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2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh

BANGLADESH: Tier 2

The Government of Bangladesh does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period; therefore Bangladesh was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included convicting more traffickers, modestly increasing the number of victims identified, acceding to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol, and at the close of the reporting period establishing seven anti-trafficking tribunals as stipulated in Bangladesh's anti-trafficking law. In addition, the government continued to allow humanitarian access to the Rohingya camps. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Law enforcement decreased investigations into trafficking cases, continued to deny credible reports of official complicity in trafficking, and, despite hundreds of credible reports of forced labor and sex trafficking of Rohingya, did not open investigations to verify these reports. Despite widespread reports of child sex trafficking, including in licensed brothels, the government did not make efforts to identify victims or investigate the persistent reports. While international organizations identified more than 1,000 potential Bangladeshi forced labor victims in Saudi Arabia during the reporting period, the government did not report efforts to provide the majority with services or criminally investigate allegations of forced labor. Moreover, the agency charged with certifying citizens for work abroad, the Bureau of Manpower and Employment Training (BMET), allowed recruitment agencies to exclude from required pre-departure trainings information on human trafficking, specifically how to file a complaint against one's employer or recruitment agency. BMET also forced some migrant workers to arbitrate labor violations with their exploitative recruitment agencies without representation. The government continued to allow employers to charge high recruitment fees to migrant workers and did not consistently address illegally operating recruitment sub-agents, which left workers vulnerable to traffickers. Victim care remained insufficient; officials did not consistently implement victim identification procedures or refer identified victims to care; foreign trafficking victims could not access protective services; and the government did not have shelter for adult male victims.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Significantly increase prosecutions and convictions for trafficking offenses, particularly of labor traffickers and complicit government officials, while strictly respecting due process. • Take steps to eliminate recruitment fees charged to workers by licensed labor recruiters and ensure employers pay recruitment fees. • Increase investigations and prosecutions of credible allegations of trafficking of Rohingya, including cases that do not involve movement. • Establish and disseminate guidelines for provision of adequate victim care and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the referral of victims to such services. • Expand services for trafficking victims, especially adult male victims, foreign victims, and victims exploited abroad. • Allow NGOs to provide services to trafficking victims in government shelters without a court order. • Cease requiring adult trafficking victims to obtain a family member's consent before leaving government shelters. • Enhance collaboration with the Inter-Sector Coordination Group and implement measures that protect Rohingya from traffickers. • Enhance training for officials, including law enforcement, labor inspectors, and immigration officers, on identification of trafficking cases and victim referrals to services. • Fully implement and monitor for compliance the registration requirements for recruitment agents and *dalals*. • Improve quality of pre-departure trainings, including sessions on labor rights, labor laws, and access to justice and assistance. • Establish clear procedures for Rohingya to file complaints in the legal system, and train law enforcement and camp management on the procedures. • Improve collaboration with NGOs and civil society for more effective partnership on anti-trafficking efforts, specifically through allowing service providers increased access to assist victims. • Fully implement the 2018-2020 National Plan of Action, including enhancing victim care and operating the anti-trafficking tribunals.

PROSECUTION

The government increased convictions of traffickers but decreased investigations and did not take adequate steps to address internal sex trafficking or official complicity in trafficking, both of which remained pervasive. The 2012 Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA) criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of five years to life imprisonment and a fine of not less than 50,000 Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) (\$590). Bonded labor was treated as a separate offense and prescribed lesser penalties of five to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine of not less than 50,000 BDT (\$590). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regards to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The government continued to train police officers through an anti-trafficking module at the police academy. The government also trained and provided in-kind support to international- and NGO-run trainings for judicial, immigration, and border officials. The government did not report if police and other relevant officials received training on the PSHTA implementing rules, which it disseminated in 2017.

