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Reforming Child Protection Law in Bangladesh: A Case for a Comprehensive Child Protection Act

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This report does not constitute case-specific legal advice, judicial opinion, or government policy. It is intended to support informed discussion on child protection law reform in Bangladesh.

Large language model systems were used as editorial and drafting-support tools for language refinement, structural organisation, and consistency review. All legal analysis, source selection, factual verification, recommendations, and final editorial decisions remain the responsibility of Constitution Watchdog.

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Executive Summary

Bangladesh has built an important foundation for children's rights through its Constitution, accession to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the enactment of the Children Act 2013. Yet in 2026, that framework does not fully match the scale and complexity of the risks faced by children in street situations, hazardous child labour, sexual abuse, online exploitation, incomplete birth registration and climate displacement.

This report argues that Bangladesh now needs a modern, integrated Child Protection Act. The new Act should recognise children as rights-holders; address children in street situations, hazardous child labour, sexual exploitation and online abuse; link birth registration to protection; and build an institutional architecture capable of enforcing these rights.

The analysis draws on the National Child Labour Survey 2022 (NCLS 2022), UNICEF/BBS MICS data (including preliminary MICS 2025 findings), the BBS/UNICEF Survey on Street Children 2022, empirical research on hazardous child labour, doctrinal work on Bangladesh's child-protection law, and international legal instruments.

Key findings

1. Child labour remains extensive despite some progress on hazardous work. NCLS 2022 reports approximately 39.96 million children aged 5–17, of whom 3.54 million are working (8.9 per cent), 1.78 million are in child labour (4.4 per cent) and about 1.07 million are in hazardous child labour (2.7 per cent). Hazardous child labour has declined compared to 2013, but the absolute number remains above one million.
2. MICS 2025 indicates a rising child labour share and modest gains in birth registration. Preliminary UNICEF/BBS MICS 2025 data indicate that 9.2 per cent of children aged 5–17 are in child labour, up from 6.8 per cent in 2019, and that under-five birth registration stands at 59 per cent, with 47 per cent holding a birth certificate. These figures do not replace NCLS 2022 but confirm that child labour remains a serious, possibly worsening problem and that birth registration is still incomplete.
3. Hazardous work causes significant health harm. Médecins Sans Frontières data from occupational health clinics in a peri-urban area of Dhaka between 2014 and 2023 show that children work in all prohibited informal-sector

categories; almost all report operating machinery, and 7.5 per cent of consultations are for work-related injuries.

4. Children in street situations form a very large population but have never been fully enumerated. The BBS/UNICEF Survey on Street Children 2022 is a hotspot and sample-based survey, not a nationwide census. It cannot be used as a national headcount. UNICEF's 2024 analytic work, which triangulates multiple sources, concludes that the number of children in street situations in Bangladesh is likely in the millions. There is no official BBS census of this population.
5. Violence, abuse and exploitation are pervasive among child labourers and street-connected children. Expert informant research and doctrinal analyses highlight widespread physical, emotional and sexual maltreatment of child labourers and children in vulnerable settings, with limited detection, reporting and redress.
6. Birth registration remains incomplete and often late. A 2020 civil-registration study found national birth registration around 54 per cent, with only 4.5 per cent of births registered within the 45-day legal timeframe. Preliminary MICS 2025 figures show improvement but still fall short of universal coverage. Lack of registration undermines enforcement of age-based protections against labour, early marriage and criminal justice misuse.
7. The Children Act 2013 is a major advance but not a comprehensive protection code. The Act created Children's Courts, child help desks, child development centres and national and district child welfare boards and incorporated the best-interests principle. Implementation studies show partial coverage and significant capacity gaps. The statute is primarily oriented around juveniles in conflict with the law; it does not provide a full protection framework for children in street situations, labour, or abuse.
8. Laws on child sexual abuse and online exploitation are fragmented. Sexual offences against children are prosecuted under the Nari-O-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain 2000, Penal Code provisions, trafficking law and the evolving cyber framework (ICT Act 2006, Digital Security Act 2018, Cyber Security Act 2023, Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 and Cyber Security Act 2026). None provides a comprehensive, child-centred sexual-offence code equivalent to India's POCSO.
9. Institutional responsibilities are fragmented and under-coordinated. MoWCA, the Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare, law enforcement, education and local

government all share responsibility for aspects of child protection. No single statutory authority has the mandate and powers to coordinate, monitor and compel compliance.

