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Child Labour and Schooling in Bangladesh

Insights from data and evidence

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Executive summary

In the past two decades Bangladesh has made substantial progress in reducing child labour. This achievement is strongly associated with an expansion in school enrolment, which is acknowledged as a key driver of progress in the elimination of child labour. These developments include the expansion of financial and in-kind support to households to encourage schooling, more effective regulation on child labour, and a gradual evolution in social and cultural norms with increased value placed on school education.

Despite progress, child labour in Bangladesh persists, and the country is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target 8.7 of eradicating child labour by 2025. Household earning losses and school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic could have further stalled progress.

Further research is needed to identify educational systems, policy and programmatic actions that can support reduction and prevention of child labour. To inform these discussions this report provides an overview of recent trends in child work and child labour and explores how the prevalence and characteristics of child labour relate to children's schooling – and vice versa – in the country.

The report uses quantitative secondary data analysis and small-scale qualitative primary data analysis to:

- describe patterns of child work and child labour (including hazardous work and worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work, such as child trafficking) in Bangladesh, using the latest available data;
- assess the interlinkages between children's participation in schooling, work and labour; and
- explore children's perspectives of the experience of work and labour and the intersections with schooling, including during the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school closures.

Based on analysis of secondary survey data and primary qualitative data, this report describes the prevalence and nature of child work and child labour, and recent trends in schooling outcomes. The report further explores the interlinkages between children's participation in labour and schooling, and the role of child marriage as a key related outcome. Implications of COVID-19 for children's schooling and labour outcomes are also assessed.

Recent trends and patterns in child work and child labour

The report included analysis of national survey data, mostly from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and International Labour Organization National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) and the BBS and UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). Key findings are presented briefly below:

- The analysis of secondary data mainly from four national surveys (Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey 2015 and 2019, NCLFS 2013, MICS 2019 and BIUSS 2016) highlighted key limitations of these data sources, including inconsistencies of child labour definitions across surveys and over time within a specific survey. Further, child labour figures based on NCLS may underestimate child labour, especially for girls, given that NCLS does not consider household chores. Despite these limitations, quantitative survey data analysis provides relevant information that can guide policy efforts to prevent and reduce child labour.
- NCLS data show a decline in the prevalence of child work and child labour (i.e., detrimental forms of work) between 2003 and 2013, both in terms of absolute numbers and prevalence. These outcomes remained relatively stable in the most recent decade, between 2013 and 2022.
- The child labour rate remains significant, estimated at 4.4 per cent considering economic activities only (NCLS 2022) and at 6.8 per cent considering both economic activities and household chores (MICS 2019).
- The prevalence of child labour is higher among older children and males, but females are significantly more likely than males to be engaged in long hours of household chores. The prevalence of child labour is similar in rural and urban areas. Children who do not attend school are significantly more likely to be in child labour compared with children attending school.
- Among the worst forms of child labour, the prevalence of hazardous work remained rather stable in Bangladesh, at around 3 per cent, although the latest figures show a reduction from 3.2 per cent in 2013 to 2.7 per cent in 2022, when about one million children were estimated to be in hazardous work.
- Most working children remain in informal employment, where they are often forced to work long hours, do not receive proper wages, and face insecure and unhealthy conditions. Conditions are especially critical in some hazardous sectors such as the light transport (e.g., *lagoona*) and construction sectors.
- Children living in street situations away from their families in unregulated conditions are vulnerable to child labour, particularly the worst forms, including hazardous work. The issue was not within the scope of this study, nor was there any nationwide survey data available on children living in street situations during the study period. However, a 2024 UNICEF report suggests that these children are often engaged in multiple income-generating activities, and are exposed to abuse and exploitation.

Trends in school participation and completion

The report assessed recent trends in schooling outcomes, considering enrolment, completion and attendance. A description of trends by type of educational institution is further included (e.g., madrasah, non-formal education), as well as a reflection on the quality of education as assessed by recent studies. Key findings are as follows:

- Data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) on primary school enrolment and completion rates show significant progress between 2010 and 2016, especially for boys. However, between 2016 and 2019, there have been no notable changes in primary school enrolment or completion rates. As of 2019, about 2 per cent of primary-school-age children remain out of school, and about 20 per cent of children do not complete primary school.
- Data from the COVID-19 period (December 2021–January 2022) showed a similar picture, although primary school enrolment slightly declined in 2021–2022 compared with 2019.
- Differences between boys and girls in primary school enrolment and completion declined over time, but girls still show higher enrolment and school completion compared with boys.
- Data for 2015–2019 show an increase in the share of children enrolled in primary non-formal education, accompanied by a reduction in the share of pupils in mainstream general education. The proportion of children in madrasah education increased slightly.
- Despite progress in school participation and completion, learning outcomes still lag behind. This is due to various factors related to the quality of education, including, among others, lack of resources, insufficient number of trained teachers, and inadequate curriculum and examination modalities.

Intersections between child work, child labour and school education

Drawing on analysis of survey data and qualitative data, the report explores the prevalence, experiences and implications of children combining schooling and work, disaggregated also by region.

- Estimates from NCLS 2013, NCLS 2022 and MICS 2019 suggest that the proportion of children enrolled in school and working has increased over time.
- Based on MICS 2019 data, combining work and school is substantially more common in rural areas and for older children, and more common for boys than girls.
- When the definition of work includes household chores, a far higher proportion of girls are found to be simultaneously at work and enrolled in school, across all age groups, reflecting the role of sociocultural norms.

- Regional findings show that there are wide variations in the proportion of children aged 14–17 years enrolled and working across the regions.
 - For both boys and girls, school dropout is higher in areas where work opportunities are more easily available, such as in the eastern region (e.g., Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Narayanganj for boys; Gazipur, Narayanganj, Sunamganj and Sylhet for girls).
 - Areas where work opportunities are more easily available also have the highest prevalence of adolescents combining schooling and work. For example, in rural areas, the proportion of girls combining schooling and work is highest in Gazipur, at about 35 per cent (NCLS 2013).

Child marriage, schooling and child labour

A recent UNICEF report suggests that 51 per cent of Bangladeshi women who are now in their mid-20s were married before they turned 18, and nearly 18 per cent were under 15 years of age. This section explores the close interlinkages between child marriage, schooling and labour.

- Cultural norms, as well as practices of early marriage and domestication of girls' time and labour, can reinforce each other, reducing the value of girls' schooling.
- There is a clear positive correlation between early marriage and school dropout. Various mechanisms can be at play:
 - The prospects of being married at an early age may discourage girls' education and thus increase their dropout. This would be consistent with earlier studies.
 - Alternatively, it may be that marriage becomes a solution for girls who have dropped out for other reasons (e.g., poverty), rather than the cause of them doing so.
- While almost all girls interviewed for the qualitative study indicated the desire to pursue education, they described not being able to attend school due to the burden of household chores and the pressure of child marriage. Girls also described engaging in paid work and supporting the family financially as a way to delay marriage.

Implications of COVID-19 for children's schooling and child labour

- COVID-19 and related school closure significantly increased the risk of child labour, as more children discontinued attendance or did not enrol in school.
- While the Government of Bangladesh introduced alternative education options such as TV and radio programmes or online education, gaps remained, as initiatives were focused on older children and access to technology was inequitable.

- About half of students in primary school and about 60 per cent of students in secondary school continued their education through lessons received from private tutors after school hours.
- In the qualitative study, almost all child participants reported that COVID-19 negatively impacted their schooling. Some children reported that they started working during the pandemic, and an increase in the incidence of child marriage was reported.

Policy and programme recommendations

Based on the above findings, a multisectoral response is needed to address child labour, as outlined in the following policy and programme recommendations:

- **Improve access to school education:** Although Bangladesh has made considerable progress in school participation, between 1.5 and 2 per cent of primary-school-age children were still not enrolled in school as of 2019. Strengthened social protection (including cash transfers in support of school participation and school feeding) can support further increases in school enrolment and attendance.
- **Improve the quality of school education:** There is considerable scope to improve teacher training as well as the physical infrastructure to make the schools more effective centres of learning. A restructuring of the school curriculum is also important to ensure students learn the relevant skills that can enhance their future employability. Expanding the reach of technical and vocational education and training could further help young people to develop relevant skills to access qualified labour market opportunities.
- **Design targeted interventions:** Targeted interventions for bringing children who have dropped out back to school should be explored. Such interventions, for instance, may include programmes for those who are working, and for school-age older girls.
- **Strengthen coordination and collaboration across different sectors and services,** including child protection systems. This is particularly important to better address the situation of girls, who remain at risk of child marriage and whose labour is often invisible. Interventions that promote equal education and future employment opportunities for boys and girls are key to designing an effective strategy to end child labour.
- **Focus attention on children living in street situations:** Even though the current study did not look into the state of children living in street situations, other evidence suggests that they are vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour.
- **Focus on geographic pockets** with high prevalence of child labour, school dropout or children combining schooling and work. For example, school dropout rates are relatively higher in the eastern region, where manufacturing and employment opportunities in other commercial activities are known to be high (e.g., Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Narayanganj for boys; Gazipur, Narayanganj, Sunamganj and Sylhet for girls).

- **Focus on specific risk sectors:** The study highlighted the garment sector, the shoe sector and the *lagoona* (light transport) sector as high-risk sectors for child labour. The leather sector also emerged as precarious for child labour in other studies. Attention should be given to identifying cases of vulnerable children working in these sectors and providing them with adequate opportunities for schooling or vocational training, and enabling access to safe job opportunities.
- **Strengthen enforcement of child labour legislation:** Working conditions for child labour are typically poor and unregulated and require strengthened laws and expansion of their reach and enforcement, especially to include the informal sector. Expanding universal social protection coverage to all adult workers could further help reduce economic insecurity and precarity, which are drivers of child labour.

Research recommendations

- **Standardize definitions and methodologies for measuring child labour:** There is scope to improve comparability in the definition of child labour used across surveys. Moreover, within the same survey there is the need to have continuity in the definition of child labour over time and to capture hours of work including diverse forms of work such as full-time, part-time (when schooling and work co-occur), unpaid domestic and seasonal work (such as harvesting).
- **Improve understanding of child labour:** In addition to tracking trends in the prevalence of child labour, it is important to conduct participatory research and contextualize it to understand the nuances and variations in types of child labour, and the fluidity between work and labour in children's lives. Such research needs to use mixed methods to help understand the factors and decision processes that result in children working and engaging in hazardous labour.
- **Expand the evidence on the impact of educational policies and programmes on child labour:** Evidence on the impact of educational policies and programmes on child labour is particularly limited in Bangladesh. There is more evidence on the impact of interventions to reduce school dropout or increase school attendance. For example, strategies such as aligning the school calendar, including examination schedules with the harvesting season when children are likely to be involved in family labour, can contribute to reducing rural dropout. Similarly, there is substantial evidence on the positive impacts of the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme on girls' education, (delayed) age at marriage and autonomy, as well as the labour-force participation of women in the formal sector. Other studies have tested the positive impacts of providing information to parents on their children's school attendance, in isolation or combined with conditional cash transfers. Yet there is scope to expand rigorous impact evaluations of educational policies and programmes, to directly measure impacts of different strategies on a wide range of labour and work undertaken by children, often at the expense of leisure, schooling and extra-curricular activities.

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1. Introduction

During the past two decades, Bangladesh has made significant progress in reducing the prevalence of child labour and improving children's schooling outcomes. Various factors have contributed to this, including specific policies enacted to support school enrolment and completion, and to reduce children's engagement in labour activities.

Bangladesh has made significant commitments to ending child labour. In March 2001, the Government of Bangladesh ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. The 2010 Child Labour Elimination Policy and the 2021 National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour 2021–2025 (NPAECL) acknowledge the role of the education sector as part of an effective strategy to eliminate child labour.¹ Education-related provisions, for instance the creation of rehabilitation centres for psychological counselling of out-of-school children before bringing them back to school, are included in the NPAECL.

Bangladesh's education policy framework complements the commitment to promoting education access for children from disadvantaged groups. The national education policy framework includes the National Education Policy (NEP) published in 2010 and the Education Sector Plan (ESP) published in 2020.² In both these policies, there is a focus on ensuring 100 per cent enrolment in primary education, through support for marginalized children or school dropouts via specific programmes and strengthening technical and vocational education training (TVET) to establish linkages between schooling and economic opportunities. The ESP continues to support the creation of separate provisions for out-of-school children within secondary education, alternative non-formal education and pre-vocational training centres, and the development of special programmes for reaching out-of-school children to bring them back to school. Annex 1 provides further details of the policy provisions in the 2010 NEP and the ESP of 2020.

Social protection measures linked to schooling have also played a significant part in supporting the increase in education enrolment, and broader declines in child labour. Programmes such as the Female Secondary Stipend Programme, the Primary Education Stipend Programme³ and Food for Education all represent key initiatives in support of children's schooling.⁴ More recently, experimental studies on programmes that improved the flow of information to parents about their children's attendance, as well as the provision of cash transfers (in the form of vouchers) directly to children, have all been found to have positive impacts on children's schooling, suggesting innovations that can help accelerate policy and programme results.⁵

Despite this progress and a positive policy environment, child labour persists in the country. In 2013, 4.3 per cent of children aged 5–17 years were in child labour, for a total of about 1.7 million children in this age group.⁶ The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) recently released the child labour estimates (2022), reporting that during the past 10 years the prevalence of child labour in Bangladesh has remained roughly unchanged, with a slight increase from 4.3 to 4.4 per cent.⁷

Moreover, there is limited evidence on various aspects of child labour in Bangladesh. This includes, for instance, evidence related to the worst forms of child labour, the hazards to which children are exposed, children's direct experiences and perception of schooling and work (including combining the two), as well as the pathways through which educational and other policy and programmatic interventions can contribute to the elimination of child labour.

To address these gaps, the Economic Research Group (ERG), in partnership with UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, implemented a multi-component study, including quantitative and qualitative analyses. The study had the overall goal of expanding understanding of the linkages between child labour and education in Bangladesh and the role of education in contributing towards ending child labour in the country. The objectives of the study were to:

- Describe the prevalence and nature of child work and child labour (including hazardous work and the worst forms of child labour) in Bangladesh, using the latest available data;
- Assess the interlinkages between children's participation in schooling, work and labour; and
- Explore children's perspectives of the experiences of work and labour and intersections with schooling, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drawing on available estimates, analysis of secondary data as well as analysis of primary qualitative data, the study describes recent trends and patterns in child labour and schooling outcomes. Analyses of child labour surveys, national education surveys and administrative data are further drawn upon to describe the extent to which children combine schooling and labour. Results from secondary data are complemented with results from small-scale qualitative research with children, undertaken in the specific context of disruptions related to COVID-19 (see Annex 2 for details of the qualitative methodology). Section 2 follows with a description of prevalence and nature of child work and child labour, while section 3 reports on recent trends in schooling outcomes. Section 4 explores the interlinkages between child labour and schooling, while section 5 further assesses the role of child marriage as a key related outcome. Section 6 explores the implications of COVID-19 for children's schooling and labour outcomes. Finally, section 7 outlines relevant policy and research implications.

