

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Labour and Employment

6th Implementation Status of National Action Plan (NAP) on the Labour Sector of
Bangladesh (2021-2026)

During the 9th session of the EU-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission in October 2019, the Government of Bangladesh committed to implementing an Action Plan aimed at upholding labour rights and ensuring workplace safety in Bangladesh. In furtherance of this commitment, the National Action Plan (NAP) on the Labour Sector of Bangladesh (2021–2026) was developed in consultation with the European Union (EU) and officially shared with the EU on 1 July 2021. The NAP represents the Government of Bangladesh’s pledge to pursue comprehensive legal and administrative reforms, as well as practical initiatives, to secure decent working conditions and safeguard the well-being of workers. The NAP’s specific objectives include:

- Aligning Labour Laws with International Labour Organization (ILO) standards.
- Eliminate child labour by 2025.
- Preventing violence, harassment, unfair labour practices, and anti-union activities.
- Promoting social dialogue.
- Enhancing trade union activities.
- Reducing the backlog of cases in labour courts.
- Streamlining complaint management systems.
- Increasing the number of labour inspectors to ensure the full functionality of the labour inspectorate.
- Ensuring workplace safety.
- Ratifying two ILO conventions.

The NAP envisions strong engagement with tripartite stakeholders, including, where relevant, the ILO and other development partners, to implement the time-bound actions detailed in the Plan. To facilitate the effective execution of the NAP, the Government of Bangladesh established a Tripartite Implementation and Monitoring Committee (TIMC) through a circular issued on 11 August 2021. The TIMC is entrusted with two key responsibilities: (1) Monitoring the progress of time-bound actions outlined in both the NAP shared with the EU and the Roadmap shared with the ILO; and (2) Providing overarching guidance for the implementation of these documents. To date, nine meetings of the TIMC have been convened.

Progress on National Action Plan (NAP)

As per the agreement with the European Union (EU), the implementation status of the National Action Plan (NAP) is published biannually, in April and October, on the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) website. The fifth update on the implementation status was published on 19 May 2024. The subsequent sixth update on the implementation status of the NAP was endorsed by the Tripartite Implementation and Monitoring Committee (TIMC) at its 10th meeting, held on 16 October 2024.

Action 1 Bring Bangladesh labour laws in compliance with ILO standards on freedom of association and collective bargaining

Action 1.1 Amendment of Bangladesh Labour Rules (BLR), 2015

The Bangladesh Labour Rules, 2015, were amended and published through a gazette notification on 1 September 2022 (S.R.O No.-284-Law/2022). The amendment process incorporated the recommendations provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee of Experts.

Action 1.2 Amendment of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (as amended in 2018)

In an effort to align the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 more closely with international labour standards, amendment proposals, in the form of a Bill, were submitted to His Excellency, the President of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. The Bill was returned to Parliament with certain observations. In the meantime, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Labour Standards Department held an online meeting with the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs in February 2024, recommending additional time to incorporate further amendments.

Subsequently, the Labour Law Working Group of the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) held several meetings with ILO experts in May 2024, generating additional recommendations. Based on these, the preparation of a draft is currently underway. The proposed amendments will be discussed in the Tripartite Law Review Committee (TLRC) before being presented to the Tripartite Consultative Council (TCC). Following the TCC's approval, the amendment proposals will be forwarded to the Advisory Council.

Action 1.3 Amendment of Bangladesh Labour Rules, 2015, after BLA amendment

Further amendments to the Bangladesh Labour Rules 2015 (as amended in 2022) has been initiated in light of the proposed amendment of BLA 2006.

Action 1.4 Adoption of Export Processing Zone (EPZ) Labour Rules

Bangladesh EPZ Labour Rules, 2022 had been published through gazette notification on 4 October 2022 (S.R.O No.-295-Law/2022 dated 4 October 2022). It contains provisions for-

- Preventing discrimination and conducting investigation against anti Workers Welfare Association (WWA) activities and collective bargaining rights
- Formation of federation
- Formation of employers’ association
- DIFE inspection in EPZ, and
- Preventing misconduct against female workers, i.e. sexual harassment and violence.

Since August 2023, BEPZA arranged tripartite consultation on “Labour rights in the EPZs & international best Practices, EPZ labour Act, 2019 & EPZ labour Rules, 2022” to analyze the impact of the law and provisions in light of the international best practices.

Action 1.5 Amendment of Bangladesh EPZ Labour Act, 2019

A 17-member Tripartite Standing Committee, consisting of an equal number of representatives from both employers and workers, was reconstituted on 8 February 2024 to work on the amendment proposals for the Bangladesh EPZ Labour Act, 2019. The committee has convened two meetings, held on 1 February 2024 and 18 February 2024, respectively. The next meeting is scheduled to take place shortly. In the meantime, amendment proposals are being received from investors and workers.

The Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) collaborates closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to enhance labour standards within the EPZs. Between August 2022 and December 2023, BEPZA conducted a series of stakeholder

meetings and held discussions with the ILO on the Technical Note and Global Good Practices to align the Bangladesh EPZ Labour Laws with International Labour Standards.