10. Data gaps impede rational policy. NCLS 2022 and MICS provide strong evidence on child labour and hazardous work, but Bangladesh lacks a regular national survey on children in street situations, child sexual abuse and child protection outcomes. The hotspot-based 2022 street-children survey is an important step but not a full enumeration.

Key recommendations

1. Enact a comprehensive Child Protection Act of Bangladesh that places children in need of care and protection, including children in street situations, at the centre of the legal framework.
2. Create a National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) as an independent statutory body with powers to coordinate, monitor and enforce child protection across government.
3. Establish District Child Protection Committees (DCPCs) in all districts with statutory mandates for case management, coordination, and emergency response.
4. Establish Child Protection Courts to handle care, protection, emergency and rehabilitation orders, and appeals, with child-friendly procedures and state-funded legal representation.
5. Introduce a mandatory reporting regime for defined professionals and institutions with clear thresholds, timelines, immunity for good-faith reports, protection from retaliation, and penalties for wilful non-reporting.
6. Adopt a dedicated, child-centred sexual-offences framework, either as a stand-alone statute or as a detailed chapter in the Child Protection Act, to address offline and online abuse, grooming, and child sexual abuse material, with child-friendly procedures.
7. Define “child in street situation” and “child in need of care and protection” in statute and create specific offences for the exploitation of children in street situations.
8. Create a statutory right to rehabilitation for children in need of care and protection, including access to food, shelter, health care, education, substance-use treatment, psychosocial support and reintegration services.

9. Strengthen birth registration duties and linkage to protection, while ensuring no child is denied emergency services or basic education because they are unregistered.
10. Mandate periodic national child-protection surveys, including a module on children in street situations, and require parliamentary debate on the findings.

Part I: Constitutional and International Obligations

1.1 Constitutional guarantees

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh provides the normative foundation for child protection¹:

- **Article 15:** Basic necessities and social security.
- **Article 17:** Universal, mass-oriented education.
- **Article 18:** Raising the level of nutrition and public health.
- **Article 27:** Equality before law.
- **Article 28(4):** Special provision for the advancement of women and children.
- **Article 31:** Right to protection of law.
- **Article 32:** Right to life and personal liberty.

These provisions authorise and require positive measures to protect children from exploitation, neglect and abuse and to secure their rights to health and education. Without implementing legislation, institutions and budgets, however, they remain aspirational.

1.2 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Bangladesh ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990² and is bound by its provisions. Key articles include:

- **Article 2:** Non-discrimination.
- **Article 3:** Best interests of the child as a primary consideration.
- **Article 6:** Right to life, survival and development.
- **Article 12:** Right to be heard.
- **Article 19:** Protection from all forms of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or exploitation.
- **Article 24:** Right to the highest attainable standard of health.
- **Article 28:** Right to education.
- **Article 32:** Protection from economic exploitation and hazardous work.

1. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, arts 15, 17, 18, 27, 28(4), 31 and 32.
2. Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3.

- **Articles 34–36:** Protection from sexual exploitation, trafficking and other forms of exploitation.
- **Article 39:** Right to physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration.

UN treaty bodies have consistently emphasised that fulfilling these obligations requires comprehensive domestic frameworks integrating law, policy, institutions and budgets.³

1.3 ILO child labour conventions

Bangladesh has also accepted the core ILO conventions on child labour:

ILO Convention No 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Bangladesh ratified C182⁴ and it has been in force nationally since 12 March 2001, as recorded in ILO NORMLEX. C182 requires immediate and effective measures to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

ILO Convention No 138 on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment. Bangladesh ratified ILO Convention No 138⁵ on Minimum Age by depositing its instrument of ratification with the ILO on 22 March 2022. ILO NORMLEX lists the Convention as in force for Bangladesh, confirming that Bangladesh is now bound by C138's requirements on minimum age for employment.

Taken together, UNCRC and ILO obligations create a clear expectation that Bangladesh will:

- Prohibit and eliminate worst forms of child labour.
- Set and enforce age-based thresholds for employment.
- Protect children from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect through enforceable domestic law and institutions.

3. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No 5: General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc CRC/GC/2003/5 (27 November 2003); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No 13: The Right of the Child to Freedom from All Forms of Violence, UN Doc CRC/C/GC/13 (18 April 2011).

4. International Labour Organization, 'Ratifications for Bangladesh' (NORMLEX) <https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103500> accessed 7 June 2026.

5. *ibid*

Part II: Current Situation – Latest Verified Evidence

2.1 Child labour and hazardous child labour

The National Child Labour Survey 2022 (NCLS 2022), released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, is the most recent dedicated national survey of child labour. For children aged 5–17:⁶

Indicator	2013	2022 (provisional)
Total children (5–17)	39,652,384	39,964,005
Working children	3,450,369 (8.7%)	3,536,927 (8.9%)
Children in child labour	1,698,894 (4.3%)	1,776,097 (4.4%)
Children in hazardous child labour	1,280,195 (3.2%)	1,068,212 (2.7%)

BBS reports a modest rise in the proportion of children in child labour and a fall in hazardous child labour.⁷ In absolute terms, however, 3.54 million children are working, 1.78 million are in child labour, and just over 1.07 million are in hazardous child labour.

A cross-sectional analysis of Bangladesh MICS Round 6 confirms that hazardous child labour is associated with poorer psychosocial functioning and higher school dropout, underscoring that even non-fatal work has significant developmental costs.

MICS 2025 preliminary findings

NCLS 2022 remains the latest dedicated national child labour survey. Preliminary results from MICS 2025⁸, however, provide newer child-protection indicators:

- 9.2 per cent of children aged 5–17 are in child labour, up from 6.8 per cent in MICS 2019.
- Under-five birth registration coverage is 59 per cent, with 47 per cent of children holding a birth certificate.

These figures are preliminary and subject to revision in the final MICS 2025 report. They should be interpreted alongside NCLS 2022 rather than as a replacement. Differences in methodology mean the figures are not directly comparable, but both

6. Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, ‘Hazardous Child Labour Declined Significantly in the Country: BBS’ (BSS, 19 July 2023) <<https://www.bssnews.net/news/137211>> accessed 7 June 2026.

7. *ibid*

8. UNICEF Bangladesh, ‘1.2 Million More Children Are Subjected to Child Labor in Bangladesh’ (UNICEF Bangladesh, 16 November 2025) <<https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/12-million-more-children-are-subjected-child-labor-bangladesh>> accessed 7 June 2026.

sources confirm that child labour remains extensive and that birth registration is incomplete.

2.2 Children in street situations

Bangladesh has no official nationwide census or full enumeration of children in street situations. The most significant data effort to date is the BBS/UNICEF Survey on Street Children 2022, which used a hotspot and sample-based methodology⁹, identifying key locations in major urban centres and surveying children there. It is explicitly not a national census and should not be treated as producing a national headcount of all street-connected children.

The 2022 survey provides detailed information on the living conditions, violence exposure and service access of the sampled children, and is an important evidence base for policy design. However, its hotspot design means it cannot safely be extrapolated into a single national figure.

UNICEF's subsequent analytic work¹⁰, including its 2024 report on children in street situations, triangulates this and other data and concludes that the number of children in street situations in Bangladesh is likely in the millions. UNICEF presents this as an estimate derived from multiple sources, not as an official BBS figure.

For legal and policy purposes, the key points are:

- Children in street situations form a very large population measured in millions, not thousands, according to UNICEF's analytic work.
- There is no BBS-style census of this group.
- The lack of an official enumeration is itself a structural problem, as it hampers rational resource allocation and accountability.

2.3 Violence, abuse, exploitation and sexual abuse

A 2023 qualitative study of key informants on child labourers in Bangladesh emphasises widespread maltreatment¹¹, often perpetrated by family members,

9. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF Bangladesh, Survey on Street Children 2022 (BBS and UNICEF, 2023); UNICEF Bangladesh, 'UNICEF: New Report Details Shocking Deprivation of Children Living on the Street' (UNICEF Bangladesh, 10 April 2023) <<https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/unicef-new-report-details-shocking-deprivation-children-living-street>> accessed 7 June 2026.

10. UNICEF Bangladesh, Children Living in Street Situations in Bangladesh 2024: A Qualitative Study (UNICEF Bangladesh, March 2024) <<https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/reports/children-living-street-situations-bangladesh-2024>> accessed 7 June 2026.

