

CHILD RIGHTS MANIFESTO

A Promise to
Every Child in Bangladesh





**A Promise to
Every Child in Bangladesh**

2025





A photograph of four young children in Bangladesh, smiling and making peace signs. They are dressed in colorful, patterned clothing. The background is slightly blurred, showing an outdoor setting.

UNICEF CHILD RIGHTS MANIFESTO A PROMISE TO EVERY CHILD IN BANGLADESH

MESSAGE OF THE UNICEF REPRESENTATIVE

From the children and youth of Bangladesh to the esteemed leaders, dedicated candidates, and resilient people of this country,

Bangladesh currently finds itself at a historical moment, imbued with a spirit of profound transformation and collective introspection. This is far more than just an electoral cycle; it is a momentous opportunity for national renewal, refocusing on the children in this country.

The events that unfolded during mid-2024, with their heartbreaking toll on children and young lives, served as an undeniable clarion call, signalling that the well-being and rights of every child must be the guiding principle for our nation's progress. This Child Rights Manifesto emerges not as a partisan declaration, but as a shared imperative for all—a common ground that transcends political differences, uniting us in our most fundamental duty: to safeguard Bangladesh's future.

The recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2025 data paints a compelling picture of enduring vulnerabilities and inequities, from an uneven pace in reducing under-five mortality to a troubling increase in child wasting, and a stark rise in child labour numbers, placing one more million children under this harmful reality. These statistics embody unfulfilled potential and highlight how insufficient attention to child rights erodes our societal foundation and jeopardises national advancement. It is a profound realisation that upholding children's fundamental rights is both an ethical choice, but most importantly, a strategically vital component for a resilient and thriving future. We must now **refocus on children** as the primary drivers of the future of this country.

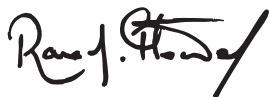


Investing in children is unequivocally the most strategic allocation a nation can undertake. It is not a drain on resources, but a powerful **investment for the country's progress**, yielding unparalleled social and economic returns – for example, every dollar invested in child protection yields around nine in social and economic returns, proving that protecting children is one of Bangladesh's smartest investments. When we provide quality education, comprehensive health services, robust protection from harm, and a nurturing environment, we are empowering them to become the innovative, productive, and engaged citizens who will propel Bangladesh into a brighter tomorrow. **A budget that reflects children's needs** is one that intelligently prioritises economic growth, social stability, and a vibrant workforce. This investment is particularly critical for girls, as Bangladesh cannot achieve its full potential if half of its formidable talent remains undervalued or excluded. This is especially painful as we stress that still today, almost half of girls in the country fall under the scourge of child marriage.

Ahead of the 2026 General Elections, this Manifesto calls upon all political parties and candidates to forge a lasting commitment to children. We urge you to adopt concrete, time-bound, and robustly funded actions that place children firmly at the centre of all policy, budgetary allocations, and programmatic interventions. This means fulfilling our national obligations under the Constitution of Bangladesh, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Let us collectively commit to legislate, implement, and report annually on a comprehensive agenda that protects and advances children's rights across critical sectors: health, nutrition, education, protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and climate resilience.

Let this Manifesto be the definitive blueprint for a Bangladesh where every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive, contribute, and fulfil their boundless potential. This is our shared promise, a collective vision for a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous nation—a new dawn for every child in Bangladesh.

Sincerely,



Rana Flowers

UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bangladesh has recently endured a year of profound changes, shaking the nation to its core with the tragic loss of over 100 children's lives and a questioning of its foundational principles. As the country navigates this historical transition, we are presented with a unique opportunity to decisively prioritise the well-being of its children.

While Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in improving children's lives, significant challenges persist. These challenges, including vulnerabilities and disparities highlighted by the latest MICS 2025, such as uneven decline in under-five mortality, an increase in the levels of wasting and child labour, or worrisome levels of the quality of education, underscore that without a dedicated focus on children's rights, the nation's social fabric and future development are at risk.

Ahead of the upcoming 2026 general elections, UNICEF organised six consultations with over 180 children in Bagerhat, Barishal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Netrokona and Rangpur, along with an online survey, U-Report, responded by over 8,000 young people, to gather their views on what matters the most to them, their needs and dreams. Based on the views from these children and young people, UNICEF urgently calls on all political parties and candidates to commit to concrete, time-bound, and funded actions. These actions must unequivocally place children at the centre of policy, budgets, and programs to drive tangible improvements in their lives and fulfil national and international commitments as outlined in the Constitution of Bangladesh, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Sustainable Development Goals.



This is a critical call to action to commit, fund, legislate, implement, and report annually on commitments designed to protect and advance children's rights across vital health, nutrition, education, protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as climate-resilience sectors. Investing in children is a smart investment, yielding long-term social and economic returns. This is particularly true for girls, as Bangladesh cannot achieve its full potential if half of its talent remains undervalued.

To build a better future for every child, this manifesto outlines ten key commitments. We must close gaps in child survival by strengthening and unifying primary healthcare services, especially in rural and urban areas, and actively addressing child wasting through locally-produced therapeutic foods. Concurrently, creating a safer Bangladesh for children demands removing exceptions to child marriage laws, aligning with the UNCRC, bolstering law enforcement and systems to eradicate violence against women and children, and swiftly eliminating hazardous child labour.

Furthermore, ensuring quality and inclusive education for all children requires guaranteeing nine years of free, quality, compulsory education, along with one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education, bridging learning gaps and the digital divide, and strengthening transferable skills to enhance employment opportunities. Addressing poverty is crucial, starting with the introduction of a child grant for the most vulnerable children aged 0-6 years to provide a vital social protection net.

Beyond core well-being, the manifesto emphasises creating a climate-resilient Bangladesh for every child. This means protecting children affected and displaced by climate hazards by ensuring their access to safe, climate-resilient, and low-carbon schools, healthcare, water, and sanitation services, while actively reducing pollution and heat exposure. Parallel to this, better water and sanitation services for children are paramount, necessitating the unification of all water and sanitation functions under one accountable ministry. This ministry would be responsible for critical infrastructure upgrades, water recycling initiatives, and ensuring safe sanitation for every child, with particular attention to health and education facilities.

The manifesto also champions a future of opportunities for every child in Bangladesh, advocating for a comprehensive review of access to quality social services for vulnerable populations, including indigenous and minority groups. For Rohingya refugee children, it stresses the importance of providing portable skills to prepare them for a safe, voluntary, and dignified return to their homeland. Crucially, we must end the concept of "invisible children" by improving and making free the process of birth registration across Bangladesh, ensuring every child has an identity and guaranteed access to every essential service.