The government investigated 403 cases under the PSHTA (including 29 investigations continued from previous years), prosecuted 312 suspects (256 for sex trafficking and 56 for forced labor), and convicted 25 individuals in nine trafficking-related cases. However, at least one reported conviction was for baby selling, which is not a human trafficking crime under international law. This is a decrease in investigations but increase in convictions from the previous reporting period, when the government investigated 592 cases, prosecuted an unknown number of suspects, and convicted eight traffickers in five cases. The judiciary completed prosecution in 39 cases. Judges acquitted 68 traffickers in 30 cases, convicted 25 traffickers in nine cases, and sentenced 17 of those convicted to life imprisonment. The judiciary did not report the sentences of the other eight convicted. This sentencing is similar to the previous reporting period, when the judiciary imposed life imprisonment in seven of the eight convictions. The government reported 4,407 trafficking cases remained pending investigation or prosecution as of December 2019. In the previous reporting period, the vast majority of cases involved migrant smuggling of Rohingya and Bangladeshis without clear indicators of crimes of trafficking in persons. This year, media continued to report police filed cases under the PSHTA with clear elements of migrant smuggling and without indicators of exploitation in labor or commercial sex. The government acknowledged investigations, prosecutions, and convictions for trafficking remained inadequate compared to the scale of the problem; the conviction rate for suspected traffickers arrested under the PSHTA was 1.7 percent.

Many officials did not understand human trafficking and at times conflated it with migrant smuggling. Some officials continued to deny the existence of internal trafficking, especially child sex trafficking, despite observers recording multiple cases of child sex trafficking in licensed brothels each month. Police and prosecutors did not collaborate during the law enforcement process, which led to delays and the formation of weak cases for prosecution. In cross-border cases, Bangladeshi officials often did not travel abroad to collect evidence and did not have sufficient agreements to receive evidence from foreign governments. Some observers noted it could take police up to eight years after receiving a complaint of trafficking to file the charge sheet necessary to refer the case for prosecution, and trafficking cases took on average 11 years from first report to adjudication. NGOs reported the substantial delay contributed to the dearth of successful investigations and prosecutions because most suspects remained out of jail and could bribe or threaten victims not to testify. The government took steps to establish seven anti-trafficking tribunals stipulated in the PSHTA to exclusively hear human trafficking cases, including appointing seven judges. The women and children's tribunal continued to hear trafficking cases but had insufficient staff and resources to handle the caseloads, and prosecutors lacked expertise in trafficking. Observers stated the government generally did not dedicate sufficient resources to pre-trial investigations and prosecutors persisted with trials to meet the statutorily required timeline of 180 working days for the disposal of cases, even if inadequately prepared. The Bangladeshi High Commission collaborated with the Government of Brunei to revoke the passports of suspected Bangladeshi labor traffickers and deport them to Bangladesh for criminal prosecution. The government continued to allow mobile courts, established under the executive branch, to adjudicate labor violations, human trafficking cases, and migrant smuggling cases. Mobile courts could only prescribe penalties of up to three years' imprisonment—less than the minimum penalty of five years' imprisonment for trafficking offenses under the PSHTA. An NGO expressed concern that some village courts, five-person panels of local government officials and villagers, adjudicated trafficking cases but could only administer financial penalties, and the courts may have subjected victims to intimidation, fraud, and corruption.

Despite continued reports of traffickers exploiting hundreds of Rohingya in forced labor and sex trafficking within Bangladesh, the only Rohingya-related cases reported by law enforcement involved movement via boat—cases that might have been migrant smuggling without elements of trafficking. The government did not establish clear legal reporting mechanisms within the camps, which impeded Rohingyas' access to justice and increased impunity for offenders. Police and international humanitarian actors maintained multiple help desks in several refugee camps to provide legal assistance to female and child refugee victims of crime, but public distrust of police and security services deterred many victims of crime, including trafficking, from approaching law enforcement for assistance. The Bangladeshi High Court did not entertain anti-trafficking cases filed by Rohingya,

despite the law allowing Rohingya to file trafficking cases in Bangladeshi courts. International organizations alleged some Bangladeshi officials facilitated trafficking of Rohingya, including accepting bribes from traffickers to gain access to camps.