2. Recent trends and patterns in child work and child labour

The ERG team undertook a critical review of the literature and surveys with regard to work and various types of labour performed by children as well as their operational definitions. While those are available upon request, this report presents three types of work engagement by children aged 5–17 years as defined by the ILO: child work (including general child participation in economic activities or household chores, if chores are measured), child labour (defined as work that is deemed harmful for children’s physical and psychological health) and, within the broader category of child labour, worst forms of child labour (including work for long hours or in hazardous conditions, such as exposure to extreme temperatures, exposure to chemicals, working with dangerous tools).⁸ National policy definitions in Bangladesh, over time, have generally converged to the international definitions, though different national surveys used partially different definitions, as outlined below.

The prevalence of child work and child labour is analysed mostly based on two main national surveys: the National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) conducted by the BBS and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted by UNICEF. While unit-level data from MICS (2019), NCLS (2013) and Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlements Survey (BIUSS) (2016) were analysed for this report, provisional summary findings reported by BBS on NCLS (2022) were accommodated at a later stage.⁹

The analysis of unit-level data from these national household surveys has highlighted some key limitations of these data sources, including inconsistencies in child labour definitions across surveys and over time even within a specific survey.

Different national surveys use partially different definitions and measurement of child labour, which limits comparability across datasets. For example, NCLS surveys only consider economic activities, while MICS studies consider both economic activities and household chores when measuring child work and child labour. Further, different surveys use partially different thresholds for weekly hours when constructing measures of long hours of work by children. These thresholds are summarized in Table 1, which refers to NCLS and MICS.

Table 1: Hourly thresholds per week and activity type used to define child labour in various surveys

| Age | Economic activities | | | | | Household chores | |
|-------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | MICS 2006 | MICS 2019 | NCLS 2003 | NCLS 2013 | NCLS 2022 | MICS 2006 | MICS 2019 |
| 5–11 | 1 hour or more | 1 hour or more | 1 hour or more | 1 hour or more | 1 hour or more | 28 hours or more | 21 hours or more |
| 12–14 | 14 hours or more | 14 hours or more | 14 hours or more | | | 28 hours or more | 21 hours or more |
| 15–17 | Not included in measurement | 43 hours or more | 43 hours or more | | | Not included in measurement | Not included in measurement |
| 12–13 | | | | 43 hours or more | 25 hours or more | | |
| 14–17 | | | | 43 hours or more | 48 hours or more | | |

Note: Figures are hours per week.

Source: Compiled by ERG from MICS and NCLS reports.

Even within the same survey, parameters and categories have not remained consistent. For instance, over 30 years, BBS conducted a periodic Labour Force Survey. In the 1980s and 1990s, the survey collected data for all household members aged 5 years and over. In 1999/2000, the minimum age rose to 10 years, and in the 2016/17 survey, the age was further raised to 15 years.¹⁰

There are several practical challenges of collecting data on child labour. For instance, a major proportion of children work in the informal sector, ranging from agriculture to domestic work, and may not be captured by routine surveys and reported in official data. This was explicitly recognized in the NPAECL, which stated, in reference to the differences in child labour between boys and girls, “It is worth noting that female child labour is generally underestimated as girls are more involved in hidden work (domestic work)”.¹¹

Even within the formal sector, it is recognized that children may not always have formal contracts with employers. Thus, the presence of child labour in the formal sector, without having a formal contract, cannot be ruled out.

To sum up, there are numerous potential issues with the data available to consistently measure and track progress in ending child labour. None of these issues are easily resolved. This does not mean that the available data are of no consequence, but it should be recognized that information is incomplete and potentially inconsistent over time, which renders accurate estimation and comparisons of prevalence and trends in child labour difficult. Thus, estimates presented below are at most indicative.

2.1 Child work

Data from NCLS indicate that the prevalence of child work (percentage of children who work, and are not necessarily engaged in child labour) declined between 2003 and 2013 but remained stable in the following decade, between 2013 and 2022. The number of working children aged 5–17 years fell from 7.4 million in 2003 (17.5 per cent of all children) to 3.45 million in 2013 (8.7 per cent of all children). The most recent NCLS estimate (2022), however, suggests that the number of working children has increased slightly, up to 3.54 million in 2022 (8.9 per cent of all children).

2.2 Child labour

The number of children involved in child labour dropped from 3.18 million in 2003 (7.5 per cent of all children in Bangladesh) to 1.7 million in 2013 (4.3 per cent of all children). The NCLS 2022 shows that the number of children in child labour remained rather stable in the past decade, with the prevalence of child labour slightly increasing to 4.4 per cent of all children.¹²

Table 2: Percentage of children in child labour aged 5–17 years, NCLS data

| | NCLS 2003 | NCLS 2013 | NCLS 2022 |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| National (all children) | 7.5 | 4.3 | 4.4 |
| Male | 10.8 | 4.6 | 6.6 |
| Female | 3.6 | 3.9 | 2.1 |
| Age 5–11 | NA | 2.1 | 2.8 |
| Age 12–13 | NA | 0.6 | 3.9 |
| Age 14–17 | NA | 10.3 | 7.9 |
| Rural | 7.5 | 4.0 | 4.4 |
| Urban | 7.5 | 5.0 | 4.6 |
| Attending school | 2.5 | 1.5 | 2.7 |
| Not attending school | 25.9 | 14.9 | 16.5 |

Notes: Child labour is defined using the thresholds set out in Table 1 above and considering the type of occupation and industry in which children work. For the year 2013, the category ‘urban’ was obtained considering both children in urban areas and children in the city corporation.

Sources: NCLS 2003, 2013 and 2022.

MICS data (see Table 3) confirms that significant progress was made in reducing child labour between 2006 and 2019. However, the prevalence of child labour remains significant, estimated at 6.8 per cent in 2019. The discrepancy between MICS and NCLS figures mainly relates to the fact that MICS considers both economic activities and household chores, while NCLS considers only economic activities when measuring child labour.

Table 3: Percentage of children in child labour aged 5–17 years, MICS data

| | MICS 2006 | MICS 2019 |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| National (all children) | 12.8 | 6.8 |
| Male | 17.5 | 8.8 |
| Female | 8.1 | 4.6 |
| Age 5–11 | 10.3 | 5.8 |
| Age 12–14 | 19.0 | 8.8 |
| Age 15–17 | NA | 6.9 |
| Rural | 13.4 | 6.9 |
| Urban | 11.2 | 6.1 |
| Attending school | 9.2 | 4.4 |
| Not attending school | 25.1 | 18.9 |

Note: Child labour is defined using the thresholds set out in Table 1 above.

Sources: MICS 2006 and 2019.

2.3 Child labour by gender, age, location and school attendance

Both NCLS and MICS data (see Tables 2 and 3) also show that child labour is more prevalent among males, although it is important to note that NCLS does not consider children's engagement in household chores, and thus the prevalence of child labour among females presented by NCLS is likely to be underestimated.

The prevalence of child labour is generally higher for older children. For instance, NCLS 2022 shows that a child aged 14–17 years is twice as likely to be in child labour compared with a child aged 12 to 13 years (see Table 2). MICS 2019 data, however, indicate that child labour is highest for the group of children aged 12–14 years. This is likely to be related to the fact that the MICS measure of child labour also includes household chores, which are instead excluded from NCLS.

The prevalence of child labour is similar in rural and urban areas, while it largely differs between in-school and out-of-school children. Based on NCLS 2022, out-of-school children were about six times more likely to be in child labour than in-school children. MICS data show a consistent pattern when comparing child labour prevalence by location or school-going status.

2.4 Hazardous child labour

Conceptually, one defines work, only a part of which is labour; and 'worst forms of child labour' is tagged to a segment of that labour which can be especially harmful to child health and overall development. ILO Convention No. 182 and Recommendation No. 190 define the worst forms of child labour to include 'hazardous work' (such as work using dangerous tools or exposing children to extreme temperatures, or work for long hours) and 'worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work'. The latter include all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the illicit activities that children are forced or led to engage in following their sale and trafficking. National surveys fail to

capture the ‘worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work’. Although BBS, ILO and a few US-based agencies designate hazardous industries or occupations, these remain to be adequately captured in national surveys in Bangladesh.¹³ With these data limitations, survey reports use long hours of work and work in designated hazardous industries or occupations as proxies for ‘hazardous work’, which are compiled in Table 4.

Table 4 suggests that the prevalence of children involved in hazardous activities and/or performing excessive work hours (Prevalence1 in Table 4) has remained reasonably stable in Bangladesh at around 3 per cent, although there was a reduction from 3.2 per cent in 2013 to 2.7 per cent in 2022. NCLS 2022 provisional summary report suggests that these children accounted for about 60 per cent of total child labour in 2022 (Prevalence2 in Table 4).

Table 4: Number and prevalence of child labour and ‘hazardous’ child labour

| | 2003 | 2013 | 2022 |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total children aged 5–17 years (N) | 42,387,000 | 39,652,384 | 39,964,005 |
| Child labour | | | |
| Number | 3,179,000 | 1,698,894 | 1,776,097 |
| Prevalence (as % of total children) | 7.5 | 4.3 | 4.4 |
| Hazardous child labour (HCL) | | | |
| Number | 1,291,000 | 1,280,000 | 1,068,212 |
| Prevalence1 (as % of total children) | 3.0 | 3.2 | 2.7 |
| Prevalence2 (as % of child labour) | 40.6 | 75.3 | 60.1 |

Note: Child labour is defined using the thresholds set out in Table 1 above and considering the type of occupation and industry in which children work.

Sources: NCLS 2003, 2013 and 2022.

According to NCLS 2013, some 95 per cent of working children were in informal employment. Separate studies have found that children in informal employment frequently experience poor working conditions and do not have the employment benefits or rights associated with formal work. They are often forced to work long hours without breaks, are financially exploited, do not receive proper wages, and are prevented from attending school, going to other educational institutions or receiving health and safety training.¹⁴

A significant proportion of children in the urban industrial sector work at least 16 hours a day in hazardous workplaces.¹⁵ Another study reports that children in the manufacturing and service sectors of Bangladesh typically work an average of 43 hours per week.¹⁶ A 2016 study by the Overseas Development Institute showed that child labourers in the slums of Dhaka work an average of 64 hours a week and earn less than US\$2 per day.¹⁷

The qualitative study conducted as part of this report brought out the poor conditions under which children work. For example, a group of children working in shoe factories, during the focus group discussion (FGD) conducted in Kishoreganj, reported that new staff receive basic training in the required technical skills.¹⁸ However, they receive minimal payment until they are fully trained and productive. Children also reported that employers do not provide decent working conditions, such as allocated breaks and time off or limits on working hours.

Working in the *lagoon* sector, a form of light public transport similar to auto-rickshaws, was further identified as one of the hazardous occupations for children. Typically, younger children start as helpers rather than drivers – with participants commenting that some of their fellow helpers were as young as 8 years old. The work includes taking fares, carrying luggage onto vehicles, and assisting drivers and passengers.

Children reported working long hours with few breaks, regardless of the weather. One child stated:

“We do not have standard scheduled working hours. All the *lagoons* start functioning from 6 a.m. in the morning and continue until 10 p.m. at night. On average, we work around 12 to 14 hours a day for just 300–400 taka [US\$2.75–US\$3.66].”

– Boy, FGD, Dhaka (Mohammadpur)

Children have limited access to water and sanitation facilities. Most had received no training for the work. One child participant described the risk of violence at work:

“Sometimes the passengers, who are not aware of the fare, misbehave with us and some even try to physically assault us. It is usually young males who initiate the assault by slapping. We sometimes also hit back against such an attack. Elderly people typically attack us verbally, but we don’t often say anything and try to tolerate it.”

– Boy, FGD, Dhaka (Mohammadpur)

Another child said that some drivers take drugs such as marijuana, resulting in driving accidents. Though there is a *Lagoon* Stand Authority, there is little evidence that it enforces any protection from economic exploitation for children, or protection from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous. The working conditions are the same for both adults and children working as drivers and helpers.

The story of Alauddin provides an example of the hazards and challenges faced by children working in the *lagoon* sector (see Box 1).

Box 1: Climbing up through a hazardous route – story of a *lagoon* helper in the light transport sector

Alauddin was 16 years old when the Economic Research Group interviewed him in September 2021. He had moved from his hometown to Dhaka in 2013 with the help of his paternal cousin and started working at the age of 10 in a clothing factory, earning Bangladesh taka (BDT) 1,500 (US\$13.50) per month.¹⁹

A year later, his mother, elder sister and two younger brothers came to Dhaka after his father's second marriage. Alauddin then started living with his family at Mohammadpur, a suburb of Dhaka, and began to work as a *lagoon* helper at the age of 11.

He has now become a *lagoon* driver, working around 15 hours a day, six days a week. However, the income is not enough for him to save any money for the future. His ambition is to get a full driving licence, which will enable him to get work as a car driver for an individual or company. This would lead to a higher salary that would enable him to build a house in his hometown where his family own some land.

When Alauddin was describing this plan, he mentioned that he had never discussed it with his friends at the *lagoon* stands. He said, "No one talks about their future plan there. Rather if someone mentions it others start laughing at him." Therefore, Alauddin has no idea what his friends are planning to do with their future.

During COVID-19 lockdowns, *lagoons* were not allowed to operate. The loss of his income meant the household was struggling to afford food, so Alauddin took an alternative job in construction. In this, he had to carry cement bags on his head up several flights of stairs; after a few days, he could not continue – meaning the family income remained too low. One of his younger brothers had to go to work.

Alauddin told researchers that, in an ideal situation, he would have liked to continue his education and go to a college and a university, but the family situation meant this was not possible. He has now given up on this goal, so that he can earn to support his family and hopefully enable his younger brothers to complete education. However, if possible, he wishes to learn English from a private tutor.

2.5 Children living in street situations

The issue of children living in street situations was not within the scope of the current study, nor was there any nationwide survey data available on the issue during the study period.²⁰ However, a recently published UNICEF report suggests that these children are engaged in multiple income-generating activities. A recurrent theme found in the UNICEF report is that most children in street situations work for long hours and are exposed to abuse and exploitation.²¹ Urban children were found to be employed under several terms: employer-based activities (such as restaurant cook assistant or tyre repair shop assistant), semi-independent activities (such as pushing a rickshaw van or selling food or non-food items) and independent work (such as informal porter or scrap collector). This is consistent with findings in the qualitative research undertaken as part of this study and merits further research and analysis.