11. MA Ahad and others, 'Maltreatment of Child Labourers in Bangladesh' (2023) 9 Heliyon e20676 <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10558293/>> accessed 7 June 2026.

employers and co-workers, and highlights the scale and severity of violence faced by child labourers.

Doctrinal and empirical work on child abuse and legal protection shows:

- Child abuse in Bangladesh remains common across socio-economic contexts.
- Reporting is low, and institutional responses are fragmented and often insensitive to children's needs.
- Legislative safeguards are extensive on paper but weakened by poor coordination, insufficient data and weak accountability.

Evidence from case-based analyses and child-rights reports suggests that children in street situations and those engaged in unregulated labour are at particular risk of sexual exploitation, including rape, coercion into transactional sex and harassment.

2.4 Substance use and health vulnerability

The MSF study of occupational health clinics in Dhaka documents severe health risks for child labourers, including non-fatal injuries, musculoskeletal disorders and skin conditions, with many children reporting residence within their workplaces.¹² Global reviews of street-connected children indicate high rates of inhalant and other substance use as coping mechanisms; Bangladesh-specific qualitative work is consistent with these patterns.

2.5 Education exclusion

NCLS 2022, MICS and smaller studies converge on several points:

- Children engaged in labour, especially hazardous work, have higher school drop-out and lower completion rates.
- Street-connected and slum-working children in Dhaka and other cities often have no school enrolment at all or leave school very early.

2.6 Birth registration and legal identity

The Births and Deaths Registration Act 2004¹³ requires births to be registered within a prescribed period, but coverage and timeliness remain limited.

A 2020 study on civil registration found that national birth registration coverage was around 54 per cent, with only 4.5 per cent of births registered within the 45-day

12. Giovanni Caleo and others, 'A Public Health Wound: Health and Work among Children Engaged in the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the Informal Sector in Dhaka, Bangladesh' (2025) BMC Public Health <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12001455/>> doi: 10.1186/s12889-025-22483-z, accessed 7 June 2026.

13. Births and Deaths Registration Act 2004 (Bangladesh).

legal timeframe.¹⁴ Preliminary MICS 2025 findings suggest that under-five birth registration has improved to 59 per cent, with 47 per cent of children having a birth certificate, but this still falls short of universal coverage.

Lack of registration undermines:

- Enforcement of minimum age for work.
- Enforcement of minimum age for marriage.
- Protection from being treated as an adult in criminal proceedings.
- Access to services requiring proof of age or identity.

2.7 Climate displacement and child vulnerability

Global and regional evidence consistently identify Bangladesh as one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, with regular river erosion, flooding and cyclones.¹⁵ Displacement pushes families into informal settlements and urban slums, where children face heightened risks of child labour, street life and trafficking.

2.8 Data gaps

Despite improved data on child labour and hazardous work through NCLS 2022 and MICS, there is:

- No systematic national enumeration of children in street situations.
- No regular national survey of child sexual abuse prevalence.
- Limited disaggregated data on climate-displaced children.

A modern child protection regime must address these gaps through statutory data obligations.

Part III: Current Legal Framework in Bangladesh

This section summarises the main statutes relevant to child protection, based on doctrinal and empirical analyses.

3.1 Children Act 2013

14. Tazeen Tahsina and others, 'Birth and Death Notifications for Improving Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Bangladesh: Pilot Exploratory Study' (2022) 8(8) JMIR Public Health and Surveillance e25735 <<https://publichealth.jmir.org/2022/8/e25735/>> accessed 7 June 2026.

15. World Bank Group, Bangladesh Country Climate and Development Report (World Bank, 2022); UNICEF, Learning to Live in a Changing Climate: The Impact of Climate Change on Children in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2016).

The Children Act 2013¹⁶ replaced the earlier Children Act 1974 and is the primary statute on juvenile justice and some aspects of child care and protection. It:

- Defines a child as any person under 18 years.
- Establishes Children's Courts for cases involving children in conflict with the law.
- Requires child help desks in police stations.
- Provides for Child Development Centres (CDCs) and institutional care.
- Creates a National Child Welfare Board and District Child Welfare Boards to coordinate child welfare issues.
- Incorporates the best interests of the child as a guiding principle and sets out child-friendly procedures.