Official complicity in human trafficking, trafficking-related corruption, and impunity for offenders remained serious concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action during the year. The government was reluctant to acknowledge or investigate such claims. In registered brothels, some police charged bribes to ignore abuse within the establishments, to not check for the required documentation that each worker was older than 18, and to procure fraudulent documents for workers as young as 10 years old. Some labor attachés, local politicians, judges, and police requested bribes from victims and their families to pursue cases. Observers alleged some officials from district employment and manpower offices allegedly facilitated human trafficking, and some traffickers in rural areas had political connections that enabled them to operate with impunity. According to NGOs, some local politicians convinced victims to accept payment from recruitment sub-agents to not report fraudulent or exploitative labor recruitment actions to police. Other observers reported some police conducted slow and flawed investigations to allow traffickers to evade punishment, including when suspects were fellow officers. During the previous reporting period, police reported arresting a law enforcement officer for allegedly forcing two 12-year-old girls into drug trafficking and exploiting them in commercial sex. The government subsequently denied the case.

Because a number of government officials, including parliamentarians, maintained close ties to foreign employment agencies, there were concerns such officials had conflicts of interest in approving migrant-friendly practices, such as prosecution of abusive recruitment agencies and increasing protections for migrant workers. In February 2020, media reported a Bangladeshi parliamentarian bribed Kuwaiti officials to bring more than 20,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers abroad on work visas that stipulated a different job and lower salaries than their contracts, and the parliamentarian then paid the workers the lesser wages or not at all. Media reported that from 2015-2018, Malaysian employment agencies and 10 Bangladeshi recruitment agencies bribed officials and politicians in both countries to create a monopoly on recruitment of Bangladeshi workers. The monopoly increased the recruitment fees charged to workers from 37,000 BDT (\$440) to more than 400,000 BDT (\$4,710) per person—higher than the government’s legal maximum—which increased Bangladeshi migrant workers’ vulnerability to debt-based coercion. After two warnings from the Dhaka High Court, the government submitted its investigative report in November 2019, where it awaited hearing. In September 2016, a federal court in New York entered a default judgment against a former Bangladeshi consular officer and his wife and ordered them to pay approximately \$920,000 to a Bangladeshi citizen in a civil suit in which the plaintiff alleged violations of the TVPA, as well as federal and state labor laws. The consular officer left the United States and remained in the Bangladesh foreign service as an ambassador. Following an appeal, a revised judgment was issued in May 2018 for approximately \$850,000. Parties reached a settlement in May 2019 and voluntarily dismissed the case in June 2019. The plaintiff had alleged experiencing retaliatory actions by the Bangladesh Consulate in New York prior to the settlement. The government did not report taking any action during the reporting period to hold the consular officer accountable.

PROTECTION

The government modestly increased the number of victims identified but maintained severely inadequate victim protection, especially for Bangladesh trafficking victims identified overseas. The government identified 585 potential trafficking victims, an increase from 419 in the previous reporting period but still much lower than the 770 victims identified in 2017. Traffickers exploited the majority of victims identified in forced labor. Organizations identified and provided support to at least an additional 1,456 trafficking victims, including 543 Rohingya identified between December 2018-2019. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the government’s lead agency for combating trafficking, had SOPs for proactive trafficking victim identification; however, the government did not report how widely officials disseminated or used these SOPs. Some police officers used a checklist to proactively identify victims when they came into contact in commercial sex establishments; however, the government did not formally adopt or disseminate the checklist, and its use was inconsistent.

The government did not have a standard, adopted policy to refer victims to services, although it retained a court-order mechanism to do so, and some officials followed an NGO’s written guidelines for referral to and provision of care. Authorities could refer trafficking victims to government or NGO shelters. The government referred 74 victims to government or NGO-run shelters and 84 to NGOs for other services, an increase from approximately 25 victims referred in the previous reporting period. NGOs assisted additional trafficking victims. While the government did not provide trafficking-specific services, police operated multiple centers for women and child victims of violence, including trafficking, in each of Bangladesh’s eight divisions that offered short-term shelter, medical, and psychological care. With partial funding from a foreign government, the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) operated some longer-term shelters for women and child victims of violence, including trafficking victims, which could provide similar care. MSW shelters, however, required a court order referral, and victims could not leave without a family member’s consent. The government also required NGOs and international organizations to obtain a court order to contact