Finally, ensuring these commitments translate into tangible change requires a budget that truly reflects children's needs. This means prioritising social sector allocations, reaching 5% of the GDP for education and primary healthcare.

Accountability is critical: the new Government must conduct a review of the Children's Act within its first year to identify contradictions, existing gaps in laws, and implementation of policies affecting children, ensuring full accordance with the UNCRC. Progress in all these commitments must be reported annually to parliament at the beginning of each fiscal year through a transparent scorecard developed specifically for children's rights, particularly focusing on vulnerable populations.

TEN COMMITMENTS FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR CHILDREN

Commitment 1 Closing the Gap in Child Survival

Strengthen and reduce fragmentation of primary health care services in rural and urban areas, addressing child wasting by the provision of locally-produced, specialised therapeutic food.

Commitment 2 A Safe Bangladesh for Children

Make communities safer, including by removing exceptions to child marriage law in line with the UNCRC, strengthening law enforcement and systems to end violence against women and children, & acting immediately to eradicate hazardous child labour.

Commitment 3 Quality and Inclusive Education for All Children

Ensure nine years of free, quality, compulsory education, along with one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education; to close learning gaps, bridging the digital divide, and strengthening transferable skills. Increase opportunities to acquire skills for employment.

Commitment 4

Social Protection Coverage for Every Child

Address poverty and vulnerability by introducing a child grant for the most vulnerable children aged 0-6 years.

Commitment 5

A Climate-resilient Bangladesh for Every Child

Protect children affected & displaced by climate hazards by ensuring access to safe, climate-resilient, & low-carbon schools, healthcare, water & sanitation services, & reducing pollution and heat exposure.

Commitment 6

Better Water and Sanitation Services for Children

Unify all water & sanitation functions under one accountable ministry, with responsibility for infrastructure upgrades, water recycling, and safe sanitation for every child, with special attention to health & education facilities.

Commitment 7

A Future of Opportunities for Every Child in Bangladesh

Review access to quality social services to vulnerable populations, including indigenous and minority groups. For Rohingya refugee children, provide portable skills as they prepare for a safe, voluntary and dignified return to their homeland.

Commitment 8

End Invisible Children in Bangladesh

Improve the process to access birth registration for children in Bangladesh without charge to ensure every child has an identity and access to every service.

Commitment 9

A Budget that Reflects children's Needs

Prioritise social sector allocations, reaching over time 5% of the GDP for each of the following sectors: education and primary healthcare.

Commitment 10

Reporting on Children and Youth Commitments

Conduct a review of the Children's Act, with a view to identifying contradictions, existing gaps in laws and implementation of policies affecting children to be conducted over the first year of the new Government to ensure they are in accordance with the UNCRC. Report progress on the above commitments in parliament at the beginning of each fiscal year through an annual scorecard developed on children's rights, in particular for vulnerable populations.



Commitment 1

Closing the Gap in Child Survival

Strengthen and reduce fragmentation of primary health care services in rural and urban areas, addressing child wasting by the provision of locally-produced, specialized therapeutic food.



RATIONALE

Over the past 20 years, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in improving child nutrition situation nationwide. However, early pregnancy, poor maternal and child diets, as well as micronutrient deficiencies, compounded by other crises, are offsetting gains made towards SDG 2 for Zero Hunger, paving the trajectory for an intergenerational cycle of malnutrition.

To address these issues, unification of Primary Healthcare (PHC) functions at ministry and directorates' leadership and programme implementation levels are needed, and capacity of the government to plan, budget, and implement programme and play a stewardship role to ensure quality of care at public and private entities through an accountable, unified common PHC structure with adequate skilled human, material and financial resources will be needed.

The intergenerational cycle of malnutrition in Bangladesh continues unabated, with almost 700,000 babies suffering from low birthweight, with 24% of children stunted and almost 13% wasted. Besides undernutrition, the rise of overweight, obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies is inequitably impacting the survival and well-being of the most vulnerable, with a special impact on babies, adolescents and mothers.

As a key step, local ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) production improves supply security, reduces costs, supports local industry and timely treatment of severe acute malnutrition (SAM).

Bangladesh still has very high maternal, newborn and child mortality, which with the current rate of reduction, will not meet the SDG goals.

The health and nutrition sector suffers from weak governance, severe fragmentation in the ministry and its directorates with duplicated divisions, directorates, management structures and programme HR and activities. This is further compounded by the low quality of care and vacancies that hamper results. In addition, low capacity to plan, budget, implement, review, monitor and evaluate programmes prevent the health sector from making a case for higher national investment in health.



POLICY ASKS

- ◆ Unify PHC functions under a common directorate under the Ministry of Health including complete ownership for urban and rural PHC.
- ◆ Capacitate programme design, budgeting, management and accountability for health managers for better resource utilisation.
- ◆ Strengthen unified PHC programme implementation at all geographic tiers, especially the community with unified and qualified HR in full capacity and numbers.
- ◆ Provide tax incentives, quality-control support and technical assistance to establish local RUTF producers.
- ◆ Fast-track national regulatory approval and ensure procurement policies favour locally produced quality RUTF.
- ◆ Integrate local RUTF into national SAM treatment protocols and emergency preparedness stocks.

MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ Unified PHC directorate with complete management and programme structure from national to community level.
- ◆ Complete ownership and stewardship from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for urban and rural PHC including engagement from private sector.
- ◆ Ensuring full number and capacity of health providers for PHC and providers at referral points that affect MNCAH&N programme and survival.
- ◆ By 2030, establish at least one certified local RUTF production facility covering at least 50% of national SAM needs.
- ◆ Reduce RUTF procurement lead time by 50% within 12 months of policy enactment.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ % of pregnant women receiving at least 4 ANC visits (ANC4+).
- ◆ Existence of a unified PHC directorate with functional leadership (Yes/No).
- ◆ Availability of updated national guidelines that include RUTF protocols.
- ◆ Existence of a costed national RUTF procurement plan.
- ◆ % of children with severe wasting treated using local RUTF.

In our country, many children grow up in poverty, without proper care, nutrition, or a safe and discrimination-free environment. Many parents simply do not have the knowledge they need about children’s nutrition, which means countless children suffer from malnutrition from a very young age. Some are even deprived of basic rights like birth registration and essential vaccinations.