On 18 February 2024, a team from the ILO Bangladesh Country Office visited the BEPZA Office and exchanged views with the Executive Chairman regarding ongoing collaboration in areas such as skill development, sustainable investment, and the amendment of the Bangladesh EPZ Labour Act, 2019. On 1 April 2024, BEPZA engaged in discussions with Ms. Elena Gerasimova, Labour Law and Labour Standards Specialist, Decent Work Team South Asia, alongside ILO Dhaka officials, regarding the ILO's Technical Note aimed at aligning the Bangladesh EPZ Labour Act with International Labour Standards.

On 30 April 2024, BEPZA further exchanged views with Mr. Tim De Meyer, Senior Advisor on Standards Policy from the ILO's International Labour Standards Department (NORMES), Geneva, along with ILO Dhaka officials, regarding amendments to the Bangladesh EPZ Labour Act to ensure compliance with International Labour Standards. In addition to labour law reforms, broader collaboration between ILO and BEPZA was discussed during the meeting. As of September 2024, BEPZA has conducted 20 consultations with stakeholders at all levels in eight EPZs as part of the review process for the EPZ Labour Act and EPZ Labour Rules in accordance with international standards. The entire process is expected to be completed within the stipulated timeframe of June 2025.

Action 2 Eliminate child labour in all its forms by 2025

Action 2.1 Regulatory and policy framework for the elimination of child labour

As part of its regulatory framework, Bangladesh ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) on 22 March 2022. In alignment with this commitment, the list of hazardous work has been updated to include five additional sectors: (1) Fish drying activities, (2) Street-based informal work, (3) Work related to the production, collection, and transportation of bricks, or the collection and transportation of stone, (4) Informal/local tailoring and garment production, and (5) Garbage and waste management work. The updated list, comprising 43 sectors in total, was published through a Gazette Notification on 29 April 2022. In conjunction with these efforts, the National Plan of Action (NPA) to eliminate child labour (2021-2025) was revised and published on 12 December 2021. The translation of this document into Bangla was subsequently published in January 2024.

2.2 Strengthen investigations and increase the number of convictions for child labour

To enhance child labour inspection capacity, the number of labour inspectors is being gradually increased, as detailed in Section 7. The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) is organizing regular training courses for labour inspectors. During the 2023-24 financial year, 28 training courses and 18 workshops were conducted for labour inspectors. Additionally, a Special Yearly Plan of Action has been implemented since 2022 to eliminate child labour in areas prone to this issue. As of September 2024, 586 cases involving the employment of child labour have been filed with the Labour Court, of which 214 cases have been resolved.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment maintains regular cooperation with various public authorities to eliminate child labour. As part of collective efforts to address this issue, regular meetings of the National and Divisional Councils, as well as District and Upazila (Sub-district) level committees- composed of representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs)- are convened to assess and follow up on the progress made. As of September 2024, 11 meetings of the National Child

Labour Welfare Council (NCLWC), 83 meetings of Divisional Councils, and 297 meetings of District Level Committees have been held.

2.3 *Projects on (hazardous) child labour/child labour survey*

2.3.1 *Implementation of a Government funded project*

The implementation of the government-funded project titled "Eradication of Hazardous Child Labour from Bangladesh (4th Phase)" was completed in June 2024. Through this initiative, 100,000 children were withdrawn from hazardous work. The project provided each child with six months of non-formal education, four months of skill development training, and a monthly stipend of Taka 1,000 for a duration of ten months, disbursed through a mobile banking system. Additionally, Taka 13,000 was provided to each child as seed money to establish small businesses.

2.3.2 *Conduct a child labour survey by Bangladesh*

The National Child Labour Survey 2022 was conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) with the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the report was published in March 2024. According to the report, the number of hazardous child labourers in the country has decreased from 1.280 million (3.2%) in 2013 to 1.068 million (2.7%) in 2022. However, the total number of children aged 5-17 engaged in child labour has slightly increased, rising from 1.698 million (4.3%) in 2013 to 1.776 million (4.4%) in 2022.

2.3.3 *Design and implement programmes of action*

To undertake a project aimed at eliminating child labour from all sectors of the economy, a feasibility study was completed in June 2023, and the findings were disseminated during a workshop on 19 July 2023. The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) has planned to implement a project entitled 'Elimination and Rehabilitation of Child Labour' to eradicate child labour in Bangladesh. A Development Project Proposal (DPP) for the project has been developed, with an estimated budget of 1,000 crore BDT. The necessary project documents have been prepared, and the administrative process for project approval has been initiated.

Starting in January 2024, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has also launched a new project titled "Advancing Decent Work in Bangladesh," a component of which will focus on reducing child labour, with a priority on hazardous forms. Additionally, other concerned ministries and departments are implementing supportive programmes that directly and indirectly contribute to the elimination of child labour.

2.3.4 *Enhance Child Labour Unit of MOLE*

The Child Labour Unit of MOLE has been strengthened with additional manpower headed by a Deputy Secretary along with required support staff.

2.4 *Awareness raising action and process*

Various awareness-raising activities are being conducted on a regular basis. Financial allocations are being made from the regular revenue budget of the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) to support Divisional and District level committees in organizing meetings, seminars, and workshops. Eight workshops, supported by UNICEF, were conducted between October 2023 and June 2024.