victims in government shelters to provide further rehabilitation services. Some victims reported abuse within the shelters. Authorities forced some victims who could not obtain family consent to remain in the shelters for as long as 10 years; some victims referred to these homes as “jails.” The government did not report how many trafficking victims its police and MSW shelters assisted during the reporting period. Government-run hospitals also had one-stop centers that could assist female victims of crime, although it was unclear if and how officials referred women to these centers. The government generally did not view adult men as trafficking victims. Neither government nor NGO shelters could accommodate male victims, although most NGOs could provide non-shelter services to adult male victims.

The government did not allow foreign victims to access government services. NGOs could care for foreign trafficking victims. NGOs could provide two or three days of temporary care to Rohingya trafficking victims in safe homes but then had to return them to refugee camps, where they remained vulnerable to traffickers. The government’s NGO Affairs Bureau continued to withhold approval for foreign funding to some NGOs working on some human rights or humanitarian issues, which may have affected provision of services to vulnerable populations, including trafficking victims. The PSHTA entitled victims to protection during judicial proceedings, including police security and allowing victims to provide testimony via video conference. While some victims participated in the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers, the government and NGOs noted insufficient implementation of this provision caused the vast majority of trafficking victims not to participate. While the PSHTA mandated creation of a fund to assist victims in seeking compensation from their traffickers, the government had not created the fund. All trafficking victims could file civil suits seeking compensation. The government reportedly screened for trafficking among individuals before arrest; however, because law enforcement did not uniformly employ SOPs to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, including women in commercial sex, law enforcement may have penalized sex trafficking victims for unlawful acts their traffickers compelled them to commit. For example, NGOs reported law enforcement raided brothels and arrested foreign women in commercial sex for violation of their visas without efforts to screen for trafficking. NGOs reported some authorities detained and fined trafficking victims in transit for failure to carry a passport and may have deported some victims without screening for trafficking. The government did not provide legal alternatives to the removal of foreign trafficking victims to countries where they might face hardship or retribution.

The government made minimal efforts to assist Bangladeshi sex and labor trafficking victims abroad. MHA and the Government of India continued to revise its 2015 memorandum of understanding (MOU) on trafficking victim identification and repatriation to streamline the process. The governments facilitated, and NGOs funded, repatriation of an additional 100 trafficking victims from India, but the lengthy and complex approval system resulted in some Bangladeshi victims languishing in Indian shelters for up to six years. The Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) maintained 29 labor offices in embassies and consulates overseas to provide welfare services to Bangladeshi migrant workers. International organizations continued to report the labor wings had neither the staffing nor the resources to assist the large number of migrant workers, especially at embassies in the Gulf. MEWOE operated four safe houses abroad for female workers with strong indicators of trafficking who fled abusive employers but did not report how many individuals the shelters assisted. While the government could fund some trafficking victim repatriation, it often took so long that victims funded it themselves and incurred additional debt. MEWOE opened a desk at the airport that provided up to 5,000 BDT (\$59) and information on available NGO services to returning female migrant workers, including trafficking victims.

Between January and November 2019, an international organization reported 1,250 female migrant workers returned to Bangladesh from Saudi Arabia, many of whom reported indicators of labor trafficking. Bangladeshi embassies abroad did not identify any as labor trafficking victims, but authorities and NGOs identified some as trafficking victims upon repatriation, as reflected in the total number of victims identified. In addition, the organization repatriated 129 deceased Bangladeshi domestic workers from Saudi Arabia in 2019; the women reportedly died in employment, including 24 cases of suicide. While MEWOE confirmed approximately 2,400 Bangladeshi domestic workers returned from Saudi Arabia during the reporting period alleging numerous indicators of trafficking, including physical and sexual abuse, contract switching, restricted movement, and non-payment of wages, the government only reported assisting 121 total Bangladeshi nationals with repatriation. Additionally, at least 425 Bangladeshi migrant workers from other countries returned with substantial indicators of trafficking during the reporting period. The government occasionally required victims of labor exploitation, including labor trafficking, to remain at embassies overseas to pursue a civil case against their employer; many victims wanted to return home and thus could not pursue cases. The government did not file any trafficking cases in destination countries. Some officials blamed victims for their own labor trafficking, claiming workers were “unprepared.” The government relied on NGOs to support victims upon repatriation. Overseas Bangladeshi workers who secured their employment through MEWOE could lodge complaints with MEWOE to seek restitution for labor and recruitment violations, including allegations of forced labor, through an arbitration process. However, trafficking-related corruption impeded the process, and it often yielded minimal awards. At least one NGO reported BMET, which facilitated the arbitration,

