44<sup>th</sup> Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1100</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 2022, [url](#), section 6

<sup>1101</sup> Mozumder, M. K. et al., Mental health and suicide risk among homosexual males in Bangladesh, PLoS One, 15 August 2023, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1102</sup> Outright International, Country Overview: Bangladesh, 2024, [url](#); Inclusive Bangladesh, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1103</sup> Notstr8ight, Who we are, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1104</sup> Notstr8ight, Dhaka Pride, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1105</sup> 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'.<sup>1106</sup> 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)'.<sup>1107</sup> 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*.<sup>1108</sup> 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."'<sup>1109</sup>

The Daily Star reported that *hijras* live as a community<sup>1110</sup> and according to Bandhu Social Welfare Society, traditionally, *hijras* have acquired a living by performing *badhai* (clapping money), blessing newborns, dancing, and singing.<sup>1111</sup>

In 2022, the national census, conducted by the BBS included for the first time<sup>1112</sup> a 'third gender' category.<sup>1113</sup> According to the 2022 preliminary findings of the census, 12 629 *hijras* were accounted for.<sup>1114</sup> The official number was adjusted to 8 124 in 2023.<sup>1115</sup> However, other sources estimated the number of *hijras* at 1.5 million.<sup>1116</sup>

##### (a) Treatment of *hijras* by state authorities

Sources reported on *hijras* running in official elections and entering politics.<sup>1117</sup> In 2024, the first Bangladeshi diplomat publicly confirmed their *hijra* identity.<sup>1118</sup>

<sup>1106</sup> 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

<sup>1107</sup> Daily Star (The), The twisted plight of Bangladeshi transgender community: A critical error in policymaking, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1108</sup> Prothom Alo, Precise definitions of hijra and transgender are required: Shale Ahmed, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1109</sup> IRI, Understanding the Lives of Bangladesh's LGBTI Community, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1110</sup> Daily Star (The), The twisted plight of Bangladeshi transgender community: A critical error in policymaking, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1111</sup> Prothom Alo, Precise definitions of hijra and transgender are required: Shale Ahmed, 26 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1112</sup> Business Standard (The), Bangladesh includes transgenders in national census for first time, 27 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1113</sup> USA, USDOS, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bangladesh, 20 March 2023, [url](#), section 6

<sup>1114</sup> Business Standard (The), Bangladesh includes transgenders in national census for first time, 27 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1115</sup> BSS, Bangladesh's total population stands at 16.98cr, 28 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1116</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1117</sup> 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

<sup>1118</sup> 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.<sup>1119</sup> The precise definition of *hijra* was not provided<sup>1120</sup> and the gender recognition has not been reflected in laws and policies.<sup>1121</sup> Legal identification documents and voter registration forms include the option to select a third gender.<sup>1122</sup> BLAST reported that the use of different ‘gender markers’ by government authorities include passports<sup>1123</sup> 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.’<sup>1124</sup> ‘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.<sup>1125</sup> According to Reuters, ‘applying, obtaining, and changing official documents remained challenging for members of the hijra community.’<sup>1126</sup> Sources reported on the government authorities conducting medical examinations to legally recognise individuals as *hijras*.<sup>1127</sup> According to JMBF, DNA tests have been performed ‘if deemed necessary’ in order to ‘confirm their biological characteristics.’<sup>1128</sup>

In 2023, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) introduced a new textbook for school children, featuring a chapter on *hijras*.<sup>1129</sup> 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.<sup>1130</sup> Due to the criticism, the textbook was removed from the curriculum by the NCTB.<sup>1131</sup> In 2024, the first mosque welcoming members of the *hijra* community was opened in Bangladesh.<sup>1132</sup>

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<sup>1119</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1120</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1121</sup> BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44<sup>th</sup> Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1122</sup> 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

<sup>1123</sup> Bangladesh, Machine Readable Passport Application Form, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1124</sup> BLAST, From Recognition to Realising Rights: Legal Protection of Gender Identity in Bangladesh Law, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 7

<sup>1125</sup> ILGA, ILGA Database - Bangladesh, [2024], [url](#)