Action 3 Combat violence against workers, harassment, unfair labour practices and anti-union discrimination

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has initiated a new project titled “Advancing Decent Work in Bangladesh,” which will run from January 2024 to December 2026. The total cost of the project is 2,684.12 million BDT. The project is designed to develop tools to enhance the functionality of enforcement mechanisms in addressing anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices. Additionally, it aims to strengthen the capacity of government enforcement officials and social partners for improved operational effectiveness.

Action 3.1 Preventive measures

3.1.1 Conduct regular training for awareness rising for responsible factory security staff, police and employers to prevent violence, harassment, unfair labour practices and anti-union acts

The Department of Labour (DOL), the Industrial Police, and the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) have been conducting regular awareness-raising programmes for responsible factory security staff, police, and employers to prevent violence, harassment, unfair labour practices, and anti-union activities.

From July 2020 to 30 September 2024, the DOL has trained 42,439 workers, management staff, and government officials through five-day "Workers' Education" and four-week "Industrial Relations" courses conducted at its four Industrial Relations Institutes (IRIs) and 32 Labour Welfare Centres (LWCs). Nearly 40% of the participants were female. On 24 January 2023, a one-day workshop was organized focusing on the remediation of unfair labour practices and anti-trade union discrimination, attended by representatives from workers, employers, and various government departments, including the Industrial Police (IP), Labour Courts, and Labour Appellate Tribunals. Additionally, on 9 August 2023, a sensitization workshop was held for 30 IP officials from Narayanganj, Gazipur, and Dhaka, emphasizing the use of minimum force and respect for workers' rights during labour protests. The Industrial Police, on the other hand, has trained 868 of its personnel from January 2024 to 30 May 2024.

Moreover, BEPZA conducts regular training and awareness programmes for workers, employers/management, security staff, and the Industrial Police of Bangladesh. From January 2024 to September 2024, BEPZA provided training to a total of 2,927 participants, including workers, employers/management, security staff, and Industrial Police, covering topics such as the Bangladesh EPZ Labour Rules, 2022, unfair labour practices, decent work, prevention of discrimination against anti-WWA activities, prevention of violence and harassment, social dialogue, effective workplace cooperation, fire safety, health, and hygiene.

To promote decent work and ensure labour rights within the EPZs, BEPZA, in collaboration with ILO Better Work Bangladesh, has trained 25 inspectors on a Training of Trainers (ToT) basis. This training covered workplace cooperation and communication, grievance handling procedures at the factory level, collective bargaining incorporating best industrial relations practices, and the promotion of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Management Systems. The trained inspectors will continue the ILO Better Work programme at enterprises within the EPZs.

3.1.2 Develop and regularly update (online) databases to provide an overview of number and nature of training programmes as well as number of trainees among factory security staff, police, employers and workers

In March 2023, BEPZA established an online database (<https://www.bepza.gov.bd/training>) to record the information of the trainees segregated by name, designation, factory, WWA, age, sex etc. Simultaneously, the record of training is maintained manually.

3.1.3 Develop a compendium in Bangla language of all existing and relevant laws, rules and regulations (including the use of minimum force and applicable sanctions or penalties for any proven violation) in order to train and raise awareness among industrial police and relevant law enforcement agencies (LEAs)

On 1 December 2023, the Industrial Police officially published a compendium in the native language (Bangla) that compiles all existing and relevant laws, rules, and regulations regarding the use of minimum force, as well as the applicable sanctions and penalties for any proven violations. This compendium aims to foster a better understanding of the normative measures among the Industrial Police and law enforcement agencies.

3.1.4 Continue to train and provide clear instructions to the industrial police and relevant LEAs on the use of minimum force, respect of human rights and labour rights, including on trade union rights and civil liberties during labour protests

The Department of Labour's Industrial Relations Institutes (IRIs) in Gazipur, Khulna, and Chattogram have conducted nine training sessions exclusively for 105 industrial police officials on workers' rights in the workplace during 2022-2023. Additionally, from January 2024 to August 2024, these IRIs conducted four more training sessions for industrial police members alongside other law enforcement agencies. The IRIs continue to provide training on labour law and other laws related to human rights.

The Department of Labour (DoL) has been sensitizing industrial police personnel through seminars on the use of minimum force and respect for workers' rights during labour protests. Industrial Police personnel from three different industrial zones—Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj- regularly attend these seminars. The DoL conducts training, workshops, seminars, and focus group discussions to enhance the investigation and remediation of violence, harassment, unfair labour practices, and anti-union activities against workers, in collaboration with the ILO through its upcoming "Advancing Decent Work in Bangladesh" project. A sensitization workshop for 30 Industrial Police members was organized on 9 August 2023 in Dhaka. From January 2021 to June 2023, the Industrial Police organized 7,496 hours of training courses attended by 5,972 male and 638 female members of the Industrial Police. Detailed curricula and other information can be found at <https://iphq.police.gov.bd/training>.