Empirical studies find:

- Partial implementation of Children's Courts and child help desks.
- Resource constraints and capacity gaps in CDCs and probation services.
- Persistent problems of arbitrary detention, poor treatment and delays in justice for children.

The Act contains provisions for children in need of protection, but these are limited. The statute is primarily oriented towards children in conflict with the law rather than children in street situations, exploited children or children displaced by climate events.

3.2 Labour law and hazardous work list

Child labour is regulated in the formal sector through the Bangladesh Labour Act and associated rules, including lists of hazardous work prohibited for children. NCLS 2022 and occupational health data show that:

- Many child labourers work in informal-sector jobs that fall outside effective labour inspection.
- Children are present in all categories of prohibited hazardous work, especially in small factories and workshops.

The Labour Act¹⁷ sets important age thresholds and prohibitions, but its reach is limited by informalisation and weak inspection capacity.

16. Children Act 2013 (Bangladesh).

17. Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 (Bangladesh).

3.3 Nari-O-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain 2000 and Penal Code

The Nari-O-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain 2000 and the Penal Code 1860 provide the main criminal law framework for violence against women and children, including sexual offences.¹⁸ They:

- Criminalise rape and various forms of sexual violence against children.
- Create special tribunals for offences against women and children.

These laws, however, are not purpose-built child sexual offences codes. They do not systematically provide for child-friendly interviewing, in-camera proceedings as a default, or comprehensive victim support mechanisms.

3.4 Trafficking law

The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 criminalises trafficking and exploitation, including of children. Implementation challenges include limited victim identification and weak coordination between law enforcement, social services and NGOs.

3.5 Child marriage law

The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 sets minimum ages for marriage and provides penalties for those who arrange or facilitate child marriage, though a special-circumstances clause has raised concerns about potential misuse.

3.6 Birth and death registration law

The Births and Deaths Registration Act 2004 governs civil registration of births and deaths. As noted, coverage and timeliness remain insufficient, and the system is weakly integrated with child protection enforcement.

3.7 Cyber and digital offences framework

Bangladesh's cyber offences framework has evolved through several instruments¹⁹:

- The ICT Act 2006 initially governed many cybercrimes, including certain online harms.

18. Nari-O-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain 2000 (Bangladesh); Penal Code 1860 (Bangladesh); Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 (Bangladesh); Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 (Bangladesh).

19. Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 (Bangladesh); Digital Security Act 2018 (Bangladesh); Cyber Security Act 2023 (Bangladesh); Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 (Bangladesh); Cyber Security Act 2026 (Bangladesh).

- The Digital Security Act 2018 (DSA 2018) replaced key provisions of the ICT Act and became the main cybercrime statute, though it attracted criticism for its impact on free expression.
- The Cyber Security Act 2023 was enacted to replace the DSA 2018.
- The Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 further replaced the Cyber Security Act 2023
- The Cyber Security Act 2026 further revised the framework and have come into effect upon gazette notification, forming part of a broader 2026 package.

A 2023 policy brief on protecting children from online sexual abuse concluded that even under the DSA 2018, legal provisions did not specifically and comprehensively address online child sexual abuse and that enforcement lacked child-sensitive mechanisms. At the time of writing, there is no peer-reviewed analysis of the effects of the 2025 Ordinance package on child protection.

The proposed Child Protection Act should therefore contain its own dedicated provisions on online child sexual abuse, grooming and child sexual abuse material, and should not rely solely on the general cyber law regime, whatever its precise configuration at any given time.

3.8 Summary of strengths and limits

In summary:

- Bangladesh has many statutes relevant to child protection, but they are fragmented.
- The Children Act 2013 is a major step forward but is not a comprehensive child protection code.
- Laws on sexual offences, online harms, trafficking and child marriage are not fully integrated or child-centred.
- The birth registration framework is weakly linked to protection.
- Implementation gaps are driven by institutional fragmentation, limited capacity and weak coordination rather than the complete absence of legal provisions.

Part IV: Structural Gaps in Child Protection

The evidence points to several structural gaps that cannot be fully resolved through incremental amendment.