<sup>1126</sup> Reuters, Feature-Bangladesh disaster response neglects vulnerable trans community, 28 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1127</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1128</sup> JMBF, 2022 Annual report, An updated state of LGBTQI+ in Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>1129</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1130</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1131</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1132</sup> 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*<sup>1133</sup> and a tax break for companies hiring employees from the third gender community.<sup>1134</sup> 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.’<sup>1135</sup> According to an academic article, ‘*hijras* lack access to quality services, health care, and employment opportunities.’<sup>1136</sup> Restricted from access to government relief,<sup>1137</sup> many *hijras* live in poverty and rely on begging and sex work to survive.<sup>1138</sup>

#### **(b) Social attitudes and behaviour toward *hijras***

According an academic article, ‘the *hijras* are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged minority in Bangladesh.’<sup>1139</sup> The same source reported on *hijras* facing social exclusion and stigma.<sup>1140</sup> However, ‘*hijra* are the least stigmatised of the LGBTIQ community, even though they too are discriminated’ according to the European Union Election Expert Mission.<sup>1141</sup>

### **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’.<sup>1142</sup>

#### **(a) Violence against LGBTIQ persons by state authorities**

The LGBTIQ community faces various forms of violence, discrimination, and marginalisation,<sup>1143</sup> including discrimination in housing, occupation, employment, and access to government services including justice and healthcare as reported by USDOS.<sup>1144</sup>

<sup>1133</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1134</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1135</sup> France, OFPRA, Rapport de mission en République populaire du Bangladesh, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>1136</sup> 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

<sup>1137</sup> UN Women, LGBTIQ+ Equality and Rights, Internal Resource Guide, 2022, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>1138</sup> 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](#)

<sup>1139</sup> 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

<sup>1140</sup> 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

<sup>1141</sup> EU, Election Expert Mission to Bangladesh 2024, Parliamentary Election, 7 January 2024, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1142</sup> JMBF, 2022 Annual report, An updated state of LGBTIQ+ in Bangladesh, 2023, [url](#), pp. 9, 11

<sup>1143</sup> 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](#);

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<sup>1144</sup> 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.<sup>1145</sup>

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.<sup>1146</sup>

### **(b) Violence against LGBTIQ persons by non-state actors**

In 2023, sources reported violence against gay men by criminal gangs.<sup>1147</sup> Gangs used dating applications to arrange dates with gay men and used physical violence or blackmail against them.<sup>1148</sup> Earlier reports included the murder of the founder Roopbaan magazine and his friend in 2016<sup>1149</sup> by the local militant organisation Ansar Al Islam.<sup>1150</sup> In 2021, six members of the militant group were convicted of murder<sup>1151</sup> and sentenced to death.<sup>1152</sup> According to USDOS LGBTIQ writers and bloggers ‘continued to receive death threats from extremist organizations’ in 2023.<sup>1153</sup> A 2021 report published by ILGA Asia suggested that people ‘identified as gay and bisexual men’ indicated ‘a rise of male rape victims’<sup>1154</sup> with cases of rape taking place in *madrassas*.<sup>1155</sup> Victims seeking justice face legal challenges as male rape is not recognised by law.<sup>1156</sup>

More background information on attacks against LGBTIQ persons carried out by Islamist groups is available in section [2.3. Security situation](#).

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<sup>1145</sup> CIVICUS, Bangladesh: ‘The legal vulnerability of LGBTIQ+ people leads to harassment and discrimination’, 4 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1146</sup> BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44<sup>th</sup> Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1147</sup> BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44<sup>th</sup> Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 4; Daily Star (The), ‘Blackmailing racket tortured him to death’, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1148</sup> BoB, Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, 44<sup>th</sup> Session, April 2023, [url](#), p. 4; Daily Star (The), ‘Blackmailing racket tortured him to death’, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>1149</sup> Roopbaan Magazine, n.d., [url](#); Guardian (The), Founder of Bangladesh’s first and only LGBT magazine killed, 25 April 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1150</sup> Global Voices, Xulhaz Mannan, an LGBT Activist in Bangladesh, Is the Latest Victim in a String of Brutal Killings, 26 April 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1151</sup> HRW: World Report 2022. Bangladesh – Events of 2021, 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1152</sup> 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](#)

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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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