Action 3.2 Investigation of violence and harassment against workers, anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices

3.2.1 Continue to provide regular training and clear instructions (including monitoring of instructions) for all DOL staff handling complaints on how to comply with the SOPs on anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices against workers

Regular training and guidance are being provided to Department of Labour (DoL) staff responsible for handling complaints related to anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices against workers. Two rounds of three-day training sessions on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for addressing unfair labour practices and anti-union discrimination were conducted for 30 DoL officials in October 2021 and August 2022, in

collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO). Additionally, a four-day in-house training on the SOPs for unfair labour practices and anti-union discrimination was organized in May 2024 at the DoL headquarters for its officials.

3.2.2 Continue to provide regular information to all workers on their rights and to complain and access legal support in case those rights are violated/ abused

DoL officials provide regular information on labour rights during the general meetings of trade unions. This information includes procedures for lodging complaints and legal avenues for redress in cases of alleged violations or abuses. If an employer fails to comply in a timely manner with the remedial actions recommended by the DoL, a case may be filed with the Labour Court on behalf of the affected workers. Additionally, the DoL continues to conduct training for workers on complaints and remedial issues under the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for addressing unfair labour practices and anti-union discrimination.

3.2.3 Continue to sensitize managers/ employers, security staff on how they can support the investigations

The Department of Labour (DoL) provides training to security staff and managers/employers of factories through its Industrial Relations Institutes (IRIs) and Labour Welfare Centres (LWCs). This training includes essential information regarding complaint management and investigations. The number of training programmes conducted by the IRIs and LWCs is detailed in Actions 4.2 and 3.1.1.

For every complaint related to unfair labour practices and anti-union discrimination, the DoL notifies both the concerned employer and the complainant in writing, seeking their cooperation in the investigation process. Meanwhile, the Industrial Police continues to engage with employers and factory management to sensitize their security personnel on the prevention of violence and to support investigations in cases of alleged violence and harassment. Data regarding these efforts are provided in Section 3.1.4.

3.2.4 Continue to provide regular training and clear instructions (including monitoring of instructions) for all personnel handling cases of alleged acts of violence and harassment against workers, including in cases of protests

The relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, monitor the activities of subordinate agencies concerning the handling of cases, including those involving alleged acts of violence and harassment against workers. The judiciary, prosecutorial services, and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) receive regular training on these matters to enhance their ability to efficiently manage relevant cases and complaints.

3.2.5 Rapid and thorough investigation of alleged cases of violence and harassment of the police against workers, including in cases of legal protests

Complaints related to anti-union discrimination are addressed in accordance with a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that specifies a stipulated timeframe. The Ministry of Home Affairs provides training to the industrial police and relevant Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) to raise awareness about issues of violence and harassment against workers. It also works to ensure thorough investigations of alleged cases of violence and harassment by the police, including those arising from legal protests.

A CFA Case Monitoring Committee, established on 23 January 2023, identifies long-pending cases to expedite the provision of remedies. To date, the Committee has convened

four meetings. Furthermore, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs plays an active role in facilitating the expeditious resolution of pending cases.

Action 3.3 Ensure timely and dissuasive sanctions/convictions and related information

3.3.1 Review for possible upward revision of fines for employers for anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices in the BLA

The Government of Bangladesh considers it paramount to implement dissuasive measures against anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices. Consequently, after extensive debate and discussion within the Tripartite Law Review Committee (TLRC), a consensus was reached to amend Section 291(1) of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. The proposed amendment seeks to increase fines for employers from the current amount of Taka 5,000 to Taka 25,000, reflecting a strong commitment to enhancing enforcement and promoting fair labour practices.

3.3.2 Compile and regularly update statistics on complaints received and of alleged incidents of violence and harassment, their follow-up including remedies for victims and sanctions/convictions imposed

All complaints regarding anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices are addressed in accordance with the timeframe stipulated in the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). From January 2020 to 30 September 2024, the Department of Labour (DoL) received a total of 89 complaints concerning anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices. Of these complaints, 52 have been resolved- 50 were amicably settled, while 2 cases were escalated to Labour Courts. Investigations into the remaining 37 complaints are ongoing. A comprehensive record of proceedings related to cases and complaints of unfair labour practices and anti-union discrimination is maintained in a publicly accessible database managed by the DoL, available at <http://103.48.18.197/en/antiunion>.

Action 3.4 Promoting Social Dialogue

3.4.1 Developing institutional mechanism and capacity building for national and sectoral Tripartite Consultative Councils (TCCs)

Self-assessments for the National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC) and the Ready-Made Garment Tripartite Consultative Council (RMG-TCC) were conducted from 5 to 8 February 2023 and on 9 February 2023, respectively. During these workshops, a report titled “Assessment of the Effectiveness and Inclusiveness of the National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC)” was prepared, accompanied by recommendations and an “Action Plan to Enhance the Effectiveness and Inclusiveness of the National TCC.” The ILO Country Office may mobilize technical assistance to support the implementation of this Action Plan.

3.4.3 Develop and implement a roadmap on social partners’ awareness and capacity building for social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels, including sectoral and national levels

The Department of Labour (DoL) has engaged in discussions with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to develop a Roadmap aimed at enhancing awareness and capacity building among social partners regarding social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels. This Roadmap is anticipated to encompass a range of activities, including training sessions, workshops, focus group discussions, and information sessions. To facilitate these objectives, the ILO has designed a comprehensive project.