Child marriage makes this situation even worse. When mothers themselves are still children, birth registration becomes complicated, and both mother and baby grow up facing serious physical and mental challenges. In Bangladesh, too many children are being born into a cycle of vulnerability and it must end.

- Tayaba Islam Tripti, 14

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

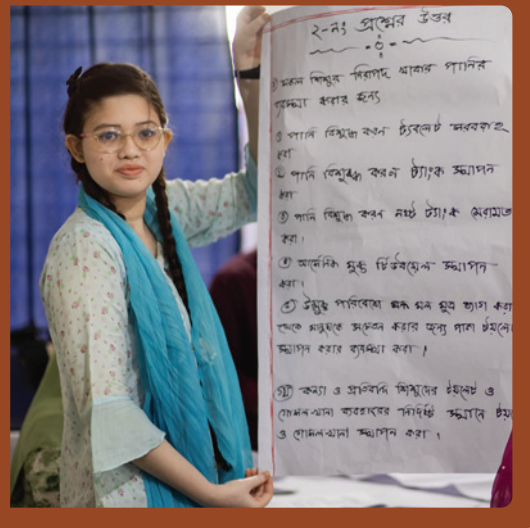


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Commitment 2

A safe Bangladesh for Children

Make communities safer, including by removing **exceptions to child marriage law** in line with the UNCRC, strengthening law enforcement and systems to end **violence against women and children**, and acting immediately to eradicate hazardous **child labour**.



RATIONALE

Child marriage violates children's rights and undermines girls' health, education, safety, and long-term economic prospects. Although Bangladesh has made progress, with child marriage among young women (20–24) declining from 51.4% in 2019 to 47.2% in 2025, the rate remains among the highest globally, nearly one in two girls still marry before 18. Its persistence is driven by poverty, weak service delivery, limited numbers of trained social service workers and case managers, barriers to secondary education, deeply entrenched gender norms, harmful traditional practices, climate shocks, and humanitarian pressures. These factors disproportionately affect the poorest and most marginalised families, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of deprivation.

Regardless of gender, child marriage is a fundamental violation of human and child rights. It deprives children, especially girls, of education opportunities; exposes them to early pregnancy, childbirth complications, and sexually transmitted infections; and places significant strain on their mental health and emotional well-being. Child marriage also increases vulnerability to intimate partner violence and harmful power imbalances, reinforcing gender inequality. Many countries with similar demographic and socio-economic profiles, such as Nepal, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Sri Lanka, have strengthened their legal frameworks by removing exceptions, tightening enforcement mechanisms, and introducing mandatory birth and marriage registration to prevent child marriage. At the societal level, child marriage reduces women's participation in the workforce, lowers lifetime earnings, and slows economic growth. The consequences across health, education, and the economy are immediate, lifelong, and intergenerational, affecting not only individual girls but the nation's human capital development.

Bangladesh has made meaningful gains in child protection, and the government continues to demonstrate a strong commitment. Yet the number of children affected by violence, abuse, and exploitation remains alarmingly high. MICS 2025 shows that 86% of children aged 1–14 experience violent discipline at home, including one in four subjected to severe physical punishment. Family and gender-based violence remain widespread and strongly associated with child vulnerability. Harmful norms continue to shape childhood, while millions of children face risks linked to poverty, parental separation and migration, absence of adequate supervision, school dropout, hazardous work, and street-based living. These findings highlight the urgency of strengthening the national child protection system, including frontline case management, expansion of the social service workforce, integrated referral pathways, and community-level prevention to protect all children, including adolescents.

Child labour remains one of the most harmful practices in Bangladesh, exposing children to hazardous and exploitative work that undermines their health, education, safety, and future opportunities. The drivers are well known: household poverty, weak enforcement of labour laws, limited access to quality schooling, lack of protection systems, declining social protection coverage, and limited parental awareness.



MICS 2025 shows that 9.2% of children aged 5–17 are engaged in child labour, an increase from 6.8% in 2019, meaning more than 1.2 million additional children are now working. Many of these children are in hazardous environments where they face physical danger, long hours, violence, and abuse.

Climate change is further aggravating these challenges. Vulnerable communities are increasingly exposed to natural disasters, crop failures, and environmental stresses that push families deeper into poverty, raising the risk of child labour and harmful coping mechanisms. Children are often the first to suffer these consequences, with families forced to send them to work to make ends meet.

The impact of child labour on children is devastating. Working children miss out on education, which limits their future opportunities and perpetuates poverty. They are also at heightened risk of physical and emotional abuse, sexual exploitation, and poor health due to hazardous working conditions and long hours. At a societal level, child labour contributes to inequality, social unrest, and reduced economic growth.

POLICY ASKS

- ◆ Strengthen and expand the social service workforce that works for children and women, to prevent school dropouts, child marriage, child labour, family violence and enhance referral mechanisms.
- ◆ Ensure full enforcement of laws prohibiting child marriage and hazardous child labour, with stronger monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
- ◆ Enhance the agency and voice of adolescent girls and boys by equipping them with life skills, vocational training, and safe spaces to participate.
- ◆ Expand access to quality services in education, health, protection, and WASH, particularly for adolescent girls, to reduce vulnerability to harmful practices.
- ◆ Scale up community-based and school-based prevention programmes addressing harmful social norms and promoting positive parenting and non-violent discipline.
- ◆ Increase the number and professionalisation of the social welfare workers to support the most vulnerable children and families accessing services with high quality case management.

MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ By 2030, reduce the child marriage rate among girls under 18 by at least 30% from the 2025 baseline.
- ◆ By 2030, reduce hazardous child labour prevalence by 50%, in line with SDG target 8.7.
- ◆ By 2030, ensure that 100% of districts have functional child protection units with social workers trained to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, and exploitation.

- By 2028, increase the proportion of adolescents (aged 10–19) with access to safe spaces, life skills training, or psychosocial support by 40%.
- By 2028, the practice of diversion and other non-custodial measures is expected to be increased by 50% by CAPO, Children Courts and Probation services.
- By 2028, increase the number of professionalised social welfare workers to support the most vulnerable children and families accessing services with high-quality case management by at least 10,000.

KEY INDICATORS

- % of girls married before 18.
- % of children engaged in hazardous labour.
- % of children experiencing violent discipline at home.
- % of districts with operational child protection units and case management systems.

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

No girl should grow up believing her dreams are out of reach. In my community, too many girls grow up facing discrimination that steals their dreams. Many still don't know that they have the right to choose their future, to say no to child marriage, and to participate as an equal in the society. I want every girl in Bangladesh to know her rights, and for child marriage to end, once and for all.