3. School participation, completion and learning

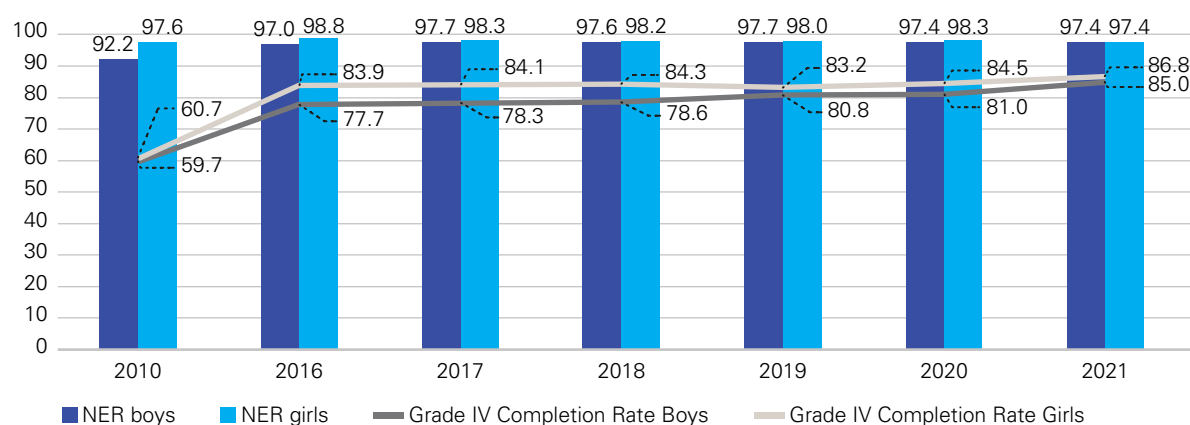
Recent decades have seen a huge expansion of school enrolment in Bangladesh, following the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990²² and a range of strategies to drive enrolment and participation across different types of schools. However, as seen above for child labour, there appears to be some stagnation in progress, and there has been no notable change in enrolment since 2016. This suggests that around 1.5 to 2 per cent of children are still not enrolled in school and are particularly at risk of child labour. Some of the key statistics related to education participation, quality and outcomes are presented below.

3.1 Enrolment and completion

Between 1990 and 2010, the net primary enrolment rate for girls increased from 80.7 per cent to about 97 per cent, while for boys the rate increased from 69 per cent to 92 per cent.²³ Data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) show a significant increase in primary school enrolment between 2010 and 2016, especially for boys, pushing the figure close to 100 per cent (see Figure 1). From 2017 onwards, the data do not show significant progress in primary school enrolment.

For both boys and girls, enrolment rates stagnated between 2017 and 2019. From 2020 to 2021, the data show a slight decline in enrolment for girls, most likely due to adverse effects of COVID-19 and related school closures (see section 5 below for a further discussion on the implications of COVID-19 for children’s work and schooling). Gender differences in primary school enrolment rates declined over time, but girls still attain higher primary enrolment compared with boys.

Figure 1: Net enrolment rate and completion rate (Grades 1–5), 2010–2021



Note: Net enrolment rate (NER): Enrolment of the official age group for a given level of education (Grades I–V; aged 6–10 years in Bangladesh) expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population. Completion rate (Grades I–V): Percentage of pupils enrolled in the first grade of primary education in a given school year who completed primary education after the required number of years.

Source: BANBEIS.²⁴

Primary completion rates show significant improvement between 2010 and 2016, from around 60 per cent for both groups to over 70 per cent for boys and over 80 per cent for girls. Again, this appears to have stagnated or even (in the case of girls) slightly declined between 2017 and 2019. In 2021, however, the data show a slight increase in primary completion rate, up to about 87 per cent for girls and 85 per cent for boys.

As seen above for primary school enrolment, gender differences in primary school completion rates declined over time, but girls still attain higher completion rates compared with boys.

Although not directly comparable due to differences in samples and definitions, MICS data present a consistent picture and show a major increase in primary school completion rates from 2006 to 2012/13, followed by a smaller increase until 2019 (see Table 5). In 2006, almost 90 per cent of those who completed primary school went on to secondary school. This rose to 95 per cent by 2012–2013 but appears to have stagnated or even marginally dropped thereafter, although a different measure (effective transition rate) was introduced after the 2012/13 survey.

Reflecting the impact of COVID-19, the 2021 Survey on Children’s Education shows that the primary completion rate and the effective transition rate slightly declined in 2021, respectively, to 78.2 per cent and 94.1 per cent nationally.²⁵

Table 5: Trends in primary completion and transition rates to secondary level

| | Primary Completion Rate | | | Transition Rate | | Effective Transition Rate | |
|----------|-------------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| | MICS 2006 | MICS 2012/13 | MICS 2019 | MICS 2006 | MICS 2012/13 | MICS 2012/13 | MICS 2019 |
| Male | 41.5 | 73.7 | 76.3 | 87.6 | 95.3 | 97.2 | 93.2 |
| Female | 52.1 | 85.8 | 89.1 | 90.5 | 94.3 | 95.7 | 95.8 |
| Rural | 43.8 | 81 | 82.5 | 88.3 | 94.7 | 96.4 | 94.2 |
| Urban | 53.6 | 73.2 | 87.5 | 91.3 | 94.7 | 96.3 | 96.2 |
| National | 46.7 | 79.5 | 82.6 | 89.1 | 94.7 | 96.3 | 94.5 |

Notes: Percentages are shown. Primary Completion Rate: Ratio of the total number of students, regardless of age, entering the last grade of primary school for the first time, to the number of children of primary graduation age at the beginning of the current (or most recent) school year.

Transition Rate to Lower Secondary School: Number of children attending the last grade of primary school during the previous school year who are in the first grade of secondary school during the current school year divided by number of children attending the last grade of primary school during the previous school year (the age range is not specified in this case).

Effective Transition Rate to Lower Secondary School: Percentage of children attending the last grade of primary school during the previous school year who are not repeating the last grade of primary school and in the first grade of lower secondary school during the current school year. Effective transition rate takes into account the presence of repeaters in the final grade of primary school.

Source: Own estimates from MICS data for 2006, 2012/13 and 2019.

3.2 Attendance

The MICS study also tracks attendance rates. As Table 6 shows, attendance in 2019 was higher than ever for both primary and secondary school, in all locations and for both boys and girls. Females had higher primary and secondary school attendance than males across all three years considered.

As of 2019, about 86 per cent of children attended primary school and 58 per cent of children attended secondary school. Females had higher school attendance than males both in primary and secondary school.

Table 6: Trends in primary and secondary school attendance rates

| | MICS 2006 | | | MICS 2012/13 | | | MICS 2019 | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------|-------|--------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| Primary school net attendance rate | | | | | | | | | |
| Urban | 79 | 83 | 80.9 | 75.4 | 79 | 77.2 | 84.3 | 88 | 86.1 |
| Rural | 79 | 84.2 | 81.5 | 69.8 | 74.9 | 72.3 | 83.1 | 88.7 | 85.8 |
| National | 78.9 | 83.7 | 81.3 | 70.8 | 75.7 | 73.2 | 83.3 | 88.5 | 85.9 |
| Secondary school net attendance rate | | | | | | | | | |
| Urban | 42.9 | 46.1 | 44.6 | 46 | 58.6 | 52.2 | 58.6 | 65.4 | 62 |
| Rural | 33.6 | 39.4 | 36.5 | 38.7 | 50.8 | 44.7 | 49.4 | 64.4 | 56.8 |
| National | 36.2 | 41.4 | 38.8 | 40.1 | 52.3 | 46.1 | 51.2 | 64.6 | 57.8 |

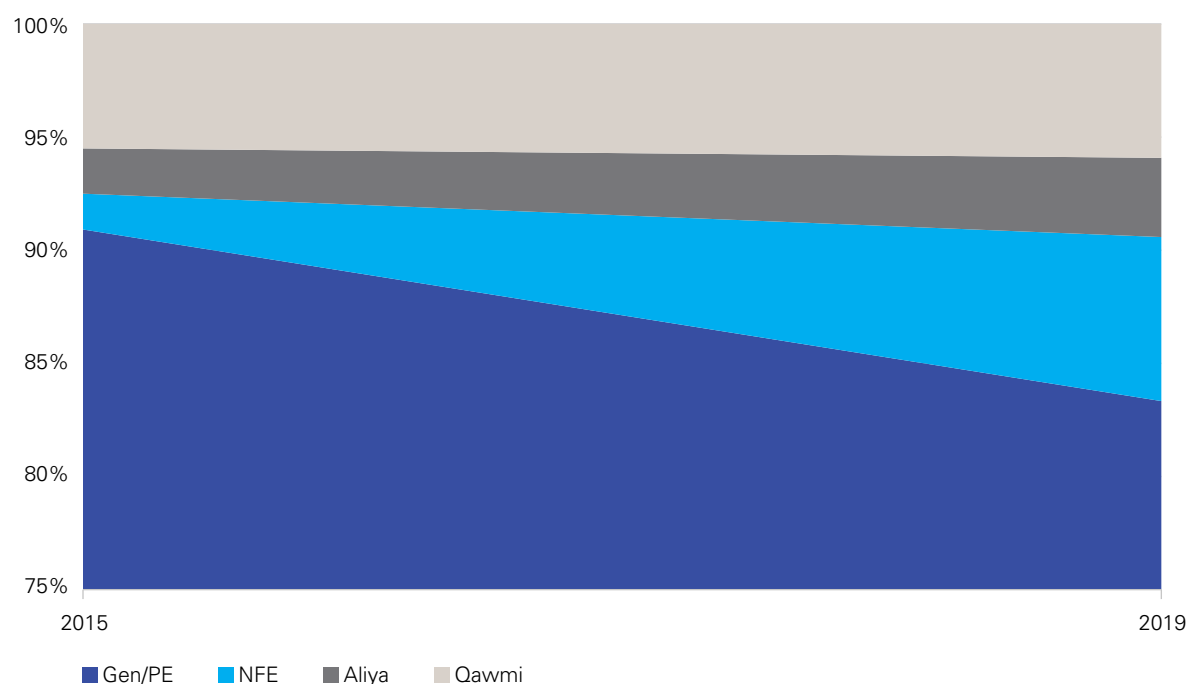
Notes: Figures are in percentages.

Sources: Own estimates from MICS data for 2006, 2012/13 and 2019.

During the COVID-19 period, the primary school net attendance was significantly lower in 2021 (at 80.5 per cent), while secondary school attendance rates remained relatively stable compared with 2019, at 59.6 per cent and 50.5 per cent in lower and upper secondary school, respectively.²⁶

Survey data rarely distinguish between different streams of schooling. One notable factor in recent years (between 2015 and 2019) has been the increased prominence of non-formal education at primary level (see Figure 2). This has been accompanied by a decrease in the share of pupils in general (i.e., mainstream public) primary education, even though general education still accounts for over 80 per cent of primary education. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of children in madrasah (Islamic theological) education between 2015 and 2019 (see Figure 2), with enrolment in two forms (Qawmi and Aliya) accounting for under 10 per cent of enrolment in primary education. A previous study has highlighted that Qawmi madrasahs enrol a disproportionately high number of children from poor families.²⁷

Figure 2: Share of primary enrolment by educational stream, 2015–2019



Source: Compiled by the authors from BANBEIS data.²⁸

3.3 Learning outcomes

The above analysis shows that between 2000 and 2019 Bangladesh made tremendous progress in increasing school enrolment rates and attendance as well as completion rates.

However, concerns remain regarding learning outcomes and the quality of education. Data from the 2022 National Student Assessment show that half of children in Grade 5 cannot read at their grade level and over two thirds cannot do basic counting after completing primary education.²⁹ Between 2017 and 2022, proficiency in Bangla increased by 6 percentage points, while proficiency in mathematics declined by 2 percentage points.

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) report also highlighted that student performance is associated with various contextual factors. These include student characteristics (e.g., parental background and availability of resources at home), teacher characteristics (e.g., teachers' qualifications), school and head teacher characteristics (e.g., access to toilets and drinking water, conducting additional classroom activities, monitoring of classroom activities by head teachers), as well as availability and quality of remote learning during the COVID-19 period.

Four key factors have been associated with limited progress in improving the quality of education and thus learning. These include: (i) a complex coexistence of multiple actors which hinder efficient management of the education system; (ii) lack of financial resources; (iii) insufficient number of trained teachers; and (iv) poorly designed study curriculum and faulty examination system.³⁰ A consistent feature of educational policies and programmes has been the effort to increase recruitment of skilled

teachers and provide them with continuous professional training. However, despite these efforts, around 21 per cent of government primary school teachers had no professional qualifications, with the lack of a pre-service teacher education programme in the teacher training institutes a major limiting factor in ensuring access to and quality of primary school education.

Many schools had not achieved the target teacher–student ratio of one teacher to 46 pupils set out in the third Primary Education Development Programme, which was higher than the international standard of 1:30. Despite this goal, in 2016 only 72.3 per cent of the government primary schools and 50.3 per cent of the newly nationalized primary schools fulfilled the norm. Analysis suggests that insufficient financial incentives are one of the main reasons for the lack of quality teachers.³¹ Dependency on private education and tutoring also suggests that families compensate for poor-quality education through private investments, increasing their out-of-pocket expenditures on education.

4. Intersections between child work, child labour and school education

This section explores the intersections between child labour and schooling, including the prevalence of children combining schooling and work. The analysis further delves into implications of child marriage for child schooling and work outcomes, based on both survey data and the qualitative small-scale analysis conducted as part of this report.

4.1 Combining schooling and work

Data from national child labour surveys suggest that the proportion of children who are both enrolled in school and working has increased over time. Among in-school children, the prevalence of child work was 3.4 per cent and 6.2 per cent in NCLS 2013 and NCLS 2022, respectively.

4.2 Gender, age and location dimensions

The proportion of children combining schooling and work is generally higher for boys than for girls, and it increases with age, being highest for older boys (see Table 7). However, when the definition of work includes household chores, a far higher proportion of girls combine school and work, reflecting sociocultural norms assigning to girls the role of primary caregivers for younger siblings or elderly household members.

MICS 2019 data also indicate that combining schooling and work is substantially more common in rural areas than in urban areas.