1. **Children in street situations lack a clear statutory category and tailored protection.** There is no explicit statutory category for “children in street situations” or equivalent. This contributes to their invisibility in formal systems and leaves them dependent on ad hoc NGO interventions.
2. **Institutional responsibility is fragmented and under-coordinated.** Multiple ministries share child-related functions, but no statutory authority has the mandate and power to coordinate, monitor and compel action across government.
3. **Sexual offences against children lack a dedicated, child-centred framework.** Existing criminal law covers sexual offences but does not systematise child-friendly investigative and trial procedures, nor does it provide for comprehensive victim support and rehabilitation.²⁰
4. **No general mandatory reporting regime for abuse.** There is no statutory duty for professionals to report suspected child abuse or exploitation to a designated authority, and referral mechanisms are largely informal and inconsistent.
5. **Probation and social work systems are under-resourced and inconsistent.** Qualitative work on probation under the Children Act 2013 documents low staffing, high caseloads, weak coordination and limited rehabilitation services.
6. **Birth registration is not effectively integrated into protection.** Weak registration and delayed certificates undermine enforcement of age-based protections and make it difficult for children to assert their rights.
7. **Climate-displaced children are not legally recognised as a specific protection category.** Existing law does not explicitly address children displaced by river erosion, flooding or cyclones, despite evidence that displacement increases vulnerability to child labour, street life and trafficking.²¹
8. **Rehabilitation and reintegration rights are not clearly articulated.** Services for abused, trafficked and street-connected children are largely project-based and discretionary. There is no statutory right to rehabilitation enforceable in court.

20. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No 13: The Right of the Child to Freedom from All Forms of Violence, UN Doc CRC/C/GC/13 (18 April 2011).

21. World Bank Group, Bangladesh Country Climate and Development Report (n 15).

9. Data obligations are limited. Without statutory duties to collect and publish integrated child-protection data, policy remains reactive and under-informed.

Part V: Comparative Lessons²²

5.1 India

India's Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 distinguishes children in conflict with the law from children in need of care and protection and creates Child Welfare Committees with quasi-judicial powers. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 (POCSO) provides a dedicated, child-centred sexual-offences code.

Strengths identified in comparative analyses include explicit recognition of children in need of care and protection and specialised sexual-offence procedures. Weaknesses and contested issues include age-of-consent complexities and implementation challenges.

5.2 Malaysia

Malaysia's Child Act 2001, as amended, and the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 provide a relatively integrated framework for child protection and juvenile justice. A comparative analysis of Bangladesh and Malaysia highlights Malaysia's use of specialised institutions and dedicated sexual-offence legislation as key advances.

5.3 Sri Lanka and others

Sri Lanka's National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) illustrates how a statutory authority with complaint-receiving, coordination and advisory powers can be central to child protection. Other jurisdictions offer useful models for data obligations, mandatory reporting and integrated services.

Bangladesh should adapt such lessons to its own constitutional and administrative structures, rather than transplanting foreign models wholesale.

Part VI: Proposal for a Child Protection Act of Bangladesh

6.1 Definitions

The Act should define:

- **Child:** Any person under 18 years.

22. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 (India); Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 (India); Child Act 2001 (Malaysia); Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 (Malaysia); National Child Protection Authority Act No 50 of 1998 (Sri Lanka).

- **Child in street situation:** Any child who lives, works or spends a substantial portion of time in public spaces, including streets, transport hubs and marketplaces, with limited or no stable family care.
- **Child in need of care and protection (CNCP):** Any child who is abandoned; living or working on the street; abused, neglected or exploited; engaged in child labour or hazardous work; trafficked or at risk of trafficking; displaced by disaster or climate events; or otherwise without adequate care and protection.
- **Mandatory reporter:** Professionals and institutions with regular contact with children (teachers, health workers, social workers, probation officers, factory inspectors, police, child-care workers, relevant NGO staff).
- **Child abuse:** Physical, sexual, emotional abuse, neglect and exploitation, defined with sufficient specificity to guide enforcement.
- **Street exploitation:** Recruitment, coercion or use of a child in a street situation for begging, theft, drug trading, prostitution, political activity or other harmful purposes.
- **Climate-displaced child:** A child displaced from their habitual residence due to river erosion, flooding, cyclone or other climate-related disaster, and lacking adequate shelter or care.