Action 4 Increase the success rate of application for registration (paper & online)

Action 4.1 Explore and implement ways of further simplifying the registration process through tripartite consultations

4.1.1 Overhaul the existing online Registration System

The digitisation of the trade union registration process under the Department of Labour (DoL) was completed on 27 October 2021. This initiative was introduced to provide trade union registration facilities directly to the workers. Recently, this simplification process has been undertaken under the myGov Platform (<https://www.mygov.bd/>), which is an integrated system encompassing a wide range of government services. The necessary registration forms have been linked to this platform to enhance user-friendliness. A technical working group is currently being formed with the support of the ILO to further streamline the process.

From October 2021 to September 2024, a total of 1,472 applications were processed. Of these, 807 applications for unions were registered, 159 applications were rejected, and 506 applications were disposed of in accordance with Section 182(2) of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006.

If the Director General identifies any essential information as incomplete in the application, he notifies the trade union in writing within twelve days of receiving the application. The trade union must respond within fifteen days of receiving this notification. If no response is received from the concerned party within the stipulated timeframe, the application is disposed of by documentation.

4.1.2 Establish a pre-application service at the Department of Labour (DOL)

A pre-application service desk was established in the offices of the Registrar of Trade Unions (RTU) under the Department of Labour (DoL) in January 2021 to facilitate a smooth registration process. This service provides technical support for applicants submitting their applications through the online registration portal. From January 2021 to September 2024, the pre-application service has assisted a total of 1,821 applicants.

4.1.3 Continuing with the provision for offline registration system

The offline registration system continues to operate alongside the online system. The Department of Labour (DoL) conducts awareness activities and provides support to applicants to encourage online registration submissions. As a result, trade union registration has risen from 60% in 2013 to 89.80% by September 2024. As of 30 September 2024, a total of 9,520 trade unions have been registered, representing approximately 3.223 million trade union members. In the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, the number of trade unions has surged from 132 in January 2013 to 1,319 by 30 September 2024.

Action 4.2 Training workers and employers on Trade Union Registration Process

Training for workers and employers on the trade union registration process is a regular activity conducted by all training institutions under the Department of Labour (DoL). Through the Industrial Relations Courses and Workers Education Courses, four Industrial Relations Institutes (IRIs) and 32 Labour Welfare Centers (LWCs) provide consistent training to both workers and employers. From July 2020 to April 2024, the DoL has trained over 42,000 individuals, including workers, employers, and government officials involved in labour administration.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the DoL organized four day-long workshops on the online registration system from 23rd to 26th June 2024, attended by DoL officials. Additionally, DoL registrars and officers from divisional and regional offices participate in regular in-house training programmes, which have annual targets set by the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE). These programmes cover, among other topics, best practices for efficiently handling registration applications through both offline and online platforms.

Action 4.3 Publicly accessible online database on registration to be made fully operational and regularly updated

The publicly accessible online database for trade union registration has been operational since September 2021. Designated officials from the trade union offices under the Department of Labour (DoL) have been assigned to regularly update this database. These officials received training to manage the database efficiently. Statistics and relevant statements on trade union applications- granted, filed, and rejected- are updated regularly in the online database. Two tripartite consultative workshops were organized to discuss the functionality, scope, and renovation of the publicly accessible database, with a focus on synchronizing it with the online trade union registration system.

Action 5 Eliminate the backlog of cases at labour courts, including in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area

5.1 Take steps to make the three newly established Labour Courts fully functional

In addition to the seven existing labour courts, three new labour courts were established in Sylhet, Barishal, and Rangpur in 2019 to expedite labour-related cases and reduce backlogs. Judges have been recruited for these newly established courts, and representatives from both employers' and workers' groups have been nominated. A two-day training course, held from May 30 to 31, 2023, was attended by the registrars and support staff of all labour courts. This training covered case file management and procedures for handling cases.

5.2 Establishment of new labour courts in Narayanganj, Gazipur, Cumilla and Faridpur districts

After establishing the offices of the new labour courts, judges were recruited, and representatives from both employers' and workers' groups were nominated. The new courts in Narayanganj, Gazipur, and Cumilla are now fully operational. Although the previously proposed Labour Court in Faridpur was deemed unviable, a new Labour Court in Mymensingh is currently in progress, despite not being a commitment outlined in the Roadmap.

5.3 Deployment of one Additional Judge (Member) to the Labour Appellate Tribunal

On 31 August 2022, the Ministry of Public Administration approved the creation of an additional Judge (Member) position for the Labour Appellate Tribunal, along with the necessary support staff. The administrative process for deploying the new Judge (Member) and recruiting the official support staff is currently underway. The offices for this newly created position will be established once the recruitment process is completed.

5.4 Establish pilot processes to classify cases in consultation with the Judges of the Labour Courts with a view to addressing case backlogs

The ILO has launched a new project titled "Advancing Decent Work in Bangladesh." This project aims to develop tools and processes that enhance the efficiency of judicial bodies in conducting and resolving cases. In collaboration with the ILO, the development of an

Online Case Management System to monitor cases, along with capacity-building initiatives for the courts through additional training, is actively being pursued.