Table 7: Prevalence of children engaged in economic activity in 2019, by school enrolment status, location, age group and gender

| Schooling status | Percentage of all in cohort engaged in economic activity | | | | | |
|------------------|--|-------|------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Ages 6–10 | | Ages 11–13 | | Ages 14–17 | |
| | Rural | | | | | |
| | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys |
| Enrolled | 5.99 | 8.67 | 9.93 | 21.78 | 11.56 | 34.31 |
| Dropped out | 2.02 | 12.02 | 20.77 | 39.95 | 19.84 | 68.18 |
| Never enrolled | 3.44 | 11.97 | 7.18 | 35.80 | 21.38 | 52.38 |
| | Urban | | | | | |
| Enrolled | 2.1 | 3.06 | 3.62 | 9.83 | 5.92 | 17.18 |
| Dropped out | 6.70 | 6.42 | 42.00 | 49.36 | 38.03 | 66.49 |
| Never enrolled | 2.72 | 0.71 | 47.56 | 40.39 | 34.09 | 57.34 |

Note: Work includes all kinds of economic activities, carried out inside and outside the home. Those reporting engagement in household chores, but not in any 'economic activity', are not included.

Source: ERG estimate from MICS 2019 data.

Two additional findings emerge from the MICS 2019 data. First, among the younger age group, only a small proportion of those who drop out of education engage in economic activity – though this increases markedly in the middle and older age groups, especially for boys. While there could be many reasons for dropping out of primary schooling, it is not clear that the need to engage in work is one of them. Second, only a few of the children who never enrolled are now working. Apart from boys aged 14–17 years, less than half of children in the other cohorts are working. Disaggregated analysis and understanding of age-based factors underpinning children never enrolling or dropping out of school is therefore important.

The above statistics are obtained without considering household chores. If household chores were also considered in the definition of working children, beyond economic activity, a far higher proportion of girls would be found to be simultaneously at work and enrolled in school, in all age brackets. These findings for rural areas reflect an embedded sociocultural norm that girls are relatively more responsible for household chores and caring for younger siblings, as well as sick or elderly members of the family, rather than being expected to engage in economic activities. Such norms clearly affect the opportunities for girls and the agency they have to determine their own pathway and education–work trajectory. There are, however, contrasting trends observed in urban areas, where the non-enrolled girls, especially those aged 11–13 years, are not behind the boys in participating in economic activities. The qualitative study conducted as part of this report also found similar signs in peri-urban areas.

Combining work and schooling is complex. Children who do work while attending school may do so outside their school hours. Especially if children work long hours, the burden of work can be detrimental to their health and their school performance and could lead to them dropping out of school. While survey data (NCLS and MICS) provide some information about these intersections, there are issues with measurements. Not all forms of work are generally captured by such surveys

and therefore total work hours may be underestimated. On the contrary, reporting on individual minor tasks may lead to overestimating the overall time spent working. Thus, qualitative studies were also relied upon to get an indication of the workload borne by children and its implications for schooling outcomes.

A majority of child respondents in the qualitative study wished they could complete their education, with several stating that they work to earn money to pay for their continued schooling. These included children combining work and education, and some who have had to drop out but wish to re-enrol. For example, an FGD participant in Dhaka said:

“I work in the *lagoon* stand after my classes and during off-school days. Due to the financial crisis in my family, my parents cannot financially support my education. So, I must earn by working to continue my education and I have been doing that for the last three years. I want to learn something apart from my regular school learning. Therefore, I have been working here and learning the driving. To balance between my work and study, I work 15 to 20 days in a month and spend the rest of the days studying.”

– Boy, FGD, Dhaka (Mohammadpur)

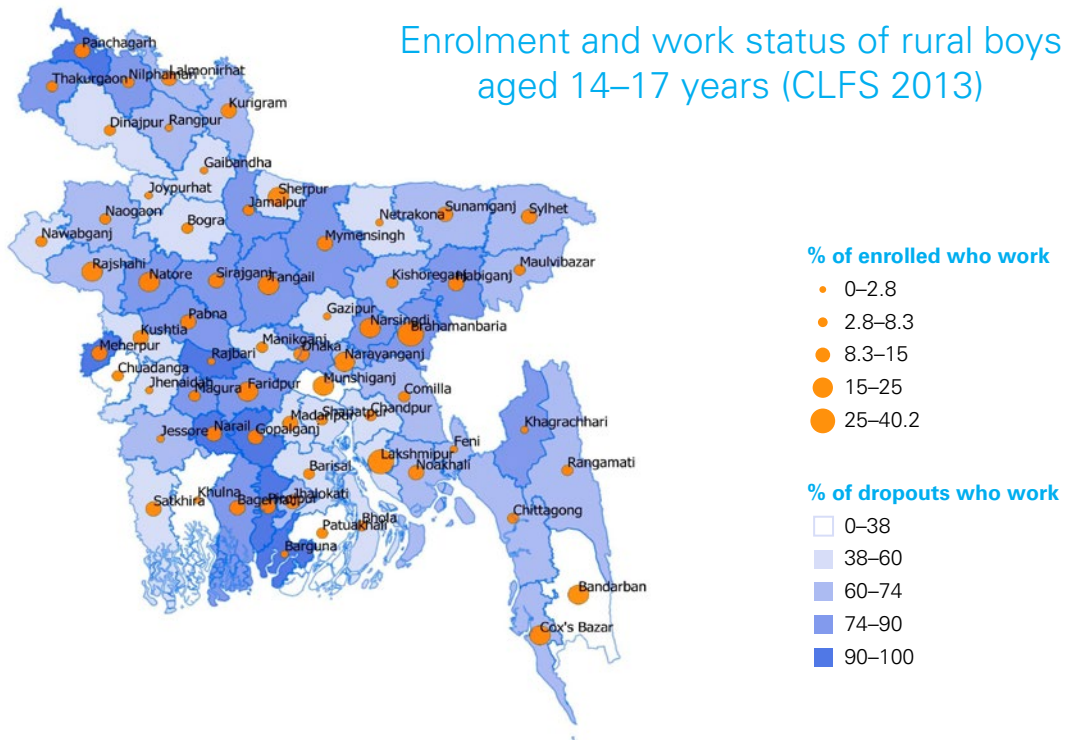
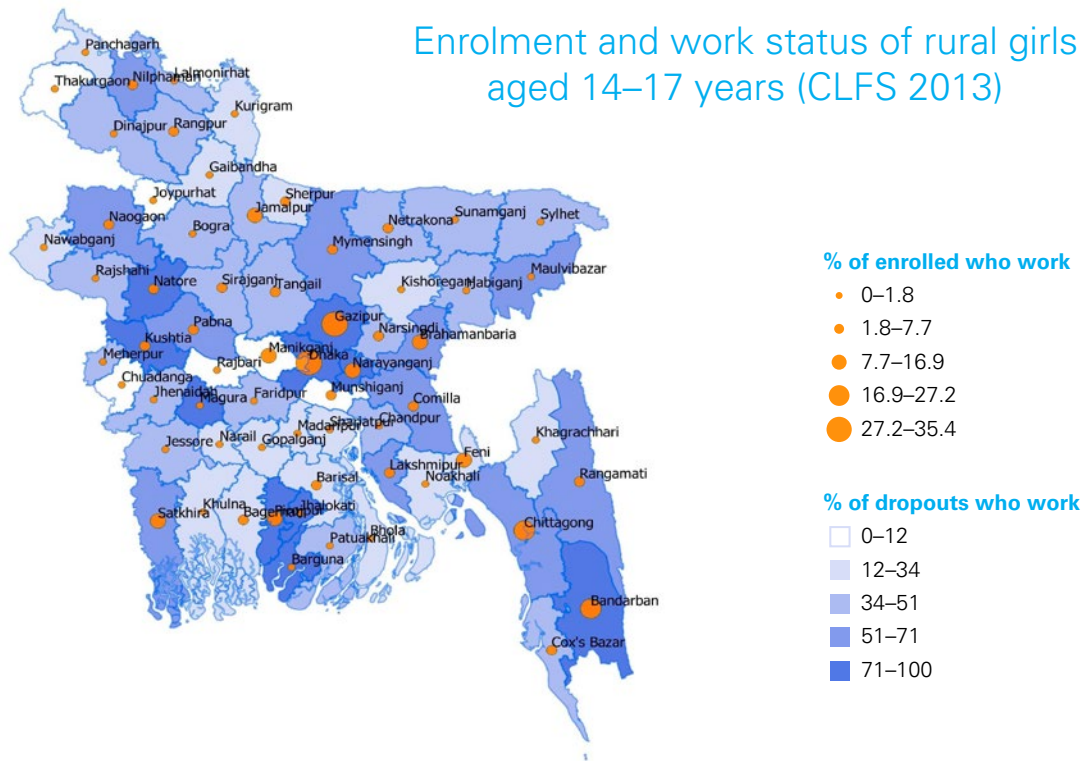
4.3 Some regional findings

The Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey (BIHS) 2018/19, NCLS 2013 and MICS 2019 reveal that children’s participation in school and work varies substantially by region.³²

For both boys and girls, the likelihood of dropping out of school is higher in areas where work opportunities are more easily available. For example, MICS 2019 data (see Annex 4) suggest that among both male and female adolescents (aged 14–17 years) the dropout rates are relatively higher in the eastern region, where manufacturing and employment opportunities in other commercial activities are known to be high (e.g., Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Narayanganj for boys; Gazipur, Narayanganj, Sunamganj and Sylhet for girls). Narayanganj and Gazipur are indeed areas of intense manufacturing activities, including the ready-made garments sector that employs women and girls older than 14 years.

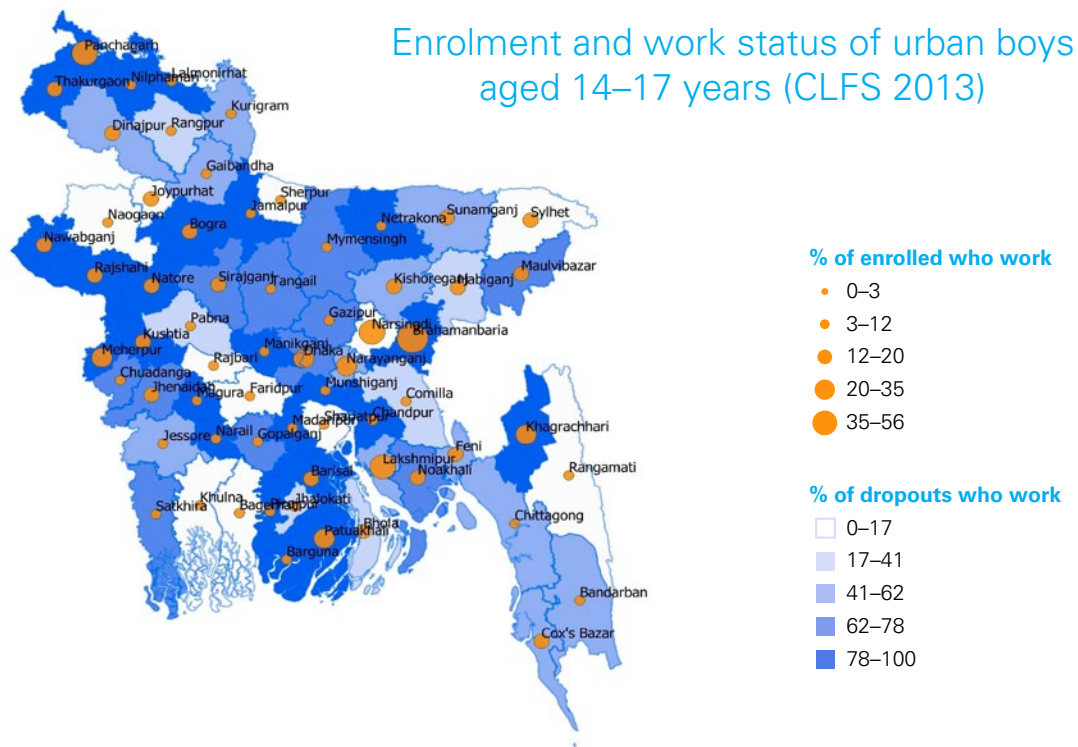
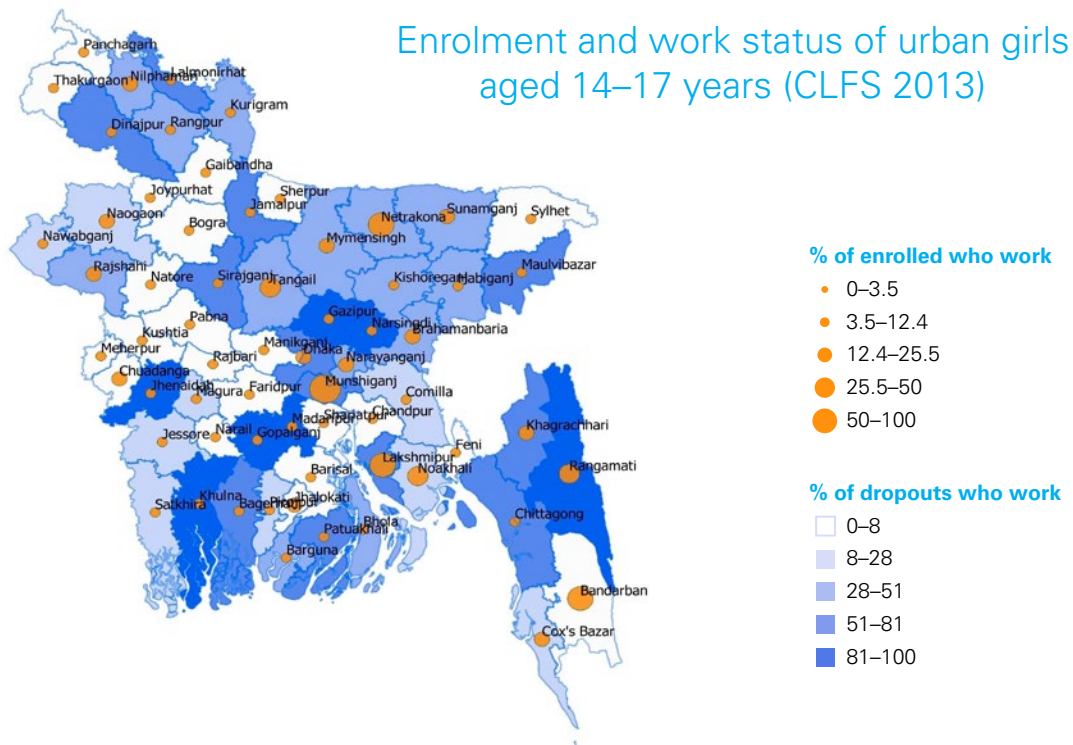
Areas where work opportunities are more easily available also have the highest prevalence of adolescents combining schooling and work. For example, NCLS 2013 shows that in rural areas, the proportion of girls combining schooling and work is highest in Gazipur, at about 35 per cent (see Figure 3a and Annex 5). In both rural and urban areas, the proportion of boys enrolled in school and working is highest in Brahmanbaria, at about 40 and 56 per cent in rural and urban areas, respectively (see Figures 3c and 3d and Annex 5).