- Nusrat Islam Trisha, 19

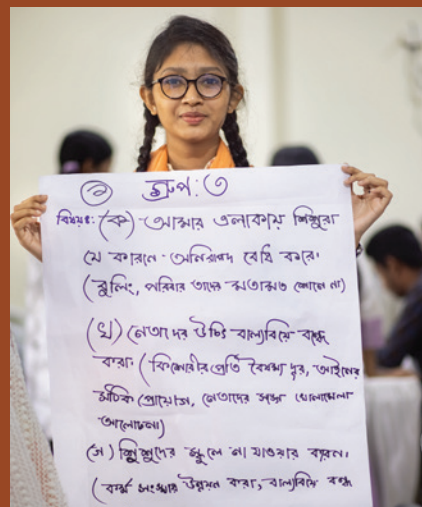


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Commitment 3

Quality and Inclusive Education for All Children

Ensure **nine years of free, quality, compulsory education**, along with one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education, to close learning gaps, bridging the digital divide, and strengthening transferable skills. Increase opportunities to acquire skills for employment.



RATIONALE

Learning and skills development are critical drivers of poverty reduction, human capital formation, and economic growth globally and more specifically in Bangladesh. By equipping children and young individuals with relevant skills, the country can enhance productivity and open pathways to better opportunities and higher incomes, and in turn, ensure a demographic dividend.

However, significant challenges remain and should be addressed. An estimated 3–4 million children of school-going age are currently out of school, and among those who attend, learning outcomes are alarmingly low. After five years of primary education, only half of the children demonstrate foundational literacy in Bangla, and less than one-third possess basic numeracy skills.

Strong foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional learning are essential for lifelong learning and development. These competencies enable children to progress through school, participate meaningfully in society, and contribute to inclusive and equitable communities.

Bridging the digital divide can play a transformative role in enhancing blended learning and addressing gaps in pedagogical resources. To achieve these goals, it is imperative that the government not only increases investment in education, but does so early, efficiently, and equitably ensuring that no child is left behind.

POLICY ASKS

- ◆ Policy initiatives to ensure at least 9 years of free, compulsory, public and quality primary and secondary education, along with at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education.
- ◆ Prioritising foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), grade specific skills, socio-emotional learning, and transactional skills Expanding digital outreach to bridge the digital divide and promote flexible, alternative learning and skills development pathways—strengthening the link between education and employability.
- ◆ Increase the investments in education, enhance the efficiency of spending by planning the education sector activities based on needs and gaps, identified through bottom-up planning rather than top-down approach.



MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ By 2030, National Education Policy is revised to reflect the commitment to 9 years of free and compulsory quality education for all.
- ◆ By 2030, curriculum reforms (including the preparation of new teaching-learning materials, pedagogic approaches and assessment systems) are completed, to support FLN, grade specific learning.
- ◆ By 2030, connecting every school and every young person to digital learning resources and materials that benefit them with information, opportunity and choice.
- ◆ By 2030, public expenditure on primary and secondary education will reach at least 3% of GDP. Development-related spending within the education sector will be prioritised and frontloaded within the first six months of the fiscal year.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ % of the children in early grades (by grade 3) with foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills.
- ◆ % of Net Enrollment Rates (NER) at secondary levels (grade 9).
- ◆ % of schools with blended teaching-learning models as a pedagogy.

There are still several major challenges in our education system. Many schools lack trained and skilled teachers, which affects the quality of learning. Our reliance on rote memorisation prevents students from gaining real knowledge and practical skills. In rural areas, shortages of classrooms, seating, books, and technology continue to limit learning opportunities.

Children with special needs fall behind because schools often lack accessible learning environments, trained support teachers, and essential learning materials. While urban schools increasingly use technology, rural students have far fewer opportunities, widening the gap even further. To build a truly inclusive and equitable education system, we must address these inequalities now.

- Ahmed Al Abid, 15

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



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গ্রাম: মিয়া
উপজেলা:

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Commitment 4

Social Protection Coverage for Every Child

Address poverty by introducing a **child grant** for the most vulnerable children aged 0-6 years.



RATIONALE

Social protection is not just a safety net – it is a powerful investment in human potential. By reducing poverty, improving nutrition, keeping children in school, and enhancing protection outcomes, social protection lays a strong foundation for a healthier and more productive society. Despite Bangladesh's commitment to being a welfare state, critical gaps persist. Closing these gaps is essential to break the cycles of poverty, prevent lifelong disadvantages, and ensure every child has an equal chance to thrive.

Investments in early years are known to yield greater returns. Nobel Laureate James Heckman's research shows that high-quality, comprehensive programmes for disadvantaged children from birth to age five yield an annual return of about 13% per child on upfront costs. Yet with Bangladesh's sizeable investment in social protection, around 2.5% of GDP, children receive not more than 15% of this allocation with children under 5 years receiving only around 2%. The National Social Security Strategy provides a strong foundation by covering most critical life-cycle Programmes. However, significant gaps remain: vulnerable groups such as adolescent mothers and their children, and children aged 4–6 years, are entirely excluded. Addressing these omissions is essential to ensure no child or family falls through the cracks, strengthen human capital development, and deliver on the promise of inclusive social protection.

Current social protection systems are primarily designed for short-term relief and lack the flexibility to address large-scale, co-variate shocks such as economic crises, pandemics, or climate-related disasters. Without adaptive and shock-responsive mechanisms, these Programmes risk leaving vulnerable populations unprotected during systemic disruptions, undermining resilience and long-term development goals.

POLICY ASKS

- ◆ Ensure adolescent mothers under 20 are fully covered under the Mother and Child Benefit Programme, with sustained support for their children.
- ◆ Close existing coverage gaps within the national social protection systems, specifically to cover children aged 4-6 years, prioritising children most at risk of exclusion.
- ◆ Guarantee predictable, multi-year funding lines for child-sensitive cash transfers.



MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ By 2027, increase coverage of the Mother and Child Benefit Programme to include all adolescent mothers under 20 and raise total beneficiaries by 50%.
- ◆ Establish and operationalise a child grant covering children 4-6 years by 2027.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ Number of adolescent mothers covered.
- ◆ Percentage of eligible children covered.

Poverty strips children of their most fundamental rights — the right to education, healthcare, protection, and a safe childhood. It forces many into hazardous street life and pushes others into child labour, robbing them of the chance to learn, grow, and dream. If we truly want to protect children’s rights, we must start by addressing poverty. Ending poverty means giving every child a fair start in life: a classroom instead of a workplace, healthcare instead of illness, and safety instead of exploitation. Ensuring children’s rights begins with ensuring that no child is left behind because of poverty.