To improve court facilities and premises, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) has relocated the Labour Courts from leased spaces to permanent locations. The MoLE is exploring options to enhance court facilities and provide space for the Courts in Dhaka and Chattogram within the existing office spaces of the Department of Labour (DoL) and the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE). As a result, the facilities of these courts have been significantly upgraded.

5.5 Independent conciliation and arbitration system as a means of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

5.5.1 Establish a Conciliation and Arbitration Cell at DOL to provide secretariat service and monitor individual cases as need be

A three-member Conciliation and Arbitration Cell was established by the Department of Labour (DoL) on 29 September 2021. This Cell is prepared to provide secretariat services to both conciliators and the panel of arbitrators. From 2013 to September 2024, a total of 114 conciliation applications were submitted to the DoL. Of these, 106 disputes were successfully resolved through the DoL's conciliation mechanism, 5 were discontinued, and 3 conciliation applications remain under consideration.

5.5.2 Develop an SOP for conciliation system through tripartite consultations

After several tripartite consultation meetings and workshops held through 2021-2023 with support from ILO, the SOP for Conciliation was finalized by National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC) on 2 February 2023. It was then notified by MoLE on 16 July 2023.

5.5.3 Appointment of conciliators through gazette notification

On 10 March 2022, the MOLE, through a gazette notification, assigned 15 conciliators with a view to settling industrial disputes.

5.5.4 Develop an SOP for arbitration system through tripartite consultations

Following a series of tripartite consultation meetings and workshops with stakeholders, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the arbitration system has been prepared and submitted to the ILO Country Office in Dhaka for feedback. On 29 May 2024, the ILO provided its comments along with some technical inputs. The Ministry of Labour and Employment is currently reviewing the SOP, which will soon be presented to the National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC) for approval.

5.5.5 Establish an arbitrators' panel

The "Guideline for Arbitrators in Industrial Dispute Settlement" was developed by the Department of Labour (DoL) in consultation with its field offices. The draft was discussed in a tripartite meeting on 19 September 2023 and subsequently shared with the ILO Country Office in Dhaka for feedback. On 29 May 2024, the ILO provided its comments along with technical inputs. The Ministry of Labour and Employment is currently reviewing the guideline, which will soon be presented to the National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC) for approval. Following the approval, necessary steps will be taken to appoint the panel of arbitrators.

5.5.6 Promote conciliation and arbitration system as ADR

In collaboration with the ILO, the Department of Labour (DoL) conducted a day-long training session on 31 August 2022 for 15 designated conciliators and 15 senior officials from the DoL, focusing on Dispute Resolution and Conciliation. On 25 October 2022, a self-assessment of the existing dispute resolution mechanism was carried out by the ILO, leading to the development of an Action Plan aimed at enhancing its effectiveness. The findings from this self-assessment were finalized during a tripartite workshop held on 26 October 2022.

Furthermore, with the support of the ILO, the DoL facilitated academic discussions on the role of conciliation and arbitration in resolving labour disputes in Bangladesh, targeting trade union leaders, employers, and DoL officials on 13 May 2024. Under the Implementation Agreement (IA) with the ILO for its "Advancing Decent Work in Bangladesh" project, the DoL plans to organize sensitization seminars, focus group discussions, and related activities to promote out-of-court settlements for industrial disputes.

5.5.7 Provide information sessions on the conciliation and arbitration system to workers, employers and DOL officials

DOL, with ILO's support, conducts information sessions/focus group discussions on conciliation and arbitration for trade union leaders, employers and DOL officials.

Action 6: Set up an efficient system to follow-up complaints received through helpline

6.1 Continuation of the helpline (16357) under revenue budget of DIFE

The helpline established in June 2020 remains operational and continues to receive complaints. A team of six Labour Inspectors is dedicated to managing the helpline. From July 2023 to June 2024, a total of 2,371 complaints were received through this service. Additionally, from July to September 2024, the helpline received 1,093 complaints, of which 821 were successfully settled. Currently, 272 complaints are awaiting necessary actions within a reasonable timeframe. The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) is committed to increasing the remedy rate while also ensuring the quality of redressals, which may sometimes require additional time.

6.2 Establishment of a complaint management cell to follow up the cases directly by the labour inspectors

A Monitoring and Evaluation Unit was established at the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) in September 2022, as indicated in the organogram. The unit consists of three Labour Inspectors and two additional officials tasked with monitoring the progress of complaint resolutions. In the fiscal year 2023-24, two workshops were conducted focused on the DIFE helpline and data management system, aimed at enabling Labour Inspectors to follow up directly on cases.

6.3 Develop a database of the complaints covering relevant information

A comprehensive database for tracking complaints received via the helpline was established in December 2021. This database encompasses details related to complaints, cases, and their resolutions or follow-ups, integrating information from both online and offline sources.

From July 2024 to September 2024, a total of 1,220 complaints were received, of which 939 came through the online website, helpline, and emails. The remaining 281 complaints were submitted through conventional offline methods. A total of 1,040 complaints have been resolved, while the remaining cases are currently being processed.

6.4 Organise regular training programme for all service personnel/officials receiving complaints via the helpline on SOP on grievance handling

Regular training sessions, including international training opportunities, are being organized for the inspectors responsible for receiving complaints. In September 2023, a one-day workshop titled “Assessment on DIFE Helpline (16357)” was conducted, attended by 25 labour inspectors. Additionally, a three-day workshop focused on the “Data Management System and Helpline” was held from March 5 to 7, 2024, with the participation of 23 labour inspectors.