Figures 3a and 3b: Enrolment and work status by rural girls and boys, NCLS 2013



Note: Work includes economic activities within or outside the household (household chores are not included).
Source: NCLS 2013.

Figures 3c and 3d: Enrolment and work status by urban girls and boys, NCLS 2013



Note: Work includes economic activities within or outside the household (household chores are not included).
Source: NCLS 2013.

5. Child marriage, schooling and child labour

Despite various actions to tackle child marriage over recent decades, Bangladesh continues to have high rates of child marriage, with UNICEF estimating that 51 per cent of Bangladeshi women who are now in their mid-20s were married before they turned 18 years old. Nearly 18 per cent were under 15 years of age when they married.³³

Girls' and family decisions on labour, education and marriage are closely linked. For instance, cultural norms, as well as practices of early marriage and domestication of girls' time and labour, can reinforce each other, thus reducing the value of girls' schooling and emphasizing the importance of learning to provide care work in the home. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the risk of child marriage, which, in turn, can further increase girls' labour. Below we briefly explore how child marriage in Bangladesh relates to girls' work and schooling outcomes.

Data in Table 8 show a positive correlation between early marriage and school dropout, with dropout among married girls ranging from about 70 per cent to 81 per cent in rural areas and ranging from about 50 per cent to about 78 per cent in urban areas. In urban slums, the dropout rate among married girls aged 15–17 years is about 50 per cent.

Various mechanisms can explain the correlation between early marriage and school dropout. The prospect of being married at an early age may discourage girls' education and thus increase their dropout. This would be consistent with earlier studies. Research has found, for example, that most families considered schooling not useful for girls, since they would leave the household after marriage and the family would not get any return from their education.³⁴ Girls were therefore 'groomed' to be good wives and were engaged in household activities from an early age. Alternatively, it may be that marriage becomes a solution for girls who have dropped out for other reasons (e.g., poverty), rather than the cause.

The table also shows that, among married girls, work participation ranges from about 34 per cent to 85 per cent. While there are indications of changes in cultural norms, with families increasingly encouraging girls to attend school, embedded social and cultural norms persist, putting an extra burden of household chores on girls.³⁵

Table 8: Marriage and school–work relations

| | Rural | | | Other urban | City corporation | Urban slums |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| | NCLS 2013 | BIHS 2015 | BIHS 2019 | NCLS 2013 | NCLS 2013 | BIUSS 2016 |
| Percentage of girls aged 15–17 years ever married | 12.36 | 13.59 | 15.79 | 9.74 | 6.16 | 11.51 |
| <i>of those who are married (%)</i> | | | | | | |
| Currently in school | 21.17 | 16.97 | 21.46 | 23.25 | 21.48 | 0 |
| Dropped out | 69.89 | 81.21 | 77.33 | 75.32 | 78.24 | 49.26 |
| Never enrolled | 8.94 | 1.82 | 1.21 | 1.43 | 0.28 | 50.74 |
| <i>of those who are married (%)</i> | | | | | | |
| Do work | 34.21 | 83.64 | 84.62 | 23.86 | 57.98 | 39.28 |
| Jobless | 0.68 | 1.21 | 0.00 | 1.85 | 3.2 | 60.72 |
| Student, retired, beggar, etc. | 65.11 | 15.15 | 15.38 | 74.29 | 38.82 | 0 |
| <i>of those reporting work (%)</i> | | | | | | |
| Wage labourer | 6.87 | 0.72 | 0.48 | 9.52 | 0 | 0 |
| Salaried worker | 33.31 | 0.72 | 0.00 | 49.59 | 89.43 | 76.75 |
| Self-employed | 17.28 | 0.72 | 0.96 | 8.49 | 7.46 | 23.25 |
| Work in own farm | 25.13 | 8.70 | 0.48 | 10.12 | 2.48 | |
| Non-earning work | 17.4 | 89.13 | 98.09 | 22.28 | 0.63 | |
| <i>of those enrolled in education (%)</i> | | | | | | |
| Do work | 12.24 | 10.71 | 28.30 | 7.35 | 1.28 | 0 |
| Jobless | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0 |
| Work status not reported | 87.76 | 89.29 | 71.70 | 92.65 | 98.72 | 0 |
| <i>of those who dropped out (%)</i> | | | | | | |
| Do work | 40.52 | 99.25 | 100.00 | 29.41 | 73.74 | 74.52 |
| Jobless | 0.97 | 0.75 | 0.00 | 2.45 | 4.09 | 25.48 |
| Work status not reported | 58.51 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 68.14 | 22.16 | |
| <i>of those who never enrolled (%)</i> | | | | | | |
| Do work | 36.92 | 66.67 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 5.07 |
| Jobless | 0.00 | 33.33 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 94.93 |
| Work status not reported | 63.08 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | |

Notes: BIUSS = Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlements Survey. In BIHS, 'Non-earning work' includes household chores. Sources: NCLS 2013; BIHS 2015 and 2019; UIS 2016.³⁶

Consistent with the above findings, FGDs conducted with girls found that, although almost all of them want to pursue education, many are not able to attend school due to the burden of household chores and pressure of child marriage.

One child FGD participant said:

“Even if I have the desire to study more, I cannot do so because I must do a lot of household chores at home. Whenever I will turn 18, my parents will become restless to marry me off and will not even hear any ‘no’ as my answer.”

– Girl, FGD, Sirajganj

Further, girls described engaging in paid work and supporting the family financially as a means of delaying marriage. Two of them stated:

“I have started sewing because I do not want to get married soon. I think, if I am working at home and earning money, my parent won’t ask me to get married soon.”

– Girl, FGD, Sirajganj

“I was able to protect one of my poor friends from child marriage by giving her a job as a tailor. Her family wanted to marry her off due to poverty. So, when my friend started earning and supporting her family financially, they gave up the concept of her marriage at this early age.”

– Girl, FGD, Sirajganj

However, some girls also mentioned that even when they were engaged in economic activities with their family members, their parents still wanted to get them married as soon as they could arrange it, to avoid social criticism. Some children commented that even though in-laws sometimes commit to allowing girls to continue studying after marriage, this usually does not happen. One girl who was studying in a technical institute said:

“I want to be a civil engineer after completing my diploma in engineering. But my mother thinks that girls do not need to study so much, and a girl should study only as much as is required to teach her child. My mother also thinks that as I am studying currently in class 10, I am eligible for marriage. That I do not agree with and I want to study a lot.”

– Girl, FGD, Sirajganj

Overall, socioeconomic patterns and sociocultural norms result in differential outcomes for boys and girls when a family is in difficult financial circumstances. Typically, boys are sent to work, and girls get married. Poverty can also drive girls to migrate to urban centres for domestic or garment work.³⁷ In this context, girls often see education as a route to independence and empowerment, while recognizing that their parents often do not share that view (see Box 2).

Box 2: Sociocultural norms and girls' work and life trajectories

Meemi was 17 years old and unmarried at the time she spoke to researchers. She lives in Sirajganj with her parents and two brothers. She is currently enrolled in secondary education and makes dresses as a means of earning money.

The pandemic resulted in both of her parents losing their stable monthly income. Her education was put at risk, because her family could not then afford both her and her brother's education.

Meemi told researchers:

“My father does not believe in educating girls. To him, doing a job after completing education is not required for girls, that is required for boys. Therefore, he doesn't want to waste his money by spending on my education, rather he wants to give my brother all the financial support he requires to complete his education and start earning money by doing a decent job.”

Her father's mindset made Meemi believe that if she wanted to continue her education, she must earn the money to pay for it, or else she will be forced to drop out of school, with the likely next step being marriage. Her family has already started receiving several marriage proposals for her, but she does not want to get married before fulfilling her dream of being a teacher.

She chose to start working to try and prevent this. She received training in tailoring from an acquaintance in her village for 40 days. Later, she managed to get an agricultural loan from a local microfinance institution to buy a sewing machine.

Balancing her work, education and domestic duties is complex. To keep her family satisfied so that they let her continue her education, she must manage her household chores first, then complete her homework for school, before finally being able to work on the dress orders. She is aware that both the unpaid chores and paid tailoring disrupt her studies and has sometimes missed deadlines for assignments, but if she does not deliver the orders in time, she will lose her customers to other tailors in the village.

Despite these hardships, Meemi is determined to continue her education journey and fulfil her dream using her own money.

6. Implications of COVID-19 for children's schooling and child labour

COVID-19 and related school closure significantly increased the risk of child labour, as more children discontinued attendance, enrolled late or did not enrol in school.³⁸ In addition to direct impacts on children's learning, girls were also placed at greater risk of forced early marriage and increased unpaid and domestic work. Children were also affected by loss of economic livelihoods for families, including loss of remittances, leading to economic pressure on children to help with family earnings, though the effects of these pathways were gendered.³⁹

During the pandemic, the Government of Bangladesh introduced alternative education options such as TV and radio programmes or online education (see Annex 6), but gaps remained, as initiatives were focused on older children and access to technology was inequitable. Households in rural areas and poor households reported significantly lower participation in TV or online education, compared with households in urban areas and non-poor households. About half of students in primary school and about 60 per cent of students in secondary school continued their education through private tuition.

In the qualitative research component of this study, almost all child participants reported that COVID-19 negatively impacted their schooling. Many children dropped out and did not expect to return full time.

Some children reported they started working during the pandemic and expected to continue working part time after school reopening. In some cases, children stopped working during lockdowns as factories closed. After their return to work, they often faced lower payment. The incidence of child marriage was also reported to increase.

Recent studies have examined access to distance learning during the pandemic and the implications of COVID-19 school closures for schooling outcomes.⁴⁰ According to one study, only 21 per cent of households reported that their children could participate in online/TV education.⁴¹ There were also significant differences between rural and urban areas (with 19 per cent of rural households reporting participation in distance learning compared with 27 per cent of urban households) and between poor households (15 per cent participation) and non-poor households (26 per cent participation). These figures are consistent with findings from BBS and UNICEF.⁴² This study also reported that children in the poorest wealth quintile were approximately 10 times less likely to participate in online learning compared with children in the richest wealth quintile (4.6 per cent versus 45.2 per cent participation rates in poorest versus richest household wealth quintiles, respectively).

Among children who did not attend online classes, some of the most cited reasons were unavailability, insufficient access to technological devices and inadequate access to an internet connection.⁴³ Indeed, the BBS and UNICEF survey found that only 36.9 per cent of children had some supportive devices in the household to ensure online learning, again with differences between rural and urban areas (32.9 per cent and 50.6 per cent, respectively).⁴⁴

In addition, a report on COVID-19 fallout also found that, of those who participated, less than one third found online classes effective.⁴⁵ The report consistently found that 51 per cent of students in primary schools and 61 per cent of students in secondary schools had continued their education through private lessons received from private tutors after school hours. Although such options were harder to access for extremely poor households, such as those living in urban slums, the study reports that 61 per cent of these households were still sending their children to coaching centres.

Regarding the consequences of school closures on schooling outcomes, the BBS and UNICEF survey report showed that the proportion of children who studied at home dropped from 95.5 per cent before school closure to 80.8 per cent during school closure.⁴⁶ After the reopening of schools, this rose to 90.8 per cent, still significantly below the pre-COVID level. BBS and UNICEF also assessed that out-of-school rates in 2021 were 15.4 per cent in primary, 15.6 per cent in lower secondary and 34.2 per cent in upper secondary schools, respectively. These rates were significantly higher than those reported in MICS 2019. Among those who attended school in 2020, the most prevalent reasons for not being in school in 2021 were 'prolonged school closures', followed by 'decrease in family income', 'child's unwillingness to attend', 'unable to bear education expense', and 'pressure for marriage'.

The National Survey on Children's Education⁴⁷ also gathered data on child marriage, showing that among women aged 20–24 years, 11.2 per cent are married before the age of 15 and 40.7 per cent are married before age 18. These proportions were lower than those reported in MICS 2019 (15.5 and 51.4 per cent, respectively). Among women aged 15–24 years, the most common reasons for early marriage were 'finding a suitable groom' (82.8 per cent), 'social practice' (24.0 per cent) and 'economic hardship' (20.7 per cent). School closure due to COVID-19 was cited only by 1.5 per cent of the sample.

Whether in school or in work, almost all FGD participants as part of the qualitative study reported significant negative impacts from COVID-19. Due to the extended closure of schools, many dropped out and did not expect to return full time. Boys in Mymensingh reported that when the schools closed, they started working with their fathers as carpenters, farmers or masons and expected this to continue part time once schools reopened. In Sirajganj, some boys and girls alike started working in the garment industry from home (see Box 3). However, with larger factories closed, the earning potential was limited. In Kishoreganj, children who worked in shoe factories lost their jobs during the pandemic. Since returning to work, they are being paid less, with employers justifying this on the basis that raw material prices have increased, and they are unable to pay the usual amount.

Box 3: Implications of COVID-19 for child work and schooling: Munira's story

At the time of interview, Munira was 14. She lives in Sirajganj with her younger sister and her mother on family-owned land. Though enrolled in school, she also works knitting yarn at the home of a family friend.

She began to work during the pandemic, after the schools were closed. Her father died, leaving the family in need of additional income. She first learned to sew, but when the sewing machine she was using broke, she could not afford to replace it and instead switched to knitting. Her first job was in a workshop belonging to her cousin, but, as this was not receiving many orders, she moved to her current position. She typically works from 6 a.m. till the evening and describes the work as hard and painful for the legs.

Since schools reopened, she has attempted to return to education, but this is proving difficult. Her extended family have provided financial support to try and enable her to continue with schooling, but she fits in some work around classes. Also, when her employer has lots of orders, she is asked to work rather than attend school. Because of such a heavy workload, she does not get enough time to study.

She sums up her position as follows: "It is not physically possible for me to attend classes regularly due to work. I cannot stop doing the work completely as well. Earning is necessary to help the household."

Many of the children in the FGDs had no idea of the support that was available during lockdowns. For example, it appears employers did not disclose the incentives or subsidies they received from the government or other related authorities.⁴⁸ Girls in Sirajganj had no idea about whether there were online classes available to them, because they do not have access to mobile phones or the internet.