- Karima Ferdousi Keka, 17

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



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Commitment 5

A Climate-resilient Bangladesh for Every Child

Protect **children affected & displaced by climate hazards** by ensuring access to safe, climate-resilient, & low-carbon schools, healthcare, water & sanitation services, & reducing pollution and heat exposure.



RATIONALE

Bangladesh is among the world's most climate-vulnerable countries, and its children are already bearing the greatest burden. Floods, cyclones, river erosion, heatwaves, and air pollution disrupt daily life: destroying homes, shutting schools, interrupting health and nutrition services, and pushing families deeper into poverty. These climate shocks threaten children's rights to survival, development, protection and education as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The new MICS 2025 data provide compelling evidence of how climate-vulnerable children are already falling behind: only about 59 percent of children under five are registered at birth, weakening their legal identity and access to services; wasting (acute malnutrition) has climbed to 12.9 percent, likely exacerbated by climate-linked disruptions; primary school enrolment remains around 80 percent, there is a notable drop in attendance at higher grades — a pattern that climate-induced disruptions can worsen; whereas 9.2 percent of children aged 5–17 are engaged in child labour, a risk that can intensify after disasters; and nearly 39.3 percent of households lack safe water, while only 73 percent have basic sanitation access. These figures underscore how climate vulnerabilities compound existing inequities in identity, nutrition, protection, water and sanitation.

As the generation most affected by climate change, children and youth must be recognised as essential partners. Meaningful child and adolescent engagement in local disaster planning, community monitoring, and national climate policymaking strengthens accountability, improves the relevance of policies, and supports more effective early warning and preparedness systems.

A climate-resilient Bangladesh must begin with its children. NDC 3.0 sets an important precedent, positioning children and young people not only as vulnerable to climate impacts but as central actors in national climate policy. Delivering on these commitments now requires sustained investment in climate-resilient schools, health services, WASH systems and social protection—with a clear focus on the districts and communities most at risk. Aligning national policies and budgets with these priorities will help protect development gains, reduce climate-induced inequalities, and ensure that every child can grow and learn in a safer, more resilient Bangladesh.



POLICY ASKS

- ◆ **Protect children displaced by climate hazards:** Guarantee uninterrupted climate-resilient access to healthcare, nutrition, water and sanitation services in high-risk areas, ensuring continuous service delivery.
- ◆ **Make every school climate-safe and disaster-ready:** Invest in climate-resilient school infrastructure, integrate climate education into the curricula and teacher training, ensuring the continuity of learning during disasters.
- ◆ **Reduce pollution and heat exposure affecting children's health:** Adopt low-carbon, clean energy solutions, enforce air-quality and emission standards and urban planning policies that reduce air pollution, improve ventilation and protect children from the climate crisis.
- ◆ **Protect vulnerable children from climate-related risks:** Expand child protection and social protection services for children displaced by climate shocks, including birth registration, child labour prevention, psychosocial support and mobile outreach services in disaster-prone or hard-to-reach areas.
- ◆ **Enable child and youth participation in climate decision-making:** Establish structured platforms at national and local levels for youth engagement in climate policies, action plans and monitoring.

MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ By **2030**, ensure that **60% of health facilities and public schools** in high-risk districts have climate-resilient infrastructure (energy, water supply, cold-chain).
- ◆ Climate-smart **10,000+ schools** (or district-based %) by 2028, prioritising high-risk climate vulnerable areas.
- ◆ By 2030, air quality in major cities meets national standards, reducing child exposure to PM2.5 by at least 30% from 2025 levels.
- ◆ By 2028, the national curriculum, textbooks and teacher training integrate climate change, DRR and environmental education at every grade level, and by 2030, at least 50% of government primary schools have green schools programme implemented in the schools.
- ◆ By 2028, scale up **child protection and social protection services** to reach **at least 75% of children** affected by disasters in vulnerable districts.
- ◆ By 2026, a national child and youth climate council has been established, with at least 50% adolescent girl representation.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ % of displaced children with access to health and education services.
- ◆ Number of child-friendly spaces established in disaster-prone areas.
- ◆ % of schools and health centres in high-risk areas built or retrofitted to meet resilience standards.
- ◆ Number of facilities serving as safe shelters during emergencies.
- ◆ Average annual PM2.5 levels in urban areas; number of municipalities implementing child-friendly green infrastructure or heat action plans.
- ◆ % of children and adolescents reached with climate and environmental education.
- ◆ % of teachers trained in climate education.
- ◆ Functional youth climate council or platform.

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

I believe future generations deserve to be at the heart of every political manifesto. This election is about hope - hope for a generation that will inherit the consequences of today's decisions. Through today's consultation, I urge our political leaders to prioritise climate change and its devastating impact on education. Frequent floods and disasters are washing away classrooms and harming the physical and mental well-being of children. If we truly care about the future, we must start by protecting those who are the future.

- Fyaj Khan Anam, 19



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Commitment 6

Better Water and Sanitation Services for Children

Unify all water & sanitation functions under **one accountable ministry**, with responsibility for infrastructure upgrades, water recycling, and safe sanitation for every child, with special attention to health & education facilities.



RATIONALE

Safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and proper hygiene are fundamental for children's survival, development, health, safety and dignity. In the past two decades, Bangladesh has made significant progress: 98.5 per cent of the population now uses at least basic drinking water. However, only about 39 per cent have access to safely managed drinking water services.

Water quality remains a serious challenge. MICS 2025 reveals that 87 per cent of the population drink water which has E. coli contamination and 15.8 per cent of the water source contains a concerning level of arsenic, above WHO standards.

Though open defecation is less than 1 per cent, safety and quality remain major challenges. Still 27 per cent of the population don't have access to even basic sanitation services. Children and women continue to use unsafe, inadequate and poorly maintained water and sanitation facilities and have no access to proper hygiene practices at schools, healthcare facilities and households. These challenges not only undermine children and women's health and dignity but also lead to school absenteeism, malnutrition, gender-based violence and poverty.

Bringing all water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) responsibilities under one lead ministry with a clear accountability mechanism is essential to ensure to overcome the challenges mentioned above. Also, that will help to have a coordinated approach to planning, financing and monitoring of WASH services. A single responsible entity would accelerate access to safely managed and climate-resilient WASH services.