6.5 Establishment of the Helpline for all workers in EPZs

On March 28 2021, BEPZA launched a Helpline (16128) to ensure labour rights and strengthen the existing grievance redress system, providing prompt services for workers in the eight EPZs under BEPZA. This helpline operates 24/7, catering to the needs of workers and employees. The calls received so far have primarily addressed issues related to wage arrears, provident funds, earned leave encashment, and inquiries about plots and investments. As of September 2024, a total of 11,580 calls have been received, with 11,533 issues resolved and 47 currently in the process of resolution.

Action 7 Provide for new labour inspectors and ensure full functionality of labour inspectorate

7.1 Filling vacant posts of Labour Inspectors by recruitment and promotion

Since the submission of the Roadmap, 152 labour inspectors have been recruited, and 21 staff members have been promoted to the position of Labour Inspector. The total approved posts for inspectors have increased to 711, up from 575 at the outset of the Roadmap. Currently, there are 450 inspectors actively working, compared to 314 during that time.

On December 7, 2023, the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) recommended 16 additional posts for labour inspectors. Verification and medical tests for these candidates are currently underway. Additionally, a requisition for 83 inspectors has been sent to the BPSC, aimed at recruiting from both the 46th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) and non-cadre processes. Furthermore, on August 24, 2023, 42 Assistant Inspector Generals (AIG) were promoted to Deputy Inspector General (DIG), and 6 Deputy Inspectors General (DIG) were promoted to Joint Inspector General (JIG).

7.2 Creation of new posts and recruitment of Labour Inspectors

Since the submission of the Roadmap, 8 new Deputy Inspector General (DIG) offices have been established, along with the recruitment of 136 labour inspectors and the creation of 13 new positions at the National Occupational Health and Safety Training and Research Institute (NOHSTRI). As a result, the sanctioned manpower of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) has now increased to 1,129, including 724 inspector positions. Additionally, the newly established field offices of DIFE in eight districts are now operational.

7.3 Full application of Labour Inspection Management Application (LIMA) digitalized labour inspection system in 23 DIFE offices

The Labour Inspection Management Application (LIMA) system has been successfully implemented with support from the ILO and GIZ. District offices of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) utilize the LIMA system for inspections, licensing, and other relevant activities. In the Fiscal Year 2024-25 (from July 2024 to September 2024), a total of 11,968 inspections were conducted, 1,141 new licenses were

issued, and 9,123 licenses were renewed. Additionally, 484 layout plans were approved through the LIMA system.

7.4 Developing competencies of Labour Inspection staff through regular trainings and capacity building measures and creating more senior positions

To enhance the competencies of labour inspectors, regular training programmes are being conducted. During the Fiscal Year 2023-24 (from July 2023 to June 2024), a total of 906 officials participated in 28 training programmes, while 571 officials attended 18 workshops (with some inspectors attending multiple training sessions and workshops counted separately). Additionally, one foundational training course was completed for 25 inspectors in FY 2023-24. For the Fiscal Year 2024-25 (from July 2024 to September 2024), 301 officials have already been trained in 9 training programmes.

7.5 Promote an effective sector-specific labour inspection approach

In May 2022, nine priority sectors were identified, including readymade garments, tanneries, chemicals, plastics and rubber, jute and textiles, engineering workshops and automobiles, rice mills, brickfields, and cement industries. Based on safety concerns, accident rates, and other relevant factors, the district offices of the DIFE developed an annual Strategic Inspection Plan targeting 5 to 8 of these priority sectors. To enhance labour inspection efficiency, an internal tracking mechanism was established, connecting all DIFE offices to obtain and compile information effectively. From July 2023 to June 2024, a total of 34,432 inspections were conducted in accordance with the annual sector-specific Labor Inspection Plan. Additionally, a Legal Officer was recruited on December 28, 2023, to strengthen the capacity of DIFE's legal unit, ensuring dissuasive penalties and follow-up on labour law violations.

7.6 Formulating DIFE inspection modalities for EPZs

The modality of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) inspections in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) has been incorporated into the newly formulated EPZ Labour Rules, 2022. The Inspection Checklist was finalized in collaboration with DIFE, which now carries out inspections within EPZs. As of September 2024, DIFE has inspected a total of 165 factories within these zones. The Inspector General (IG) of DIFE has conducted inspections on six occasions. Notably, from January 2024 to September 2024, BEPZA inspectors carried out a total of 5,462 inspections across eight EPZs as part of their regular duties. Overall compliance among the inspected factories has been found to be satisfactory.

EPZ checklist link

The URL of the inspection checklist under which inspections are conducted is shown below:

Link-1: <https://bit.ly/4dMPA0L>

Link-2: <https://www.bepza.gov.bd/content/labour-issues>

Link-3: <https://dife.portal.gov.bd/site/page/d60953be-00d2-4325-9637-f81d5a35f6e3>

7.7 Incorporating the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on Labour complaints and investigation in the BLA

The required provision has been proposed in the ongoing BLA, 2006 amendment process.