Somewhat deviating from the quantitative estimates reported above, respondents from the qualitative study carried out as part of this report pointed out that the pandemic had led to an increase in child marriage, including for boys. While some of the girls in Sirajganj reported that their parents were only waiting for a good proposal for marriage, boys in Mymensingh explained that following school closures, some of their friends got married after getting involved in romantic relationships. They reported that the cost of a 'love' marriage is lower than an 'arranged' marriage. At the same time, some of those getting married were not earning and were dependent on their parents.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The report presented estimates on child work and child labour mainly based on four surveys: BIHS (2015, 2019), NCLS (2013), MICS (2019) and BIUSS (2016). Recent trends on schooling outcomes were also reported, mostly based on MICS and data from the DPE Annual Primary School Census. Next, survey data were used to assess the prevalence of children combining schooling and work, including through district-level maps. The report also explored the interlinkages between schooling, work and marriage, and the implications of COVID-19 for child work and schooling. Results from secondary data analysis were complemented with findings from a primary small-scale survey including FGDs and life story sessions with children.

Despite data limitations which limited comparability across surveys and over time, the data provided relevant findings which enable exploration of some policy implications.

There has been a significant decline in child labour in Bangladesh in recent decades. An estimated 3.54 million children were working in Bangladesh in 2022 (8.9 per cent of all children). As of 2022, NCLS indicated that 4.4 per cent of children are engaged in child labour. As of 2019, MICS data indicated that 6.8 per cent of children were in child labour. MICS showed a higher prevalence of child labour (compared with NCLS), because MICS estimates also consider household chores, while NCLS only consider economic activities.

Child labour is more prevalent among older children and boys, although girls' labour is probably underestimated. Survey data showed a similar prevalence of child labour in rural and urban areas, while both surveys showed that children who do not attend school are much more likely to be in child labour compared with children who attend school.

Most children work in informal employment, characterized by low wages, long hours of work and unsafe conditions. The *lagoon* sector was described by children as hazardous, exposing them to multiple risks and abuses, including low salary, long work hours, risk of accidents and exposure to violence. Children living in street situations are also identified in recent research as particularly vulnerable to exploitation and hazardous work.

The country has registered sustained growth in school enrolment and school completion since the 1990s, but progress has slowed in recent years. School attendance rates also increased between 2006 and 2019, both for primary and secondary levels. Concerns remain regarding learning outcomes. For example, data from the 2022 National Student Assessment show that half of children in Grade 5 cannot read at their grade level and over two thirds cannot do basic counting after completing primary education. Among the factors hindering progress in the quality of education are an insufficient number of well-trained teachers, a poorly designed curriculum and a faulty examination system.⁴⁹

Survey data suggest that the proportion of children combining schooling and work increased in recent years. Combining school and work is more common for older children and boys, and in rural areas.

If work would include household chores, the proportion of girls combining work and school would be far higher. In some cases, children view their work, including in hazardous sectors, as necessary to pay for their schooling costs, either to continue education or to re-enrol if they had dropped out of school.

Children's participation in schooling and work varies substantially by region. For children aged 14–17 years, MICS 2019 data showed that school dropout is relatively higher in the eastern region, where manufacturing and commercial activities are also more prevalent (e.g., Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Narayanganj for boys; Gazipur, Narayanganj, Sunamganj and Sylhet for girls).

Despite improvements in girls' schooling, child marriage rates remain relatively high in Bangladesh. The data clearly show that child marriage increases the risk of school dropout and child labour. The qualitative analysis highlighted the role of sociocultural norms, implying that girls are more heavily engaged in household chores compared with boys and are more likely to experience pressure to get married from an early age. Pressure to discontinue education and marry becomes more likely if households face financial difficulties.

The COVID-19 health and economic crisis and related school closures increased the risk of school dropout and learning losses, which in turn increased the risk of child labour. While Bangladesh introduced alternative education options (e.g., TV and radio programmes, and online classes), access to technology was inequitable. Moreover, the students often perceived online classes as having limited effectiveness.

Our qualitative analysis showed that many children started working during the pandemic, due to multiple factors including family financial difficulties, school closures and health shocks for adults in the household.

7.1 Programme and policy recommendations

The results presented above show that Bangladesh registered significant progress both in improving schooling outcomes and in reducing child labour. Among the many factors contributing to these developments are: (i) increased access to education – through legal changes, the expansion of targeted support, including financial and in-kind incentives to encourage attendance (such as the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme, an early global example of a targeted conditional cash transfer to assist schooling); (ii) the increased value that families are placing on school education which is part of a wider evolution in social and cultural norms; and (iii) the more extensive regulation of child labour backed by more effective enforcement.

However, progress in school enrolment and completion, as well as in child labour reduction slowed in recent years, and the prevalence of children combining school and work is increasing. Inadequate learning at school is also a cause of concern. These developments call for strengthening policy and programme efforts to improve children's schooling and reduce child labour. Several important recommendations are contained in the national policies, in particular around improving the quality of education and focusing on the informal sector. Enhancing the relevance and quality of school education, ensuring social protection, preventing children from entering the work force, and creating decent jobs lie at the heart of eliminating child labour in Bangladesh.

Overall, a multisectoral response is needed to address child labour, as outlined in the following policy and programme recommendations:

- **Improve access to school education:** Though Bangladesh has made considerable progress in extending the reach of school education, between 1.5 and 2 per cent of primary-school-age children were still not enrolled in school as of 2019. Strengthened social protection (including cash transfers in support of school participation and school feeding) can support further increasing school enrolment and attendance.⁵⁰
- **Improve the quality of school education:** There remain gaps in the quality of education and learning achievements of children that need to be addressed, so that children acquire the necessary competencies to find decent jobs. There is considerable scope to improve teacher training, as well as the physical infrastructure in schools, to make them more effective as centres of learning. A restructuring of the school curriculum is also important to ensure students acquire the skills that can improve their future employability. Expanding access to TVET could further support young people to develop adequate skills for qualified labour market opportunities.
- **Design targeted interventions:** Further, there may be opportunities for targeted interventions to bring children who have dropped out back to school or to strengthen learning outcomes for children who are in school. These interventions, for instance, may support children who have dropped out of primary education, older children who have dropped out of secondary education and started working or older girls who experience higher risk of early marriage and school dropout.⁵¹
- **Strengthen coordination and collaboration across different sectors and services** including child protection.⁵² Not explicitly recognizing, for instance, the linkages between schooling and child labour limits the extent to which educational strategies can contribute to ending child labour. Similarly, a cross-sectoral response is needed to better address the situation of girls, who remain at risk of child marriage and whose labour, within the household, is often invisible. Interventions promoting equality of education and future employment opportunities for boys and girls are key to design an effective strategy to end child labour.
- **Focus attention on children living in street situations** who are particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour, including working in extremely hazardous conditions. In addition to shelters, drop-in centres and open-air programmes providing food and education, which can alleviate some of their most extreme deprivations, strong child protection and social welfare interventions including referral systems and efforts to reconnect children with families and communities are needed to help reduce the extreme risks this population faces.
- **Focus on geographic pockets of child labour and out-of-school children:** The above analysis showed that some geographical areas have a higher prevalence of out-of-school adolescents aged 14–17 years and child labour. Dropout is relatively high in the eastern region, where manufacturing and employment opportunities in other commercial activities are known to be high (e.g., Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Narayanganj for boys; Gazipur, Narayanganj, Sunamganj and Sylhet for girls). Narayanganj and Gazipur are areas of intense manufacturing activities, including the ready-made garments sector that employs women and girls older than 14 years.

- **Focus on specific risk sectors:** Beyond the above-mentioned garment sectors, the study highlighted the high risks of the shoe sector and the light transport sector (e.g., *lagoonas*) for child labour. The leather sector also emerged as high-risk in previous studies.⁵³ Attention should be given to identifying cases of vulnerable children working in these sectors and providing them with adequate opportunities for schooling or vocational training, ensuring them access to safe job opportunities.
- **Strengthen enforcement of child labour legislation:** While data suggest a reduction in the prevalence of child labour, there is little evidence to suggest that working conditions for child labourers are improving. The working conditions of children are poor and unregulated. It is therefore important to strengthen and expand the reach of laws and their enforcement to end child labour in the informal sector, while simultaneously expanding universal coverage of social protection to all workers as part of an overall effort to reduce human insecurity and end precariousness in people's lives.

7.2 Research recommendations

- **Standardize definitions and methodologies for measuring child labour considering multiple types of activities:** There is scope to improve comparability in the definition of child labour used across surveys and over time. Moreover, it is important to capture hours of work for different types of activities, considering both economic activities and household chores, as well as diverse forms of work such as full-time work, part-time work (when schooling and work co-occur) and seasonal work (such as harvesting).
- **Improve understanding of child labour:** In addition to tracking trends in the prevalence of child labour, it is equally important to initiate mixed-method and qualitative research to help understand the factors and decision processes that result in children working and engaging in hazardous labour. Conducting participatory research with older children, and contextualizing research, is necessary to understand the nuances and variations in types of child labour and the fluidity between work and labour in children's lives.
- **Expand the evidence on the impact of educational policies and programmes on child labour:** As underlined in a recent review and related Evidence Gap Map,⁵⁴ the evidence on the impact of educational policies and programmes on child labour is particularly limited in South Asia, including in Bangladesh. In general, more evidence on the impact of interventions on reducing school dropout, or increasing school attendance, is available. For example, strategies such as aligning the school calendar, including examination schedules, with harvesting season, when children are likely to be involved in family labour, can significantly reduce rural dropout.⁵⁵ Similarly, there is substantial evidence on the positive impacts of the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme on girls' education, delayed age at marriage and autonomy, as well as the formal sector labour-force participation of women. Other studies have tested the positive impacts of conditional cash transfers combined with increased and targeted information to increase school attendance.⁵⁶ There is scope to expand rigorous impact evaluations of educational policies and programmes in South Asia, including in the context of Bangladesh, to directly measure the impacts of different strategies on a wide range of labour and work undertaken by children, often at the expense of leisure, schooling and well-being.

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Acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| BANBEIS | Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics |
| BBS | Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics |
| BDT | Bangladesh taka |
| BIHS | Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey |
| CLEP | Child Labour Elimination Policy |
| DPE | Directorate of Primary Education |
| ESP | Education Sector Plan |
| FGD | focus group discussion |
| HCR | Head-count ratio |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| LS | life story |
| MICS | Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey |
| NCLS | National Child Labour Survey |
| NEP | National Education Policy |
| NER | Net enrolment rate |
| NPAECL | National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour |
| TVET | Technical and vocational education training |
| UIS | Urban Informal Settlements Survey |

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Annex 1: Educational strategies linked to child labour

Table A.1: List of educational strategies linked to child labour

| Target | Category | Source |
|--|----------|--|
| Children | | |
| Make compulsory primary education free to all along with free learning materials | 1A/1B | NEP2010; ESP2020 |
| Introduce/expand merit-based scholarships | 1A/1B | NEP2010; CLEP2010; ESP2020; NPAECL2021 |
| Provide food/meals and healthcare within school | 1A/1B | |
| Prevent physical and mental torture of children, including stringent measures against the teasing of girls at schools | 1A/1B | NEP2010 |
| Families/Households | | |
| Offer cash or in-kind transfers for attendance | 1B | |
| Offer other relevant social protection intervention (e.g., housing, access to water, to childcare) for attendance | 1B | |
| Schools/Communities | | |
| Improve infrastructure and make it disability-friendly | 1C | NEP2010; ESP2020 |
| Increase use of distance learning methods to continue and expand the reach of education | 1C | ESP2020; NPAECL2021 |
| Develop a non-discriminating curriculum with attention to the multilingual ethnic children | 1C | NEP2010; ESP2020 |
| Recruit teachers with adequate pedagogical training; and improve the learning environment in the classes | 1C | NEP2010; ESP2020 |
| Increase TVET and technical institutions | 1C | NEP2010; CLEP2010; ESP2020; NPAECL2021 |
| Use remote and online learning methods to maximize the reach of TVET education | 1C/1D | ESP2020 |
| Create special provisions for working children; set-up mobile institutes in remote locations | 1C | NEP2010; CLEP2010; ESP2020; NPAECL2021 |
| Build skills and awareness beyond the traditional curriculum (e.g., life skills training, agency, child rights awareness, including on the financial and social benefits of education) | 1D | |
| Provide the children the choice of opting out of mainstream education and starting TVET | 1D | NEP2010 |
| Integrate ICT and TVET-based programmes into the curriculum | 1D | NEP2010; ESP2020 |
| Integrate TVET content into mainstream education to build professional skills | 1D | NEP2010; ESP2020 |
| Establish career guidance and job placement offices in the TVET institutes and create industry linkages with apprentice programmes for a smooth transition to work | 1D | NEP2010; ESP2020 |

Notes: Category is classified as follows: 1A 'increasing access', 1B 'reducing dropout', 1C 'improving quality', or 1D 'enhancing relevance'.

Abbreviations: CLEP = Child Labour Elimination Policy, ESP = Education Sector Plan, ICT = information and communications technology, NEP = National Education Policy, NPAECL = National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour, TVET = technical and vocational education training

Annex 2: Methodology: qualitative study of child labour

As part of this report, the Economic Research Group conducted complementary qualitative research to explore aspects of child labour and schooling that are difficult to capture through standard surveys.

The qualitative research enquired about the drivers of child work and child labour and documented children's perceptions, aspirations, and own living experience of work and – where relevant – education (including combining school and work). It also explored the characteristics of the worst forms of child labour, the role of marriage, and the implications of the COVID-19 crisis.

Fieldwork was conducted between June and September 2021. Four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each with between seven and nine participants. Topics of discussion included children's school experience, their dreams and aspirations, their work environment, constraints to securing gainful employment and what support they believe could help overcome those constraints.

The FGDs were supplemented by eight life story (LS) sessions of children who were identified based on gender, location, and nature of work. The LS approach captures detailed information from the respondents which is often difficult to gain from in-depth interviews and FGDs. Life stories are often longer sessions than in-depth interviews.

Ethical considerations

Participants in the FGDs and LS sessions included children and young adults, who had been involved in child labour. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Throughout the research process, careful consideration was given to the potential risks and benefits to the respondents, their families and wider communities in accordance with the research protocols of UNICEF. The privacy and confidentiality of all research participants were maintained. Recognizing the risks of COVID-19, activities were designed with health protocols and social distancing measures in mind.

The research design was submitted to an Institutional Review Board at the Institute of Health Economics of Dhaka University for ethical clearance, which was received on June 3rd, 2021.