6.2 National Child Protection Authority (NCPA)

The Act should create an independent National Child Protection Authority with:

- Legal personality to sue and be sued.
- A governing board appointed through a transparent process, with fixed terms and removal only for cause.
- A mandate to:
 - Coordinate child protection across ministries.
 - Maintain a national child protection case register.
 - Receive and refer complaints.
 - Monitor compliance and issue directions to agencies.
 - Commission and publish national child-protection surveys.
 - Report annually to Parliament.

6.3 District Child Protection Committees (DCPCs)

DCPCs should be established in all districts, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner and including representatives from child welfare, social services, education, health, labour, law enforcement and civil society. Their statutory functions should include:

- Case management for CNCPs.
- Coordination of services and referrals.
- Monitoring local child-protection indicators.
- Implementing emergency protocols for climate-displaced children.

6.4 Child Protection Courts

The Act should establish Child Protection Courts to:

- Hear applications for care and protection orders.
- Issue emergency protection orders.
- Make rehabilitation and supervision orders.
- Hear appeals from DCPC decisions.
- Enforce mandatory-reporting obligations.

Procedural rules should require:

- In-camera hearings.
- Prohibition on identifying child parties.
- State-funded legal representation for children and indigent families.
- Child-sensitive hearing practices, including the use of trained child advocates.

6.5 Mandatory reporting

A mandatory-reporting chapter should:

- Set a reporting threshold of reasonable suspicion of abuse, neglect or exploitation.
- Specify mandatory reporters and institutional duties.
- Set a timeframe for reporting to the NCPA/DCPC.
- Provide immunity for good-faith reporters and protection from retaliation.
- Create an offence for wilful or reckless non-reporting, with proportionate penalties.

6.6 Child sexual abuse and exploitation

The Act should either incorporate a detailed CSA chapter or be complemented by a stand-alone Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, with:

- Definitions of child sexual abuse, exploitation, grooming, online offences and child sexual abuse material.
- Child-friendly investigation protocols (limited and specialised interviews, safe environments).
- Mandatory in-camera proceedings and prohibitions on using the child's sexual history.
- Prohibitions on direct cross-examination of child victims by the accused.
- Provision of victim and witness support services and long-term rehabilitation.

6.7 Street exploitation offences

The Act should criminalise:

- Recruiting, coercing or using children in street situations for begging, theft, drug trading, prostitution or political activities.
- Employing children in worst forms of labour, with enhanced penalties when the child is in a street situation or climate-displaced.

6.8 Rehabilitation and reintegration rights

For CNCPs, the Act should establish enforceable rights to:

- Safe shelter and adequate food.
- Health care, including substance-use treatment.
- Psychosocial and trauma-informed counselling.
- Access to education and non-formal learning.
- Vocational training for older adolescents.
- Family tracing and reintegration where safe.

Child Protection Courts should have specific powers to order agencies to provide these services and to monitor compliance.

6.9 Birth registration and age verification

The Act should:

- Reinforce state duties under the Births and Deaths Registration Act 2004.²³
- Require health facilities and local government bodies to facilitate birth registration proactively.
- Prohibit denial of emergency services or basic education due to lack of registration.
- Place age-verification duties on employers, with penalties for employing children in violation of minimum-age rules.

6.10 Climate-displaced children

The Act should:

- Recognise climate-displaced children as CNCPs.
- Require DCPCs to activate child-protection protocols during disasters, including child-safe shelters, family-tracing mechanisms and anti-trafficking measures.
- Prioritise climate-displaced children for registration and education continuity.

6.11 Regular surveys and reporting²⁴

The Act should require the NCPA to:

- Conduct a National Child Protection Survey at least once every five years, with modules on child labour, children in street situations, violence and service access.
- Publish results and table them in Parliament.
- Maintain a public dashboard of key indicators.

Part VII: Implementation Roadmap

A realistic phased implementation might be:

- **0–6 months:** Drafting committee formation, evidence audit, stakeholder mapping, initial consultations.
- **6–12 months:** Drafting of the Child Protection Act, fiscal note, institutional design, further consultations.

23. Births and Deaths Registration Act 2004 (Bangladesh).

24. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No 5: General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc CRC/GC/2003/5 (27 November 2003).

- **12–24 months:** Passage of the Act, establishment of NCPA and DCPCs, pilot operations in selected districts, initial training.
- **24–36 months:** National rollout of Child Protection Courts, mandatory reporting and core rehabilitation services.
- **36–60 months:** First National Child Protection Survey and parliamentary review under the new Act.

