

[EU 2018 Annual Report on Human Rights and Democratisation - Country Updates on Human Rights and Democracy 2017](#)

See caste-related passages highlighted

People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangladesh's high economic growth and incremental poverty reduction have not been accompanied by comparable progress in the area of human rights and respect for the rule of law. Bangladesh has ratified most of the international treaties and covenants including the ICCPR. The political situation in Bangladesh has been characterized by a dominant role of the ruling party, with the main opposition parties (Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami) out of the parliament with practically very limited influence on the political process. Radicalization is intensifying and Bangladeshi authorities have significantly increased operations by security forces against suspect groups but have no comprehensive strategy to counter radicalisation. Violence on religious grounds continued in a sporadic manner in 2017.

Shrinking democratic space and the continuous deterioration of civil and political rights, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and restrictive actions against human rights activists, as well as independence of judiciary and access to justice remain areas of grave concern. Human rights NGOs documented at least 139 cases of extrajudicial killings and 86 cases of enforced disappearances in 2017. Law enforcement agencies are mostly unsuccessful in tracking down the perpetrators. The death penalty is maintained in Bangladesh. The trial courts sentenced 410 persons to death and six people were executed in Bangladesh in 2017. On 27 November, the High Court upheld the death sentences of 139 men convicted for killing 57 army officers and 17 others during the 2009 mutiny. Appeals are planned to be filed at the Supreme Court.

Progress is needed in the field of freedom of expression and of the media, Bangladesh ranked 146th among 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index in 2017. There are several legislative acts in place that restrict the freedom of expression, most notably the Information and Communication Technology Act. **The rights of persons belonging to minorities should be improved.** Gender equality, women's and children's rights, fundamental labour rights, freedom of assembly freedom of association (trade union registration) and fair labour practices, also remain of concern, as is the situation of the Rohingyas, despite appreciated constructive humanitarian role played by Bangladesh in welcoming the Rohingya refugees who have arrived as a result of violence in Northern Rakhine State, Myanmar on 25 August 2017. Despite some progress as regards work place safety registered in the framework of the Sustainability Compact, the Bangladesh Labour Act and the Export Processing Zone Law maintain high thresholds for forming trade unions and so far failed to comply with key ILO Conventions which Bangladesh ratified. There are persisting problems in relation to child labour. Violence against women remains widespread. Bangladesh continues to have one of the highest child marriage rates worldwide.

In 2017, the EU's main priorities remained the rule of law and access to justice, promoting freedom of expression, fundamental economic and social rights, gender equality, women's human rights and preventing gender-based violence; protection of minorities (religious, ethnic, work and descent-based) and refugees, abolishing the death penalty. The EU Delegation and the EU Heads of Mission adopted a Local Implementation Strategy for the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, aiming at enhancing cooperation with and provide support to human rights defenders in Bangladesh.

The EU closely followed the human rights situation in the country through political dialogue, public diplomacy, development cooperation activities, engaging with civil society representatives and human rights organisations and defenders. The EU regularly called on Bangladesh to make progress on the issues of human rights and democracy at all meetings with Bangladeshi partners. The EU regularly underlines that the respect of human rights and democracy, including free, fair and inclusive elections due end 2018, in accordance with international standards for democratic elections, are essential for creating a more prosperous Bangladesh. The EU raised concerns on enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings, judicial independence, freedom of expression, labour rights and freedom of association, child labour and the death penalty at the 8th EU-Bangladesh Joint Commission meeting in Brussels in July 2017. The EU has also underlined the urgent need for aligning labour legislation with ILO standards and allowing for the full freedom of association at the 3rd Sustainability Compact Review meeting in Dhaka in May 2017.

In 2017, EU human rights projects were being implemented by different organisations focussing on access to justice, protection of minorities (religious, ethnic, work and descent-based) and refugees, economic and social rights, including labour rights, gender equality, women's human rights, gender-based violence and rights of sexual minorities, freedom of expression.