Research took place in five locations selected to represent urban, peri-urban, and rural areas: Dhaka, Kishoreganj, Mymensingh, Panchagarh, and Sirajganj (at least one LS and one FGD was undertaken in each location, apart from Panchagarh, where two LS sessions were held, but no FGD. Table A2 shows the qualitative sample distribution by location and method of primary data collection, while Table A3 shows additional information for each study location.

Table A.2: Qualitative sample, by method of primary data collection

| Location | LS | FGD | FGD participants | Total number of participants |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Dhaka (Mohammadpur) | 1 | 1 | 8 | 9 |
| Kishoreganj (Bhairab) | 2 | 1 | 8 | 10 |
| Mymensingh | 1 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Panchagarh | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Sirajganj | 2 | 1 | 10 | 12 |
| Total | 08 | 04 | 33 | 41 |

Table A.3: Description of locations for the qualitative study

Dhaka represents an urban industry-based location. The upper head-count ratio (upper HCR) – the percentage of the population below the upper poverty line – is 10 per cent (BBS 2020). According to BBS 2013a, the main industries include ceramics, food and drink manufacturing, garments including jute mills and footwear, press and publications, pharmaceuticals, and sawmills. According to MICS 2019, the net attendance rate for primary education is 84.3 per cent and for lower secondary is 57.7 per cent.

Mymensingh reports an upper HCR of 22 per cent and is a predominantly agricultural economy (BBS 2013b). According to MICS 2019, the primary net attendance rate is 73.1 per cent and lower secondary is 45 per cent.

Sirajganj reports an upper HCR of 30.5 per cent. Though a predominantly agricultural district, around half of the weaving industries of Bangladesh are located in Sirajganj. According to BBS 2013c, there were 14,849 handloom factories in Sirajganj with around 104,795 operational looms. Net attendance rate for primary education is 81.7 per cent and for lower secondary 54.8 per cent.

Panchagarh reports an upper HCR of 26.3 per cent. Panchagarh is also an agricultural district, and the main industries are sugar, tea, rice mills, and sawmills (BBS 2013d). Primary and lower secondary education net attendance rates are 85.7 per cent and 69.2 per cent, respectively.

Kishoreganj reports an upper HCR of 53.5 per cent. The economy relies primarily on agriculture, though there are some industries, including textiles, cold storage, poultry feed production, fish hatcheries and dairy farms (<https://kishoreganj.gov.bd/en>).

Abbreviations: BBS 2013a = Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *District Statistics 2011 Dhaka*, Ministry of Planning; BBS 2013b = Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *District Statistics 2011 Mymensingh*, Ministry of Planning; BBS 2013c = Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *District Statistics 2011 Sirajganj*, Ministry of Planning; BBS 2013d = Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *District Statistics 2011 Panchagarh*, Ministry of Planning; BBS 2020 = Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Poverty Maps of Bangladesh 2016. Key Findings*, 2020; MICS = Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Children's Fund, *Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, District Summary Findings*.

For both LS and FGDs, researchers sought to achieve representation by gender, stream of education and nature of work. For LS, participants were aged between 15 and 17 years, while FGD participants were aged between 12 and 15 years. (Tables A4 and A5 show sociodemographic information for LS and FGD participant, respectively.) While the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the planned scope of the qualitative research, the findings still provide valuable insights into the experiences of children in different parts of the country, especially after the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Table A.4: Sociodemographic information of the LS respondents

| No. | Location | Gender | Age | Enrolment Status | Highest Level of Education | Type of Institution |
|------|--------------------|--------|-----|--------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| LS-1 | Urban/Metropolis | Male | 16 | Dropout | Primary | General |
| LS-2 | Peri-urban/Upazila | Male | 15 | Dropout | Secondary | General |
| LS-3 | Rural | Female | 16 | Currently Enrolled | Secondary | General |
| LS-4 | Rural | Male | 15 | Currently Enrolled | Secondary | General |
| LS-5 | Rural | Female | 14 | Currently Enrolled | Secondary | Aliya Madrasah |
| LS-6 | Rural | Female | 17 | Currently Enrolled | Secondary | TVET |
| LS-7 | Peri-urban/Upazila | Male | 17 | Dropout | Primary | General |
| LS-8 | Peri-urban/Upazila | Male | 15 | Dropout | Primary | General |

Note: TVET = technical and vocational education training

Table A.5: Socio-demographic information of the FGD respondents

| | | Rural | | Peri-urban | | Urban | | Total |
|---|---|-------|--------|------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| | | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | |
| Gender | | 0 | 12 | 14 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 35 |
| Enrolment Status | Currently enrolled | 0 | 12 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 18 |
| | Dropout | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 16 |
| | Never enrolled | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Type of Institution | General | 0 | 5 | 11 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 24 |
| | TVET | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Religious | 0 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Education Level | Pre-primary | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | Primary | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 12 |
| | Secondary | 0 | 11 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 20 |
| Highest Education Level of Sibling | Pre-primary | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | Primary | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| | Secondary | 0 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 18 |
| | Higher secondary | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | N/A | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Employment Status | Outside the household | 0 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 22 |
| | Within the household, non-farm business | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| | Within the household, farm work | 0 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| | Not working | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Note: TVET = technical and vocational education training

Annex 3. The international framework on child labour definition

The key international conventions on child work and child labour are the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and International Labour Organizations (ILO) Conventions 138 (on minimum age) and 182 (on the worst forms of child labour). The ILO also issued specific recommendations related to the above Conventions and provided further guidelines through the resolutions on child labour statistics adopted at the International Conferences of Labour Statisticians (e.g., ILO, Resolution to amend the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians Resolution concerning statistics on child labour, 20th ICLS, ILO, Geneva, 2018).

Based on the framework outlined by the above documents, **child work** includes activities by children under 18 years of age in economic production (formal and informal production, as well as activities inside or outside the household) and non-economic production (household chores, such as taking care of other children, cooking and cleaning).

Not all work done by children should be classified as 'child labour' that is to be targeted for elimination.

Child labour is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or
- interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

Whether or not particular forms of 'work' can be called 'child labour' depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed, and the objectives pursued by individual countries. International conventions distinguish two main forms of child labour: work below the minimum age and worst forms of child labour.

Work below the minimum age is regulated by ILO Convention 138, which specifies that the general minimum age for work shall be no lower than the end age of compulsory education, generally 15 years of age. However, national authorities can specify a lower minimum age of 14 years and may permit the employment of children aged 13–15 years if this is not likely to be harmful to a child's health or education (Article 7).

Worst forms of child labour are defined by ILO Convention 138 and Recommendation 190. It includes 'hazardous work' (such as work using dangerous tools or exposing children to extreme temperatures, or work for long hours) and the so called 'worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work'. The latter include all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as sale and trafficking of children, and the use, procuring and offering of children for illicit activities.

The above framework is operationalized by setting age-specific thresholds to define child labour.

Annex 4: School dropout and child work (MICS 2019)

Table A6: Prevalence of school dropout and child work, children aged 14–17 years (MICS 2019)

| | Urban | | | | Rural | | | |
|----------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| | Dropout | Work | Dropout | Work | Dropout | Work | Dropout | Work |
| Bagerhat | 0 | 49.32 | 35.19 | 29.34 | 27.23 | 48.75 | 18.4 | 28.63 |
| Bandarba | 24.41 | 67.8 | 32.8 | 0 | 44.31 | 55.84 | 1.04 | 16.19 |
| Barguna | 44.01 | 17.39 | 58.85 | 14.91 | 24.22 | 38.28 | 20.75 | 18.81 |
| Barishal | 20.84 | 42.72 | 10.31 | 6.15 | 18.85 | 44.17 | 13.65 | 6.51 |
| Bhola | 52.93 | 59.24 | 20.55 | 20.55 | 33.84 | 41.98 | 22.95 | 18.3 |
| Bogura | 12.28 | 16.26 | 14.58 | 4.66 | 9.17 | 46.69 | 16.03 | 11.98 |
| Brahmanb | 54.87 | 36.45 | 19.88 | 3.87 | 61.07 | 50.75 | 23.57 | 5.39 |
| Chandpur | 41.7 | 37.49 | 0 | 11.99 | 30.38 | 44.62 | 20.39 | 2.8 |
| Chattogr | 27.08 | 26.35 | 25.7 | 13.11 | 33.77 | 27.41 | 22.71 | 1.93 |
| Chuadang | 34.25 | 34.5 | 8.4 | 40.34 | 23.02 | 54.38 | 14.38 | 35.39 |
| Cumilla | 60.2 | 38.96 | 16.82 | 0 | 36.63 | 29.15 | 27.67 | 1.3 |
| Cox's Ba | 22.95 | 42.33 | 23.32 | 12.02 | 44.66 | 52.09 | 24.11 | 4.09 |
| Dhaka | 23.87 | 27.68 | 21.62 | 15.44 | 32.62 | 33.36 | 12.87 | 3.87 |
| Dinajpur | 18.93 | 71.12 | 17.88 | 17.88 | 11.49 | 60.52 | 13.55 | 38.38 |
| Faridpur | 21.48 | 32.1 | 5.76 | 11.49 | 46.99 | 65.62 | 17.72 | 12.7 |
| Feni | 26.76 | 21.08 | 14.01 | 10.27 | 25.74 | 26.88 | 18.13 | 2.64 |
| Gaibandh | 0 | 38.18 | 0 | 39.74 | 18.19 | 45.15 | 19.97 | 9.32 |
| Gazipur | 32.22 | 50.66 | 65.97 | 50.55 | 23.1 | 38.8 | 46.5 | 33.53 |
| Gopalgan | 6.73 | 0 | 9.59 | 0 | 33.38 | 16.23 | 17.77 | 0 |
| Habiganj | 27.57 | 39.61 | 38.01 | 0 | 34.31 | 55.44 | 28.73 | 4.8 |
| Joypurha | 34.76 | 9.62 | 12.23 | 6.81 | 20.94 | 50.04 | 24.25 | 30.15 |
| Jamalpur | 21.88 | 35.27 | 7.87 | 7.87 | 15.81 | 34.8 | 24.55 | 15.7 |
| Jashore | 17.55 | 23.3 | 25 | 16.9 | 24.94 | 44.26 | 11.53 | 18.68 |
| Jhalokat | 18.63 | 32.11 | 7.46 | 23.12 | 12.23 | 16.54 | 14.42 | 4.91 |
| Jhenaida | 24.59 | 35.67 | 4.76 | 39.12 | 20.55 | 64.58 | 10.18 | 44.97 |
| Khagrach | 49.68 | 58.46 | 30.2 | 25.75 | 49.7 | 70.54 | 27.6 | 38.42 |
| Khulna | 14.85 | 18.17 | 19.77 | 8.71 | 24 | 41.23 | 20.31 | 12.41 |
| Kishoreg | 51.34 | 70.47 | 16.31 | 16.31 | 26.19 | 53.35 | 10.82 | 12.36 |
| Kurigram | 23.15 | 72.57 | 11.76 | 66.33 | 31.22 | 74.35 | 11.52 | 33.16 |
| Kushtia | 13.47 | 34.34 | 4.81 | 34.62 | 36.93 | 71.37 | 13.32 | 27.8 |
| Lakshmip | 51.21 | 28.5 | 31.49 | 3.18 | 40.13 | 51.21 | 26.25 | 7.26 |
| Lalmonir | 36.44 | 43.38 | 0 | 34.23 | 30.47 | 65.46 | 7.55 | 30.34 |
| Madaripu | 12.32 | 6.16 | 25.76 | 0 | 31.85 | 12.08 | 12.51 | 0 |
| Magura | 26.11 | 34.47 | 0 | 8.26 | 28.44 | 60.22 | 21.04 | 27.9 |
| Manikgan | 0 | 0 | 0 | 35.19 | 15.55 | 33.43 | 14.26 | 17.65 |
| Meherpur | 15.83 | 22.09 | 0 | 8.58 | 23.93 | 47.65 | 13.48 | 32.14 |
| Maulviba | 41.04 | 32.51 | 14.66 | 0 | 40.71 | 45.17 | 25.29 | 2.82 |
| Munshiga | 33.35 | 17.04 | 17.68 | 0 | 25.33 | 18.61 | 21.5 | 1.97 |
| Mymensin | 18.16 | 18.15 | 15.85 | 15.85 | 44.51 | 53.71 | 27.17 | 19.07 |
| Naogaon | 50.23 | 49.35 | 0 | 0 | 21.75 | 54.76 | 17.01 | 14.76 |

| | Urban | | | | Rural | | | |
|-------------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| | Dropout | Work | Dropout | Work | Dropout | Work | Dropout | Work |
| Narail | 39.57 | 24.88 | 9.33 | 23.73 | 38.23 | 59.99 | 19.14 | 31.01 |
| Narayanganj | 55.21 | 21.6 | 52.48 | 12.69 | 42.22 | 30.01 | 42.73 | 13.53 |
| Narsingd | 43.77 | 48.83 | 33.44 | 15.92 | 47.01 | 41.16 | 19.79 | 7.72 |
| Natore | 36.91 | 48.01 | 16.39 | 5.7 | 24.97 | 50.48 | 32.49 | 13.5 |
| Chapai N | 17.77 | 38.15 | 29.91 | 15.76 | 49.03 | 61.37 | 33.16 | 7.99 |
| Netrokon | 24.7 | 36.14 | 0 | 0 | 29.5 | 63.94 | 32.2 | 18.63 |
| Nilphama | 42.67 | 39.37 | 22.29 | 31.15 | 33.2 | 42.95 | 13.89 | 15.36 |
| Noakhali | 35.35 | 41.75 | 39.49 | 11.66 | 35.68 | 43.74 | 18.58 | 5.17 |
| Pabna | 8.46 | 21.06 | 3.6 | 0 | 31.22 | 55.94 | 18.82 | 20.8 |
| Panchaga | 57.72 | 85.96 | 12.25 | 12.25 | 20.09 | 47.69 | 17.73 | 15.47 |
| Patuakha | 17.05 | 62.14 | 8.85 | 0 | 27.25 | 34.46 | 9.09 | 11.5 |
| Pirojpur | 18.35 | 13.93 | 3.86 | 0 | 36.43 | 26.26 | 20.72 | 5.91 |
| Rajshahi | 12.05 | 35.25 | 18.86 | 2.45 | 46.49 | 69.52 | 25.45 | 12.5 |
| Rajbari | 39.7 | 47.96 | 5.66 | 5.35 | 32.61 | 52.93 | 16.59 | 12.01 |
| Rangamat | 13.01 | 32.41 | 23.05 | 24.15 | 37.63 | 53.47 | 22.28 | 28.97 |
| Rangpur | 13.37 | 42.97 | 34.01 | 4.86 | 17.92 | 52.28 | 14.77 | 26.12 |
| Shariatp | 39.76 | 42.37 | 17.89 | 0 | 31.85 | 43.89 | 15.61 | 6.64 |
| Satkhira | 48.38 | 66.28 | 18.11 | 18.11 | 23.13 | 38.99 | 20.2 | 21.68 |
| Sirajgan | 37.31 | 18.81 | 26.1 | 20 | 23.15 | 62.8 | 30.4 | 30.41 |
| Sherpur | 29.98 | 29.98 | 20.5 | 6.83 | 26.19 | 27.69 | 2.14 | 6.77 |
| Sunamgan | 26.22 | 20.98 | 2.78 | 6.25 | 48.96 | 54.04 | 43.17 | 3.2 |
| Sylhet | 23.82 | 12.33 | 2.45 | 2.45 | 44.68 | 28.6 | 40.46 | 6.17 |
| Tangail | 14.16 | 23.56 | 31.57 | 0 | 21.65 | 42.01 | 26.91 | 15.85 |
| Thakurga | 37.84 | 31.64 | 14.62 | 0 | 28.17 | 34.36 | 14.86 | 5.44 |

Source: Authors' estimates based Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Children's Fund, *Progotir Pathay, Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Findings Report*, Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 2019.

