NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE RIGHTS OF CHILD

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RESEARCH REPORT

SITUATION ANALYSIS OF BRICK KILN WORKERS IN PUNJAB & SINDH; A CHILD CENTRIC, GENDER SENSITIVE & MINORITY PERSPECTIVE



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National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC)
Evacuee Trust Complex, 5th Floor, Agha Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad, Pakistan

Community World Service Asia
Street No. 1, MPCHS E-11/1, Islamabad

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info@ncrc.gov.pk
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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE RIGHTS OF CHILD

National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC) is a statutory body established by the Government of Pakistan for the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of children's rights in Pakistan. NCRC has the mandate to examine and review policies, laws, practices, and proposals, inquire into violations of child rights, sponsor research, raise awareness, build capacities, provide technical support, and advise the Government on legislative and policy matters by virtue of the National Commission on the Rights of Child Act, 2017.

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TECHNICAL OVERSIGHT

MR. PIRBHU LAL SATYANI (NCRC)
COMMUNITY WORLD SERVICE ASIA (CWSA) TEAM

AUTHORED BY

DR. NIAZ MURTAZA

EDITORIAL REVIEW

MS. MAHAM AFRIDI (NCRC)
MS. IZZA FAHEEM TAHIR (NCRC)
CSWA TEAM

DATA COLLECTION

CSWA FIELD TEAM
NATIONAL LOBBYING DELEGATION (NLD) MEMBERS

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

ALIF PRINTING & PACKAGES

Message from the Chairperson, National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC)

Behind every brick that builds our cities, there is a family. Too often, that family includes a child who began moulding clay at the age of four or five, a mother who worked through her pregnancy and returned to the kiln days after giving birth, and a father whose debt has followed him from one kiln to the next, and sometimes from his own parents. This study was commissioned to look closely at those families, and what it found should trouble every one of us.

The National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC), in partnership with Community World Service Asia (CSWA), undertook this situational analysis across eight districts of Punjab and Sindh with a deliberate lens: child-centric, gender-sensitive, and attentive to the position of religious minorities and marginalised castes, who make up the overwhelming majority of the kiln workforce. The picture that emerged was consistent from district to district. No worker we spoke to held a written contract. Every worker was in debt to the kiln owner. Families of eight to eleven members, children included, earn less together than the statutory minimum wage for a single adult. Children attend school, where a school exists, and then return to the kiln. Housing, credit, food and permission to attend a funeral all flow through the ame employer, and that dependence is the mechanism by which bondage persists.

I want to be clear about where responsibility lies. The problem is not an absence of law. The Constitution prohibits forced labor and guarantees education. The Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act has stood since 1992. Provincial legislation on child labor at brick kilns, minimum wages, occupational safety and social security is in place. What is missing is implementation: inspections that reach beyond a handful of kilns, registration systems that capture the actual workforce rather than a few supervisors, District Vigilance Committees that meet, and social protection that reaches the women and children who need it most. Where the state is absent, kiln owners set the terms, and the consequences are borne by children.



This report does not stop at documenting harm. It identifies model kilns that comply with the law and remain profitable, civil society programmes that secure workers' release through the courts rather than by paying an unlawful debt, and practical tools, from digital wage records to a Brick Kiln Management Information System, that can make enforcement possible even with limited staff. The recommendations are concrete and within reach. They require political will from provincial governments, sustained engagement from employers, and coordination among labor, education, health and child protection institutions.

The Commission will use this evidence to press for that will. A country cannot build its future on the labor of children it has promised to protect. I urge every reader, whether legislator, official, employer, donor or citizen, to treat the findings that follow not as a description of how things are, but as a measure of how far we still have to go.

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ACRONYMS

BISP	Benazir Income Support Program
BKMIS	Brick Kiln Management Information System
BLLF	Bonded Labor Liberation Front
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWSA	Community World Service Asia
DOI	Digital Object Identifier
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FIR	First Information Report
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
ILO	International Labor Organization
IT	Information Technology
NCRC	National Commission on the Rights of Child
NCHR	National Commission for Human Rights
SCPA	Sindh Child Protection Authority
SESSI	Sindh Employees' Social Security Institution
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TMK	Tando Muhammad Khan
UN	United Nations

INTRODUCTION

This research report presents the findings of a study on the socio-economic conditions of brick kiln workers in Punjab and Sindh, examined through a child-centric, gender-sensitive, and minority-inclusive lens. The study was commissioned by the National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC) and Community World Service Asia (CWSA).

CWSA, in collaboration with NCRC, works to support the empowerment of communities facing marginalization, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Building on this experience, CWSA intends to broaden its programmatic focus on labor rights in Pakistan. To this end, CWSA, in collaboration with NCRC, conducted a comprehensive situational analysis of brick kilns in Punjab and Sindh to assess key challenges related to human rights, women's rights, child rights, and labor rights violations, and to identify strategies for improving the working and living conditions of brick kiln workers.