prohibited NGO advocates from accompanying migrant workers, which forced workers to arbitrate claims alone against both powerful recruitment agencies and BMET. MEWOE reported it settled complaints against 214 recruitment agents in 2019 that compelled them to pay 34.4 million BDT (\$404,710) total to 352 migrant workers, compared to settlement of 660 cases that awarded 25.7 million BDT (\$302,350) in compensation to workers in 2018; it did not report if any complaints involved forced labor. Because the government did not initiate criminal investigations into migrant workers exploited abroad and civil remedies remained inadequate, civil society organizations ran alternate dispute resolution systems to assist labor trafficking victims in obtaining some financial remedies.

PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking. The government continued implementing its 2018-2022 anti-trafficking national action plan. While it increased collaboration with civil society, it also relied on civil society to fund and implement large portions of the plan, including broader development objectives. MHA continued to lead the inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee, which met bi-monthly. Contacts reported interagency collaboration remained weak between ministries and suggested, as provided for in the PSHTA, creation of a standing national authority to coordinate anti-trafficking efforts. In contrast with previous years, MHA no longer made publicly available its anti-trafficking law enforcement data or annual report on human trafficking. In September 2019, Bangladesh acceded to the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.

The 2013 Overseas Employment and Migrants Act (OEMA) criminalized fraudulent recruitment and unlawful recruitment fees; however, these provisions still permitted the government to set legal recruitment fees at rates between 85,000 and 262,000 BDT (\$1,000 and \$3,080), high enough to render many migrant workers indebted and vulnerable to trafficking through debt-based coercion. A research organization reported that in 2018, Bangladeshi migrant workers traveling to Saudi Arabia on average paid more than 450 percent of the government's fixed recruitment price for the total labor migration process. According to the research, the government's fixed recruitment fee for Saudi Arabia was equivalent to a Bangladeshi worker's salary for five-and-a-half-months, and workers in reality paid fees equivalent to more than two years of salary. During the reporting period, MEWOE began discussions with the Government of Saudi Arabia to increase the number of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Kingdom. The Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) oversaw 1,186 licensed labor recruitment agencies. Its vigilance task force continued operations against corrupt recruitment agencies, travel agencies, and illegal and unregulated sub-agents who operated in rural locations and connected prospective migrant workers to licensed employment agencies. MEWOE suspended 162 recruitment agencies for operating in violation of the law, including breach of employment contracts and recruitment regulations. Authorities referred some of the recruitment agents to mobile courts, which convicted 28 individuals for labor trafficking-related offenses under the 2013 OEMA, including sending migrant workers abroad unlawfully, charging unlawful recruitment fees, and fraudulent recruitment. Mobile courts prescribed fines or imprisonment; fines were inadequate penalties to deter the crime. In 2018, mobile courts convicted 11 individuals, although it was unclear in both years how many cases contained elements of trafficking in persons.