Part VIII: Budget and Institutional Feasibility

The Child Protection Act must avoid unfunded mandates. It should:

- Require a minimum budgetary floor for child protection, as a percentage of the social sector budget, subject to parliamentary review.
- Identify staffing needs for the NCPA, DCPCs, Child Protection Courts and social services.
- Mandate training programmes for judges, prosecutors, police, probation, social workers and frontline health and education staff.
- Provide for development of a digital child-protection case-management and referral system integrated with existing government systems.

NGO and international partnerships can support service delivery, but the Act should set safeguarding standards and clarify accountability.

Part IX: Summary Recommendations Table

Problem	Current gap	Proposed legal solution	Lead institution	Timeline
Children in street situations lack clear legal status	No statutory category or dedicated protection pathway	Define “child in street situation” and “child in need of care and protection”; create street-exploitation offences and referral duties	Parliament; NCPA	Within 12 months of Act
Fragmented institutional responsibility	Child protection duties are spread across ministries without a central coordinating authority	Establish an independent NCPA and district-level DCPCs with statutory coordination, monitoring and referral powers	Parliament; MoWCA; NCPA	12–24 months
Child sexual abuse procedures are not sufficiently child-centred	Sexual offences are addressed through general criminal laws without a dedicated child-protection framework	Enact a dedicated child sexual abuse chapter or stand-alone statute with child-friendly investigation, trial and rehabilitation procedures	Parliament; Ministry of Law	12–24 months
No general mandatory reporting regime	Professionals have no clear cross-sector duty to report suspected child abuse or exploitation	Introduce mandatory reporting with clear thresholds, reporting timelines, good-faith immunity, retaliation protection and penalties for wilful non-reporting	Parliament; NCPA; DCPCs	12–24 months
Probation and social services are under-resourced	Low staffing, weak coordination and limited rehabilitation	Statutorily integrate probation, social services and rehabilitation	MoWCA; Ministry of Social Welfare; NCPA	24–36 months

Problem	Current gap	Proposed legal solution	Lead institution	Timeline
	capacity restrict effective child protection	systems with the NCPA/DCPC framework and require minimum staffing and training standards		
Birth registration is weakly linked to protection	Delayed or incomplete registration undermines age-based protection from labour, marriage and justice-system misuse	Strengthen proactive birth-registration duties and prohibit denial of emergency services or basic education due to lack of registration	Local Government Division; NCPA; DCPCs	24–36 months
Climate-displaced children are not recognised as a protection category	Disaster displacement is not linked to specific child-protection duties	Define climate-displaced children as CNCPs and require disaster-time child protection protocols, safe shelters, family tracing and anti-trafficking measures	NCPA; DCPCs; MoDMR	24–36 months
Rehabilitation rights are not enforceable	Services for abused, trafficked and street-connected children remain largely discretionary or project-based	Create a statutory right to shelter, food, health care, psychosocial support, education, vocational training and safe reintegration	Parliament; NCPA; DCPCs	24–60 months
Child-protection data remain incomplete	No regular integrated survey covers street situations, abuse exposure, service access and protection outcomes	Mandate a National Child Protection Survey every five years, with public reporting and parliamentary review	NCPA; BBS	First survey by year 5

Part X: Conclusion

Bangladesh's Constitution and international commitments already recognise that children are entitled to protection from exploitation and abuse and to access to education, health and development. The Children Act 2013 and related laws significantly improved the legal position of children, particularly in juvenile justice. Yet NCLS 2022, MICS data, the BBS/UNICEF street-children survey and empirical research on hazardous child labour and abuse show that millions of children remain in hazardous work, in street situations and in conditions that expose them to violence and exploitation.

The missing element is a coherent, enforceable and adequately funded statutory architecture for child protection. A Child Protection Act of Bangladesh that builds on the Children Act 2013, incorporates the latest NCLS 2022 and MICS 2025 evidence, and addresses emerging risks in digital spaces and climate displacement, can provide that architecture.

Bangladesh has demonstrated in other areas that it can design and implement ambitious legal reforms when there is political will. Children in street situations, in hazardous labour and in unregistered or displaced communities are already living with the consequences of the current gaps. The law now needs to move beyond declarations and create the structures that can genuinely protect them.

End of Report