Brick kiln workers in Pakistan are subject to significant exploitation, often described in policy and academic literature as a form of modern-day bonded labor. The sector employs millions of workers and plays a critical role in supplying materials to the construction industry, yet it remains largely unregulated. Workers are typically drawn from the poorest segments of society, including landless rural populations and marginalized communities, who have limited access to formal employment opportunities. The study specifically examined the following areas:

1. Socio-economic concerns faced by brick kiln workers;
2. Child rights violation in and around brick kiln settings;
3. Intersectionality with respect to gender, faith, caste, and socio-economic status with respect to child rights violations in brick kiln settings;
4. Responsibilities of the labor department and other relevant government departments regarding labor rights protection;
5. Presence and role of workers' unions and civil society organizations;
6. Gaps in service provision;

METHODOLOGY



2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology comprised a comprehensive desk review of findings from government reports, international organisations' publications, academic research, and investigative journalism, in order to identify the key challenges and rights violations faced by brick kiln workers. The findings from this review formed the basis for identifying the areas to be explored further through fieldwork. The fieldwork was conducted over six weeks by the lead researcher and CWSA staff. NCRC Member (Sindh & Minorities), Pirbhu Satyani, joined the inception phase and provided technical inputs.

Sampling Strategy: The study adopted purposive sampling to ensure representation of key vulnerable groups, including women and child workers, minority communities, and highly indebted households. Four districts were selected in each province on the basis of the findings of literature review as shown below. In each district, at least one focused group discussion (FGD) (15-20 participants each) was conducted, while 5–8 key informant interviews with government officials, kiln owners and CSOs were also conducted at the provincial level. Triangulation was done by comparing responses across workers, officials, and civil society actors. A 6-day mapping field mission was conducted in Punjab and Sindh to cover 4 districts in each province, with 3-4 meetings on each day as follows:

Field Activities for Data Collection	Punjab	Sindh	Total
Meeting with relevant government staff	6	8	14
FGDs with brick kiln workers	4	4	8
Meetings with unions or CSOs	15	4	19
Meetings with kiln owners	1	4	5
Total	26	20	46

The list of key informant interviews (KIIs) and field visit plans are given in the annexes.

Data Analysis Approach: Thematic coding of responses by type of respondents around debt, wages, child labor, gender, services, social protection and exit pathways.

Ethical considerations: Given the risks associated with bonded labor, child labor, harassment, debt bondage, and trafficking-related concerns, the methodology incorporated informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, safe referral pathways, and careful handling of sensitive questions and responses.
In line with child safeguarding principles, children were not interviewed directly. The presence of a woman interviewer helped ensure these principles were applied more effectively and facilitated data collection from women participants.
Interviews were conducted in a manner that minimized risk to participants, particularly in contexts where workers may face retaliation from employers. To further protect confidentiality, participants' responses were kept anonymous throughout the study, and all collected data was stored securely through password-protected files and secure storage systems.

Study limitations

- **Time and coverage constraints:** The study was based on short field visits across selected districts in Punjab and Sindh. As a result, it may not fully capture regional variations or conditions in less accessible or unvisited areas.
- **Indicative district-level data:** District selections were based on a combination of secondary sources including NGOs' reports, and practitioner insights. Given the absence of standardized district-level datasets, these should not be treated as statistically precise.
- **Reliance on qualitative methods**: The study relied primarily on focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews, a qualitative approach that yields rich, contextual insights but does not produce statistically representative or generalizable findings.
- **Response and access bias:** Given the sensitive nature of bonded labor concerns, respondents may have been hesitant to share full information due to fear of repercussions from kiln owners or local actors. Access to certain kiln sites or stakeholders was restricted, potentially influencing the diversity of perspectives captured.

Thus, the findings are indicative and qualitative rather than rigorous and quantitative.

LITERATURE REVIEW



3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews findings from government reports, international organizations, academic research and investigative journalism, to examine the main concerns faced by workers in brick kilns, with the aim of providing a comprehensive understanding of the concerns that were subsequently investigated in the field data collection.

3.1 Debt Bondage

A common practice in brick kilns is the advance payment system, called peshgi, which ties workers and their families to kiln owners through debt as workers enter into jobs through loans (International Labor Organization, 2014; National Commission for Human Rights, 2025). Although this system claims to meet the immediate needs of workers, it often becomes coercive due to low wages, high deductions, and faulty record-keeping. Workers frequently do not know how their debts are calculated given the lack of written contracts (International Labor Organization, 2014). Debt bondage is usually seen as the central mechanism through which labor exploitation is done in brick kilns.

As a result, workers often remain tied to the same kiln owners for many years, sometimes across multiple generations. The terms of repayment are typically disadvantageous to workers: payments are calculated on a piece-rate basis, while deductions for food, shelter, and loan interest are determined by the owners (ILO, 2014). Consequently, debts remain constant or increase over time, reinforcing dependency and limiting workers' ability to exit the arrangement.