In February 2020, in acknowledgement of the absence of a legal framework to regulate , including those who fraudulently recruited migrant workers for exploitation or used unlawful recruitment fees, the government began requiring all recruitment agents to request permission from MEWOE before appointing any . It was unclear how MEWOE would monitor existing or new agents for compliance. BAIRA acknowledged migrant workers frequently paid fees in addition to the legal amount BAIRA agents charged before the worker began the formal recruitment process. *Dalals* also also directly connected workers to overseas jobs by providing fake visas and other documentation, and in some cases, incorrect information about the migration process and the job in the destination country. Observers stated a migrant worker's financial situation often determined job placement, not his skills or abilities, and migrant workers frequently paid as much as five times more than the government's maximum fee level. The government continued to have a number of bilateral labor agreements, in part intended to protect Bangladeshi workers abroad, although there was no evidence the government enforced the MOUs. The government continued to require pre-departure training, including safe migration and anti-trafficking components, for some migrant workers, including a 30-day pre-departure training course for female domestic workers. The government offered safe migration information through numerous district employment and manpower offices and training centers. However, it was unclear how many migrants were aware of these services and accessed them before traveling abroad. BMET, the government agency responsible for preparing and certifying outbound Bangladeshi workers, allowed some recruitment agencies to prohibit briefings on topics “against recruiting agencies’ interests.”

Labor inspectors had responsibility for monitoring workplaces and reporting allegations of forced and child labor to police for criminal investigation. While international organizations estimated 93 percent of child labor—including forced child labor—took place in the informal sector, inspectors did not monitor the informal sector. Staffing and resources to inspect for labor violations, including

forced and child labor, remained severely inadequate, and inspectors exclusively conducted announced inspections, which gave employers time to hide children or exploitative conditions. In 2018 and 2019, inspectors filed 42 cases against employers for the worst forms of child labor; they did not report if they also referred these cases to police for criminal investigation. The government continued to conduct national awareness campaigns through print media, television, and text messages, and through its local counter-trafficking committees, at times in partnership with NGOs. The government maintained several helplines to report crime; during the reporting period, the helplines received and police identified trafficking victims in 27 cases.

The government continued to allow international organizations and NGOs to provide some assistance to refugees. Notably, in January 2020 the government endorsed an international organization's pilot program to introduce the Burmese national curriculum to some Rohingya aged 11-13 in refugee camps, allowing them access to some schooling. However, it continued to bar Rohingya from formal schools, working legally, and restricted their movement. In addition, it continued to suspend birth registration for both Bangladeshis and Rohingya in four municipalities, all of which increased vulnerability to trafficking. The government provided anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers and provided anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel. The government began criminally investigating one repatriated peacekeeper for alleged child sexual exploitation in Haiti in 2017, which the UN had substantiated in the previous reporting period. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for child sex tourism.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Bangladesh, and traffickers exploit victims from Bangladesh abroad. Traffickers exploit some Bangladeshi men, women, and children who migrate willingly to work in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, especially Brunei, Malaysia, and the Maldives, in forced labor. Traffickers also exploit Bangladeshis in forced labor in South Asia, Southern and Eastern Africa, Europe, and the United States. Many Bangladeshis migrate for work each year through illegal channels and traffickers target them. Before departure, many workers assume debt to pay high recruitment fees, imposed legally by recruitment agencies belonging to BAIRA and illegally by unlicensed sub-agents; this places workers at risk of debt-based coercion. Some recruitment agencies, agents, and employers also commit recruitment fraud, including contract switching; this includes promising women and children jobs and exploiting them in sex trafficking upon arrival. In recent years, authorities identified more than 100 Bangladeshi male forced labor victims in construction in Vanuatu, and officials received thousands of complaints of non-payment of wages and contract switching among the 30,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers in Brunei. More than 69,000 of the 234,000 Bangladeshi workers in Maldives are undocumented, and some report passport retention, underpayment or non-payment of wages, and fraudulent recruitment. In Saudi Arabia, traffickers exploit in labor trafficking a substantial number of the hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi female domestic workers. Officials report that recently approximately 200 domestic workers return to Bangladesh from Saudi Arabia each month with indicators of forced labor.

Traffickers exploit Bangladeshi women and girls in sex trafficking abroad, including in India, Pakistan, and Gulf countries. Traffickers have sold some women who migrated through Bangladeshi recruitment agencies to Lebanon or Jordan for domestic work into forced labor and sex trafficking in Syria. Some Chinese traffickers force Bangladeshi women, specifically indigenous women from Chittagong Hill Tracts, into sex trafficking and labor in domestic work through arranged marriages. Some traffickers falsify identity documents to make children appear older than age 18 to send them abroad. Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, deported hundreds of undocumented Bangladeshi workers during the reporting period, some of whom employers had coerced into forced labor and caused their documents to expire.