POLICY ASKS

- ◆ Assign a single lead ministry for WASH to deliver integrated WASH services in all settings, including in emergency situations.
- ◆ Ensure every school has functional, climate-resilient, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive WASH services.
- ◆ Ensure every healthcare facility has functional, climate-resilient, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive WASH services.
- ◆ Ensure an increased number of children have access to safe water at home.
- ◆ Establish a unit with clear responsibility for water quality regulation, control and check, including wastewater being discharged to the environment.

MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ By 2028, designate one ministry with mandate and budget to plan, coordinate and implement WASH activities including in emergency situations.
- ◆ By 2030, ensure that all schools have functional, climate-resilient, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive WASH services.
- ◆ By 2030, ensure that all healthcare facilities have functional, climate-resilient, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive WASH services.



- ◆ By 2030, ensure that at least 50% of children have access to a safe and piped water supply at home.
- ◆ By 2027, establish a national water quality and wastewater regulatory unit.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ Existence of a single lead and mandated WASH ministry/division.
 - ◆ Percentage of schools with access to functional, climate-resilient, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive WASH services.
 - ◆ Percentage of healthcare facilities with access to functional, climate-resilient, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive WASH services.
 - ◆ Number and % of children covered with safe piped water supply system.
- Existence of a designated national water quality and wastewater regulatory body.

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In our country, a large number of people still do not have access to safe drinking water. More than 40% of the population lacks safe water even today. In coastal districts like Bagerhat, frequent flooding makes the situation worse. During floods, many communities face severe shortages of safe water, leading to widespread contamination and disease outbreaks. Every year, countless children suffer from waterborne diseases simply because they do not have clean water to drink.

- Mukta Jannat Diya, 18



Photo credit: © UNICEF/Bangladesh/2025/Rasnat



ရေပြည့်ခါနီးတစ်ခုကိုအေးကြည့်ပါ
the jar/pitcher before
collection of water

ရေသယ်အောင်ရင်ရေပိ / အရေကိုပိရအပ်ပါ
Cover jerry can/ pitcher during
transportation of water

00 / MAND





Commitment 7

A Future of Opportunities for Every Child in Bangladesh

Ensure quality social services to vulnerable populations, including indigenous and minority groups. For Rohingya refugee children, **provide portable skills** as they prepare for a safe, voluntary and dignified return to their homeland.



RATIONALE

Bangladesh's commitment to leaving no one behind has guided significant progress in child survival, education and social inclusion. Yet, some children, particularly those affected by displacement and those living in remote or marginalised areas, continue to face persistent barriers to learning and development opportunities.

Children from minority and remote communities, including those in geographically disadvantaged location such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), still face limited access to quality education, health, nutrition, Water Sanitation and protection services. Strengthening inclusive accessible and sustainable service delivery and culturally appropriate education remains central to the Government's vision of equitable development across all regions.

Rohingya refugee children, living in camps in Cox's Bazar, face an uncertain future while awaiting a safe, voluntary and dignified return to their homeland. The recent High-Level Conference on the Rohingya Crisis in New York on September 2025 reaffirmed the global community's commitment to sustaining humanitarian support and importantly, sustainable investment in education, providing portable skills, accredited learning and livelihoods, building youth's skills and support their eventual integration during the future safe, voluntary and dignified return.

POLICY ASKS

For Rohingya Refugee Children and Youth -

- ◆ **Protect education, ensuring accreditation and continuity of learning:** Safeguard the operation of learning centres protecting children's access to education aligned with the **Myanmar curriculum** or other recognised standards so that children's learning is portable and relevant to their future reintegration and return.
- ◆ **Maintain humanitarian support and protect child services:** Safeguard the operation of learning centres and community-based services from closure due to funding shortfalls and ensure life-saving assistance reaches children in need. Provide structured psychosocial support, mentoring, and youth engagement opportunities to promote agency and hope. Link the continuity of essential child services with national and international **roadmaps for voluntary, safe, and dignified return**, ensuring they remain aligned with humanitarian principles.
- ◆ **Invest in skills, livelihoods and community resilience:** Expand access to life skills, language, and vocational training for adolescents and youth, including young women, to enhance self-reliance and preparedness for return.

For Children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Other Minority Communities -

- ◆ **Promote equitable access to quality education and child-centred social services in Health, Nutrition, WASH and Protection:**

Ensure that children from indigenous and linguistic minority communities have equal access to schools, health care, and protection services with adequate infrastructure and outreach in remote areas.



MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ By 2030, at least 90% of Rohingya children have access to formal curriculum in Camps in Ukhiya and Tektaf upazillas and Bhasan Char.
- ◆ All CHT children of primary school age have access to government-primary schools with all necessary infrastructure, qualified teachers and teaching learning materials, within 1 square KM distance.
- ◆ By 2030, at least 20,000 Rohingya youth and 30,000 CHT/minority youth engaged in certified skills, green jobs or digital training programmes.
- ◆ Functional inclusion plans developed and implemented for all ethnic minority-majority districts, with specific budget tracking for children's services.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ % of CHT children of primary school age with access to Government primary schools with all necessary infrastructure, qualified teachers and teaching learning materials, within 1 square KM distance.
- ◆ Number of CHT, minority youth and Rohingya youth engaged in certified skills, green jobs or digital training programmes.
- ◆ Inclusion plans with specific budget tracking for children's services and implemented for all ethnic minority-majority districts.
- ◆ % of Rohingya Children reached with formal curriculum in Camps in in Ukhiya and Tektaf upazillas and Bhasan Char.



THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

When every voice, every culture, and every community is valued, a nation turns out to be strongest. But true strength is born when every child, regardless of their language, identity, or heritage, grows up knowing they belong. A nation flourishes when its children are free from discrimination, empowered by equal opportunity, and protected by justice.

When we uplift every child from every community, we build a future rooted in dignity, harmony, and hope. A future where diversity is not just accepted, but celebrated as our greatest strength.

- Sarah Almas Prithibi, 18



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Commitment 8

End Invisible Children in Bangladesh

Improve the process to **access birth registration for children** in Bangladesh without charge to ensure every child has an identity and access to every service.