Action 8: Ensure proper work for the Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC) and transition to Industrial Safety Unit (ISU)/Ensuring close cooperation of the RCC/ISU with the RMG Sustainability Council (RSC)

8.1 Remediation of factories under the national initiative for fire, electrical and structural safety

8.1.1 Complete development of a business plan outlining three categories of factories including timelines for remediation

This planning process was completed on 10 February 2021 by Remediation Coordination Cell, DIFE. The total no was 1549 Factories.

Category-1: Remediation of factories easily possible by factories owner considering their technical capacity 173 Factories

Category-2: Remediation of factories possible 346 factories

Category-3: Remediation of factories challenging 1030 factories

8.1.2 Implement the business plan on remediation of factories

The implementation of this plan involves motivational seminars, drawing and design approvals, continuous follow-ups, technical discussions with consulting firms, and the enforcement of an escalation process.

As of September 2024, the Industrial Safety Unit has conducted visits to 173 category 1 factories to make interim and final decisions regarding their status. DIFE has issued 62 initial Corrective Action Plan (CAP) completion certificates and cancellation letters for Utilization of Declaration (UD) to a total of 56 factories. Additionally, 45 factories have either closed or relocated to new locations.

8.1.3 Continue to work on remediation of factories under category 2 and 3, including with support from relevant international development partners

Present Status:

In Category 1, the number of factories currently in operation is 118.

In Category 2, there are 220 factories in operation.

In Category 3, a total of 1,211 factories exist, of which 101 are open.

Overall, 1,110 out of 1,549 factories have been closed or relocated across all categories.

With support from the ILO under the RMGP-Phase II project, remediation efforts in Categories 2 and 3 were completed in May 2023. Under the "Advancing Decent Work in Bangladesh" project, ILO support for remediation will commence soon. This project aims to implement specific activities to establish an Industrial Safety Framework, expand the Industrial Safety Unit (ISU) to prioritized sectors, and ensure fire and chemical safety in logistics and storage.

8.2 Enhancing quality control and transparency of the RCC

8.2.1 Develop a quality assessment mechanism for remediation being monitored by RCC and apply it.

In 2022, the ILO completed the risk ranking of all National Initiative (NI) factories. Based on this ranking, the factories were categorized for the process of Utilization of Declaration (UD) cancellation and the escalation protocol.

8.2.2 Ensure full application of Remediation Tracking Module (RTM)

The Remediation Tracking Module (RTM) has been revised with technical support from the ILO. Assessment reports and Corrective Action Plans (CAP) for 666 National Initiative (NI) factories have been uploaded into the RTM. Under the project "Advancing Decent Work in Bangladesh," further revised reports will be uploaded to the RTM system with continued support from the ILO.

8.3 Establishing a transition plan to graduate RCC to ISU

8.3.1 RCC to handover the remediation work to DIFE Safety Unit

This action was completed in December 2021. Upon the completion of the RMGP Phase I project, supported by the ILO, the Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC) handed over the remediation work to the DIFE Safety Unit in December 2021.

8.3.2 Post Creation and Deployment of Labour Inspectors for the ISU

The Government of Bangladesh has established a dedicated Industrial Safety Unit (ISU). Currently, nine engineers from the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) are assigned to the ISU.

8.3.3 Upon establishment of ISU, DIFE Safety Unit to handover responsibility to ISU

It is completed. Please refer to Action 8.3.2.

8.3.4 Capacity building and training of DIFE's existing Engineers on building safety (fire, structure, electrical, chemical, boilers etc.)

The DIFE Safety Unit consists of 24 engineers. Their capacity-building training was completed in two phases, with the first phase concluding on 28 November 2021 and the second phase in June 2022, involving 23 engineers. Additionally, these engineers have undergone specialized Master Training on Structural, Fire, and Electrical Safety Issues with support from the ILO.

8.4 Development of a framework for coordination with RMG Sustainability Council

A Government Coordination Council (GCC) has been established under the Ministry of Commerce, chaired by the Additional Secretary (Export) of the Ministry of Commerce (MoC). The GCC includes representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Jute & Textile, Ministry of Industries, BEPZA, and the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA).

A coordination framework between the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) and the RSC (Ready-Made Garment Sustainability Council) was approved and endorsed by the Ministry of Commerce on 20 October 2022. The GCC held its first meeting on 23 December 2021, and as of 4 April 2024, it has convened seven meetings to facilitate coordination between the RSC and DIFE.

In December 2023, the Review Panel, established to evaluate operations in risky factories, assessed a nine-story building, which was subsequently modified in accordance with the panel's instructions. Additionally, three bilateral meetings between DIFE and the RSC have taken place to address remediation issues in factories.

Action 9 Ratify ILO Convention on minimum age and Forced Labour Protocol

9.1 Ratify Protocol of 2014 to ILO Convention on forced labour (P29)

Bangladesh ratified the Protocol of ILO Convention 29 on 20 January 2022, and it officially entered into force on 20 January 2023.

9.2 Ratify ILO Convention 138 on minimum age (C138)

Bangladesh ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention 138 on 22 March 2022, establishing the minimum age of 14 for admission to employment. With this ratification, Bangladesh has achieved the significant milestone of ratifying all eight ILO Fundamental Conventions.