Traffickers continue to exploit adults and children from all regions of the country in Bangladesh's legal brothels, many illegal brothels, and private hotels. Traffickers use false promises of work to lure poor women and children into sex trafficking and fabricate exorbitant debts the women and girls as young as 10 must work to repay. Child sex trafficking remained widespread; experts estimate 20,000 children are both growing up in and exploited in commercial sex in Bangladeshi brothels. Many women and girls reported it was after they had fled abusive child marriages between the ages of 12 and 14 that traffickers preyed on them and sold them to brothels. Other women reported they had grown up in brothels because their mothers had worked in commercial sex, and the brothel owners had put them in commercial sex when they were children. In some registered brothels, owners force children to take steroids to appear older. In legal brothels, some police charge bribes to ignore abuse within the establishment, to not check for the required documentation that each worker is older than 18, and to procure fraudulent documentation for minors as young as 10 years old. Some traffickers force sex trafficking victims to become addicted to drugs and use addiction to keep them in sex trafficking and forced criminality. Traffickers sexually exploit street children in exchange for food, shelter, protection, and money.

Traffickers often used debt-based coercion to compel workers into labor, exploiting an initial debt assumed by a worker as part of the employment terms. Traffickers force adults and children to labor in the shrimp and fish processing industries, aluminum and garment factories, brick kilns, dry fish production, and shipbreaking. Traffickers force children younger than 14 into labor in domestic work, including through restricting their movement and torture. In 2018, a survey by an international organization found more than 400,000 children in domestic work in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi children are at risk for forced labor in tanneries. Traffickers coerce street children into criminality or force them to beg, and begging ringmasters sometimes maim children to increase earnings. Traffickers force children, especially in border areas, to produce and transport drugs, especially *yaba*. Traffickers use coercive debts to force Bangladeshi families and Indian migrant workers to labor in brick kilns, shrimp farming, and on tea estates. Some kiln owners sell bonded females into prostitution purportedly to recoup the families' debts. NGOs allege some officials allow human traffickers to operate at India-Bangladesh border crossings and maritime embarkation points. The North Korean government may have forced North Koreans to work in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh hosts more than one million undocumented Rohingya in refugee camps and host communities in Cox's Bazar near the Burmese border and other parts of the country, approximately 700,000 of whom arrived after August 2017. Traffickers exploit Rohingya men, women, and children from refugee camps in sex and labor trafficking both within Bangladesh and transnationally. Traffickers transport Rohingya girls within Bangladesh to Chittagong and Dhaka and transnationally to India, Malaysia, and Nepal for sex trafficking, sometimes using false promises of jobs or marriage; some traffickers “trade” these girls over the internet. Local criminal networks take Rohingya women from refugee camps at night, exploit them in sex trafficking, and bring them back to the camps during the day. International organizations allege some Bangladeshi officials facilitate trafficking of Rohingya, including accepting bribes from traffickers to gain access to camps. Rohingya girls and boys are recruited from camps and forced to labor as shop hands, fishermen, rickshaw pullers, and domestic workers. Some Bangladeshi fishermen use debt-based coercion to exploit Rohingya men if they place their shelter on the fishermen's land. Some Rohingya men who fled to Bangladesh from Burma decades ago have been trapped in forced labor through debt-based coercion to Bangladeshi fishermen for decades. In the recent past, some traffickers sold into forced labor Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants, who traveled by boat to Southeast Asia and could not pay ransoms. Multiple NGOs and humanitarian officials assess Rohingyas' statelessness and inability to receive formal schooling or work legally has increased their vulnerability to traffickers. International organizations allege some Bangladeshi officials facilitate trafficking of Rohingya, including accepting bribes from traffickers to gain access to camps. Foreigners create demand for child sex tourism, including exploitation of Rohingya girls near Cox's Bazar.

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