RATIONALE

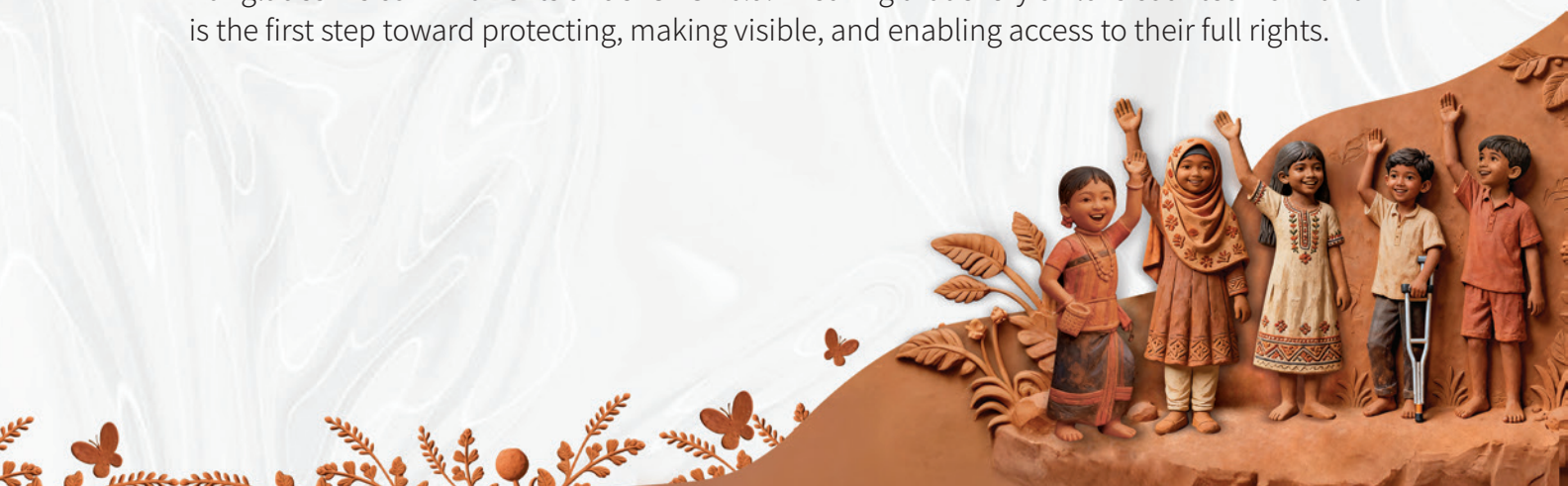
Birth registration is every child's first legal recognition by the State and the gateway to all other rights. It establishes a child's identity, name, age, and nationality, which are fundamental for accessing education, health care, social protection, justice, and protection services. Without birth registration, children remain invisible in national systems, unable to prove their age or identity, and at heightened risk of child marriage, child labour, trafficking, wrongful institutionalisation, and exclusion from essential services. A birth certificate is often the difference between protection and vulnerability.

In Bangladesh, despite steady improvements, birth registration coverage remains far too low. MICS 2025 shows that only 59% of children under five are registered, and just 47% possess a birth certificate, meaning more than 6 million children still lack legal identity. Early registration is particularly weak: only 25% of children under 45 days are registered, missing the crucial window for linkage with health services and early life enrolment. This gap undermines the rights of newborns and significantly delays their integration into Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) and protection systems.

Multiple systemic barriers continue to impede universal birth registration. These include fragmented digital systems, limited integration between health facilities and local government, inadequate capacity and staffing at Union Parishads, and inconsistent internet connectivity and device availability. Parents often face long distances, informal fees, administrative delays, or a lack of clarity about registration procedures. For marginalised groups, such as children in informal settlements, children living without parents, children with disabilities, and those in hard-to-reach or climate-affected areas, these barriers are even more acute.

The consequences extend far beyond documentation. Children without registration cannot easily enrol in school, access disability benefits, prove age in cases of child marriage or labour, or receive social protection transfers. They also remain uncounted in national statistics, weakening planning, budgeting, and accountability across sectors. Universal birth registration is therefore central not only to protecting children individually but also to strengthening national systems, forecasting service needs, and ensuring equitable resource allocation.

Scaling up birth registration, through a strengthened digitized CRVS, integration with health and education systems, strong community outreach, and a strengthened local government workforce, is critical for achieving the Child Rights Manifesto's vision and advancing Bangladesh's commitments under SDG 16.9. Ensuring that every child is counted from birth is the first step toward protecting, making visible, and enabling access to their full rights.



POLICY ASKS

- ◆ Scale up and integrate digital birth registration into health, education, and social protection systems to reach children at birth and throughout early childhood.
- ◆ Expand awareness campaigns and community-based outreach to ensure parents, caregivers, and communities understand the importance of birth registration.
- ◆ Strengthen coordination between the Office of the Registrar General (ORG), Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs for streamlined processes.
- ◆ Ensure birth registration services are accessible, free of cost, and inclusive of children in remote, marginalised, and displaced communities.

MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ By 2030, achieve 95% birth registration coverage for all children under five.
- ◆ By 2028, ensure 90% of all children are registered within 45 days of birth
- ◆ By 2027, integrate birth registration modules into 100% of public health facilities nationwide.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ % of children under five with birth registration.
- ◆ % of children registered within 45 days of birth.
- ◆ Number of local government offices and health facilities with functional digital birth registration systems.
- ◆ % of children from marginalised/ displaced groups with birth registration.

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

“ In Bangladesh, many children are still deprived of birth registration — a barrier that limits their access to education, healthcare, and essential government services. Due to child marriage, many young mothers are unaware of the importance of birth registration or struggle to gather the required documents. As a result, their children often miss the critical window for timely registration.

Without birth registration, a child’s identity and rights remain unprotected. To end this cycle, we must prevent child marriage, raise awareness, and take strong, coordinated action to ensure every child is registered at birth, and every right is safeguarded.

- Rawshan Tabassum Rawnaq, 14



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Commitment 9

A Budget that Reflects Children's Needs

Prioritise social sector allocations, reaching over time 5% of the GDP for each of the following sectors: education and primary healthcare.



RATIONALE

Maximising investment in children is the smartest path to human capital development by ensuring a skilled, healthy, and productive future workforce. Yet Bangladesh spend less than 2% of GDP on education and less than 1% on health, among the lowest globally, with nearly half (50%) of allocated funds unutilized.

The underinvestment means millions of children miss school, lack essential health services and die needlessly. Out-of-pocket expenditure accounts for over 70% of total health spending, maternal deaths reach 3,700 annually, and 86,000 under-five children die annually. Education quality remains poor, and inequality hits the most vulnerable hardest.

Bangladesh's demographic window of opportunity is closing fast, reversing after 2033. Bold and urgent investment in children is the only way to sustain growth tomorrow and secure Bangladesh's future.

POLICY ASKS

- ◆ Progressively increase budget for education and health to equate to international standards. of 5% of GDP.
- ◆ Ensure proper utilisation of allocated resources to the social sector line ministries.

MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ By 2030, enhance education budget to 2.5% and health budget to 1.5% of GDP as intermediary targets towards global standards (4-6% in Education and 5% in health).
- ◆ By 2030, ensure at least 95% utilisation of social sector budgets: health, education, social welfare, women and children affairs etc.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ Health budget as % of GDP
- ◆ Education budget as % of GDP
- ◆ % budget utilised by education and health ministries and divisions



A national budget must truly reflect the needs of children. Organizations like UNICEF and child advocates across the country are calling for stronger investments in key sectors, and I believe these areas must be prioritised:

Education: Bangladesh currently invests around 2% of GDP, far below the global benchmark of 4–6%. To improve quality, we need better learning environments, curriculum reforms, and heat-resilient schools.

Health: With less than 1% of GDP allocated to health, increasing this to at least 2% is essential. Universal healthcare, more trained health workers, and stronger immunisation services must be at the centre of this investment.

Social Protection: Programmes like maternity benefits and child grants are vital — but they must reach the families who need them the most. If we want a stronger Bangladesh, we must start by investing in its children.

- Sohan Hawlader, 18

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



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Commitment 10

Reporting on Children and Youth Commitments

Conduct a **review of the Children's Act**, with a view to identifying contradictions, existing gaps in laws and implementation of policies affecting children to be conducted over the first year of the new Government to ensure they are in accordance with the UNCRC. **Report progress on the above commitments** in Parliament at the beginning of each fiscal year through an annual scorecard developed on children's rights, in particular for vulnerable populations.



RATIONALE

Bangladesh, as a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) since 1990, is obligated under Article 44 to submit periodic reports every five years to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on measures taken to implement the Convention and progress achieved. The periodic reporting process is an important opportunity for the State to highlight major developments since the previous report, including legal and policy reforms, service delivery gaps, and actions taken to fulfil the Committee's recommendations. Bangladesh's 6th periodic report was due in 2021, and its 7th periodic report is due in 2026, yet neither has been submitted. As a result, Bangladesh is currently two reporting cycles overdue, limiting opportunities for accountability, international review, and structured progress monitoring on child rights.

The Committee's last concluding observations highlighted several priority areas requiring further action by Bangladesh:

- ◆ **Accelerate the adoption and harmonisation of child-related laws**, primarily the Children's Act, ensuring full alignment with the Convention, including the removal of legal loopholes that permit child marriage and strengthening legislation on violence, alternative care, and digital protection.
- ◆ **Establish a well-resourced and empowered interministerial coordination mechanism** with a clear mandate and authority to oversee the implementation of the Convention across all sectors and levels of government, including national, district, and local structures.
- ◆ **Strengthen child-focused public budgeting and expenditure tracking**, ensuring adequate and sustained financing for core education, health, and child protection functions, including social service workforce expansion, case management, CRVS, and community-based prevention.
- ◆ **Accelerate the creation of an independent Children's Ombudsperson**, with the authority to receive, investigate, and address complaints from children, monitor violations, and provide oversight of government actions affecting children.
- ◆ **Develop and operationalise a comprehensive Early Childhood Development strategy**, integrating health, nutrition, protection, early learning, disability screening, and parenting support to ensure holistic survival and development in the early years.
- ◆ **Ensure children's rights are fully integrated into all laws, policies, and programmes**, particularly within education, health, justice, social protection, and alternative care systems, and that implementation is monitored across ministries.
- ◆ **Scale up birth registration efforts**, including mobile registration services and stronger integration with health facilities and local government, to ensure that all children, especially those in rural, urban-poor, migrant, and marginalised communities, are registered and have access to birth certificates.
- ◆ **Adopt firm, coordinated measures to prevent and respond to child abuse, neglect, and exploitation**, including strengthened case management, reporting mechanisms, community awareness, and effective enforcement of the Children Act.



POLICY ASKS

- ◆ **Accelerate the revision of the Children Act (2013) to fully align with CRC** obligations and address emerging risks (digital harms, disability inclusion, alternative care safeguards, child labour, and child marriage loopholes).
- ◆ **Establish and resource a high-level Inter-Ministerial Child Rights Committee**, chaired at Secretary level, with authority to coordinate, monitor, and report on child rights implementation across ministries, divisions, and local government.
- ◆ **Institutionalise child rights monitoring and accountability**, including integration of CRC recommendations into national planning processes (Perspective Plan, 8th and 9th Five-Year Plan, SDG implementation mechanisms).
- ◆ **Strengthen national CRVS integration** with Health, Education, LGD, and Social Services, ensuring birth registration from birth and protection against identity-related vulnerabilities.
- ◆ **Professionalise and expand the social service workforce (SSW)** to enable effective child protection case management and follow-up.

MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS

- ◆ **By 2027, Bangladesh will submit its 6th and 7th combined CRC State Party Report**, fully updating progress since 2015 and responding to all outstanding recommendations.
- ◆ **By 2026, establish and operationalise a National Inter-Ministerial Committee on Child Rights**, with quarterly coordination and annual public reporting.
- ◆ **By 2027, launch a National Child Rights Scorecard**, published annually and presented to Parliament, tracking progress on child marriage, violence, child labour, birth registration, disability inclusion, and child well-being.
- ◆ **By 2028, deploy a trained social service workforce in every upazila**, supported by a national case management system linked to DSS and MoWCA.

KEY INDICATORS

- ◆ Number of CRC periodic reports submitted on time (target: two overdue reports cleared by 2027).
- ◆ Existence and functionality of a National Inter-Ministerial Child Rights Committee (quarterly meetings, published minutes).
- ◆ Annual Child Rights Scorecard produced and tabled in Parliament (Yes/No each year).
- ◆ Coverage of social service workforce (number of trained SSWs per 100,000 children; number of upazilas staffed).
- ◆ Number of ministries reporting annually on CRC-linked child indicators through the scorecard (target: all relevant ministries).

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

“ I want to grow up in a country where the laws really protect children. It is not enough to only write rules on paper. We need to see them working in real life. When the law is strong and everyone follows it, children like us can feel safe and can focus on our dreams without fear.”

In the registration process for children, I want the mistakes to be corrected properly and quickly. Many children, especially street children, still do not get registered the right way. Birth registration is a basic right, so it must be simple, free from errors, and easy for every child to access.

- K. M. Iftesham Islam, 15



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CHILD RIGHTS MANIFESTO

**A Promise to
Every Child in Bangladesh**



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