Annex 5: School dropout and child work (NCLS)

Table A7: Prevalence of school dropout and child work, children aged 14–17 years (NCLS 2013, rural)

| District | Male | | Female | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Currently enrolled and do work | Drop out and do work | Currently enrolled and do work | Drop out and do work |
| Bagerhat | 8.98 | 79.10 | 4.86 | 32.69 |
| Bandarban | 23.47 | 31.65 | 24.67 | 100.00 |
| Barguna | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Barisal | 5.14 | 49.09 | 7.74 | 25.75 |
| Bhola | 6.65 | 57.07 | 0.00 | 22.69 |
| Bogra | 3.06 | 50.79 | 0.00 | 42.14 |
| Brahmanbaria | 40.20 | 86.99 | 16.93 | 52.02 |
| Chandpur | 3.71 | 49.02 | 0.00 | 46.25 |
| Chittagong | 6.48 | 62.61 | 27.18 | 66.61 |
| Chuadanga | 6.80 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Comilla | 5.21 | 68.26 | 2.72 | 52.21 |
| Cox's bazar | 22.03 | 66.57 | 2.66 | 47.89 |
| Dhaka | 10.89 | 79.39 | 30.75 | 84.36 |
| Dinajpur | 3.38 | 55.09 | 0.00 | 43.18 |
| Faridpur | 21.16 | 80.15 | 0.00 | 40.31 |
| Feni | 0.00 | 61.39 | 10.00 | 32.65 |
| Gaibandha | 2.67 | 55.73 | 0.00 | 22.11 |
| Gazipur | 2.80 | 53.91 | 35.39 | 79.77 |
| Gopalganj | 10.88 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 24.65 |
| Habiganj | 13.34 | 82.00 | 0.00 | 44.00 |
| Joypurhat | 0.00 | 59.97 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Jamalpur | 6.74 | 83.31 | 11.54 | 46.93 |
| Jessore | 0.00 | 69.73 | 0.00 | 44.87 |
| Jhalokati | 13.13 | 68.26 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Jhenaidah | 0.00 | 58.55 | 0.00 | 50.60 |
| Khagrachhari | 0.00 | 75.70 | 0.00 | 27.34 |
| Khulna | 0.00 | 30.40 | 0.00 | 19.93 |
| Kishorganj | 4.62 | 67.72 | 0.00 | 28.33 |
| Kurigram | 13.58 | 74.11 | 0.00 | 32.87 |
| Kushtia | 13.03 | 47.69 | 3.41 | 82.71 |
| Lakshmipur | 34.47 | 59.48 | 5.40 | 53.56 |
| Lalmonirhat | 9.83 | 70.66 | 0.00 | 43.07 |
| Madaripur | 9.35 | 56.48 | 0.00 | 25.88 |
| Magura | 7.26 | 84.42 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Manikganj | 4.02 | 54.63 | 16.04 | 0.00 |
| Meherpur | 10.92 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 50.00 |
| Maulvibazar | 4.53 | 63.41 | 1.05 | 58.60 |
| Munshiganj | 20.24 | 38.07 | 6.05 | 0.00 |
| Mymensingh | 14.50 | 76.07 | 6.79 | 66.01 |
| Naogaon | 5.24 | 65.66 | 3.21 | 71.48 |
| Narail | 12.30 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 29.44 |

| District | Male | | Female | |
|-------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Currently enrolled and do work | Drop out and do work | Currently enrolled and do work | Drop out and do work |
| Narayanganj | 25.00 | 70.82 | 14.70 | 87.69 |
| Narsingdi | 18.57 | 81.80 | 4.59 | 50.68 |
| Natore | 18.57 | 79.81 | 3.39 | 100.00 |
| Nawabganj | 6.80 | 42.87 | 0.00 | 27.02 |
| Netrakona | 0.00 | 55.13 | 2.17 | 38.98 |
| Nilphamari | 5.55 | 85.00 | 5.12 | 58.49 |
| Noakhali | 15.01 | 65.56 | 0.00 | 21.44 |
| Pabna | 9.44 | 85.64 | 2.88 | 54.51 |
| Panchagarh | 14.43 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 21.19 |
| Patuakhali | 6.14 | 25.46 | 0.00 | 40.59 |
| Pirojpur | 13.25 | 92.09 | 16.53 | 100.00 |
| Rajshahi | 20.00 | 63.47 | 0.00 | 46.79 |
| Rajbari | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Rangamati | 8.32 | 74.22 | 5.52 | 59.45 |
| Rangpur | 2.36 | 74.48 | 3.66 | 46.49 |
| Shariatpur | 3.92 | 58.10 | 0.00 | 16.36 |
| Satkhira | 12.22 | 56.01 | 12.79 | 63.21 |
| Sirajganj | 12.04 | 87.33 | 3.04 | 48.63 |
| Sherpur | 17.46 | 52.42 | 4.09 | 33.63 |
| Sunamganj | 14.07 | 73.61 | 1.75 | 35.80 |
| Sylhet | 11.52 | 64.99 | 1.33 | 40.66 |
| Tangail | 16.93 | 90.37 | 4.06 | 36.52 |
| Thakurgaon | 4.85 | 88.23 | 0.00 | 12.20 |

Source: Authors' estimates based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and International Labour Organization (ILO), *Provisional Report, National Child Labour Survey Bangladesh (NCLS) 2013*, BBS and ILO, 2013.

Table A8: Prevalence of school dropout and child work, children aged 14–17 years (NCLS 2013, urban)

| District | Male | | Female | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Currently enrolled and do work | Drop out and do work | Currently enrolled and do work | Drop out and do work |
| Bagerhat | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 65.20 |
| Bandarban | 0.00 | 50.02 | 34.13 | 0.00 |
| Barguna | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 46.86 |
| Barisal | 4.19 | 100.00 | 2.07 | 0.00 |
| Bhola | 9.21 | 36.22 | 0.00 | 39.81 |
| Bogra | 6.45 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Brahmanbaria | 56.02 | 100.00 | 6.97 | 51.06 |
| Chandpur | 0.00 | 92.93 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Chittagong | 0.00 | 53.58 | 0.00 | 52.72 |
| Chuadanga | 0.00 | 68.69 | 4.81 | 0.00 |
| Comilla | 2.52 | 41.00 | 2.40 | 18.98 |
| Cox's bazar | 5.02 | 58.91 | 9.47 | 16.07 |
| Dhaka | 19.78 | 76.01 | 9.80 | 63.20 |
| Dinajpur | 5.32 | 60.29 | 1.98 | 81.27 |
| Faridpur | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Feni | 7.43 | 51.37 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Gaibandha | 0.00 | 48.75 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Gazipur | 0.00 | 75.33 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Gopalganj | 0.00 | 66.67 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Habiganj | 7.01 | 37.69 | 2.22 | 45.20 |
| Joypurhat | 9.68 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Jamalpur | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 58.92 |
| Jessore | 0.00 | 52.18 | 0.00 | 24.82 |
| Jhalokati | 0.00 | 28.86 | 7.58 | 0.00 |
| Jhenaidah | 5.09 | 65.61 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Khagrachhari | 15.80 | 100.00 | 12.42 | 60.72 |
| Khulna | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Kishorganj | 10.54 | 56.80 | 0.00 | 37.88 |
| Kurigram | 3.03 | 56.96 | 0.00 | 32.04 |
| Kushtia | 8.19 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Lakshmipur | 34.97 | 61.72 | 37.32 | 60.34 |
| Lalmonirhat | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 75.51 |
| Madaripur | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Magura | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 26.79 |
| Manikganj | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Meherpur | 20.28 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Maulvibazar | 11.60 | 78.37 | 0.00 | 63.24 |
| Munshiganj | 0.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 66.66 |
| Mymensingh | 2.61 | 73.82 | 8.20 | 33.58 |
| Naogaon | 0.00 | 0.00 | 10.33 | 17.67 |
| Narail | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

| District | Male | | Female | |
|-------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Currently enrolled and do work | Drop out and do work | Currently enrolled and do work | Drop out and do work |
| Narayanganj | 15.17 | 56.88 | 5.57 | 33.05 |
| Narsingdi | 24.33 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| Natore | 4.87 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Nawabganj | 8.30 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 16.86 |
| Netrakona | 0.00 | 100.00 | 50.00 | 35.10 |
| Nilphamari | 0.00 | 100.00 | 6.64 | 35.89 |
| Noakhali | 6.95 | 67.77 | 25.54 | 25.00 |
| Pabna | 0.00 | 40.80 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Panchagarh | 30.79 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Patuakhali | 16.97 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 70.37 |
| Pirojpur | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 28.02 |
| Rajshahi | 6.65 | 100.00 | 10.75 | 38.28 |
| Rajbari | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Rangamati | 0.00 | 0.00 | 14.97 | 100.00 |
| Rangpur | 0.00 | 33.17 | 3.52 | 30.88 |
| Shariatpur | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Satkhira | 0.00 | 68.53 | 0.00 | 24.59 |
| Sirajganj | 4.60 | 66.67 | 0.00 | 76.08 |
| Sherpur | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Sunamganj | 8.03 | 46.84 | 10.09 | 33.97 |
| Sylhet | 9.79 | 17.12 | 0.00 | 7.86 |
| Tangail | 0.00 | 69.63 | 21.08 | 49.42 |
| Thakurgaon | 10.68 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

Source: Authors' estimates based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and International Labour Organization (ILO), *Provisional Report, National Child Labour Survey Bangladesh (NCLS) 2013*, BBS and ILO, 2013.

Annex 6: Alternative education provided by the Government of Bangladesh during COVID-19

Table A9: Alternative education provided by the Government of Bangladesh for public schools Grades 6 to 12 during COVID-19

| Period | Alternative schooling under existing formal education |
|-------------------|--|
| March 15, 2020 | Schools closure announcement March 17–March 31, 2020 ¹ |
| March 29, 2020 | First TV-based class airs for Grade 6 to 9 students in Shangshad TV ² |
| April 5, 2020 | Announcement of the launch of “GhoreBosheShikhi”, the subject-wise teaching initiative in Shangshad TV from April 7, 2020 ³ |
| April–May, 2020 | General Holiday extended to April 14; then extended to April 25; later extended to May 5; later to May 16; and finally, to May 31 ⁴ |
| 24 June, 2020 | Government launches ‘Virtual Class’ for university students ⁵ |
| July–August, 2020 | Online classes start in various schools. A radio programme named “GhoreBosheShikhi” was broadcast from 12 August 2020 |
| November 1, 2020 | Assignment starts under Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education ⁶ |
| April 25, 2021 | Government launches ‘Boithok’ a video conferencing application ⁷ |
| July 9, 2021 | Announcement of temporary closure of ‘GhoreBosheShikhi’ for Eid-UI-Azha from July 18 to July 29, 2021 ⁸ |
| July 25, 2021 | Announcement of the suspension of assignments of 2022 SSC, HSC candidates until further notice ⁹ |

Notes:

- [1. <www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/coronavirus-scare-all-educational-institutions-shut-till-march-31-1881658>](http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/coronavirus-scare-all-educational-institutions-shut-till-march-31-1881658)
- Biswas, K., Asaduzzaman, T.M., Evans, D.K., Fehrlar, S., Ramachandran, D., Sabarwal, S., ‘TV-Based Learning in Bangladesh: Is it Reaching Students?’, World Bank, July 2020,
- [3. <www.dpe.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dpe.portal.gov.bd/notices/30a58a2e_57d5_4013_9e89_658b72adec0d/Letter_19.pdf>](http://www.dpe.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dpe.portal.gov.bd/notices/30a58a2e_57d5_4013_9e89_658b72adec0d/Letter_19.pdf)
- [4. <www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/06/28/timeline-government-s-efforts-to-curb-covid-spread>](http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/06/28/timeline-government-s-efforts-to-curb-covid-spread)
- [5. <www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/education/2020/06/24/govt-inaugurates-virtual-class-for-online-education-in-universities>](http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/education/2020/06/24/govt-inaugurates-virtual-class-for-online-education-in-universities)
- Instead of taking annual examination, assignments were provided to the students of Grades 6–9 to identify students’ learning shortcomings so that authorities can take remedial steps in those areas. See [6. <www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/assignments-class-6-9-students-start-nov-1-1983217>](http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/assignments-class-6-9-students-start-nov-1-1983217)
- [7. <https://unb.com.bd/category/Bangladesh/bangladeshi-video-conferencing-app-boithok-launched/68101>](https://unb.com.bd/category/Bangladesh/bangladeshi-video-conferencing-app-boithok-launched/68101)
- [8. <www.dpe.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dpe.portal.gov.bd/notices/52ed694f_82e6_48f9_a647_12f95d5a6a7c/12.%20TV%20Routine%20\(11-15%20July%202021\).pdf>](http://www.dpe.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dpe.portal.gov.bd/notices/52ed694f_82e6_48f9_a647_12f95d5a6a7c/12.%20TV%20Routine%20(11-15%20July%202021).pdf)
- [9. <www.thedailystar.net/youth/education/news/assignments-2022-ssc-hsc-candidates-suspended-till-further-notice-dshe-2136651>](http://www.thedailystar.net/youth/education/news/assignments-2022-ssc-hsc-candidates-suspended-till-further-notice-dshe-2136651)

Abbreviations: HSC = Higher School Certificate, SSC = Secondary School Certificate

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