Evidence from Punjab supports the argument that debt bondage is closely associated with broader socio-economic vulnerability. Khan and Shahzadi (2022) conducted a mixed-method study involving 150 brick-kiln workers from 35 kilns across three districts of Punjab and found that debt bondage was linked with poverty, inadequate nutrition, and poor socioeconomic conditions. Indebtedness cannot be understood as an isolated financial issue, but rather as part of a wider system of economic dependency that affects households involved in brick-kiln production. Similarly, a study conducted with 1600 brick kiln workers in Sindh, Pakistan reveals the higher prevalence of forced labor and

trafficking. Most of the sampled brick kiln workers belong to the Hindu religion Oad caste, and reported their wealth status as "poorest" according to the national classification. Some workers from other Scheduled Caste communities, including Kolhi and Bheel, are also engaged in brick kiln work. Over 80% workers neither possess birth forms nor registered for social security with the Sindh Employees Social Security Institution (SESSI) (Hameed et al., 2025). These research findings entail the nexus of bonded labor and socio-economic conditions. However, there is a need for in-depth research to understand the linkage of debt bondage with socio-economic and other similar variables in Sindh context.

The informal nature of the brick kiln sector is a key factor enabling the persistence of exploitative practices. Employment relationships are rarely formalized, and workers lack of access to contracts, legal protections, or institutional support. Although legislation exists to prohibit bonded labor, enforcement mechanisms are weak and inconsistently applied. Institutional challenges include limited inspection capacity, fragmented responsibilities across administrative levels, and inadequate monitoring systems. As a result, kiln operations often function outside regulatory oversight, allowing exploitative practices to continue without accountability. The International Labor Organization's assessment of Pakistan's brick-kiln supply chain further identified gaps in the implementation of fundamental labor rights, mainly in relation to bonded labor and child labor. The study emphasized institutional and enforcement deficits within the sector, indicating that the existence of legal provisions does not necessarily guarantee effective protection for workers (Gill, 2022).

3.2 Child Labor and Marginalized Groups

Child labor is widespread within brick kilns, due to economic necessity and the structure of production systems (International Labor Organization, 2014; Khan, 2020). Families often rely on the labor of children to increase output and meet financial obligations, particularly under piece-rate payment arrangements. The involvement of children in labor has long-term consequences for education and social mobility. Many children lack access to schools. Most children never enroll in school while some drop out at an early age, limiting their future opportunities.

Piece rate pay is a compensation system where employees are paid based on the number of units produced or services completed rather than hours worked.

Marginalized communities, including religious minorities and Communities historically subjected to caste-based discrimination, along with religious minorities, are overrepresented in the kiln workforce and face significant exploitation and discrimination (National Commission for Human Rights, 2025; Christian Aid, 2024).

Existing literature highlights that child labor in brick kilns is closely connected to the debt relationships of adult workers. Mayberry and Farrukh (2024) report that children working in hazardous industries such as brick kilns are typically not covered by formal employment contracts; instead, they may be linked to contracts made with the child's father and to continuing household debts, creating conditions in which children become part of the broader system of bonded labor.

Child workers , who are undocumented, unacknowledged as workers, and under the control of their parents, occupy the most precarious position within this hierarchy. The two decision-makers in the kiln milieu, namely kiln owners and fathers, deny responsibility for child labor and attribute it to one another.

Child labor in brick kilns is thus deeply rooted in economic vulnerability, debt arrangements, and exploitative production systems. Its intersection with bonded labor and discrimination against communities facing marginalization perpetuates a cycle of poverty and restricts children's future opportunities. Addressing child labor requires coordinated measures to tackle the economic and structural inequalities that sustain it (Ali et al., 2017)

The two major decision-makers in the kiln milieu, i.e. the kiln-owners and the fathers, disassociate themselves from child labor and blame each other for its existence. The bottom line is that the children have no say in their decisions related to work, leisure, or education. Finally, it was observed that these children start going to the kilns with their parents as infants. Hence, they are acculturated into the brick-kiln milieu and start working at the earliest possible age. This acculturation of children into the brick-kiln milieu at an early age makes them acquiescent to their exploitative environment and produces a

quiescent state of mind in which self is dehumanized, and basic human rights are made negotiable.

3.3 Women's Concerns

Women and girls contribute extensively to production processes but are often not formally recognized as workers, resulting in unequal or unpaid labor. Their work is frequently subsumed under that of men household members, reducing their financial autonomy. Women are also typically paid lower wages than men. Many women work long hours in physically demanding tasks such as molding, carrying, and stacking bricks while simultaneously managing domestic responsibilities, creating a "double burden" of productive and reproductive labor. Pregnant women and mothers face serious health risks due to exposure to heat, smoke, dust, and physically strenuous work, often without access to maternal healthcare services. Women also face harassment and exploitation while social norms and power imbalances further restrict their access to justice and support mechanisms. Poor living conditions, lack of healthcare access, and unpaid home care responsibilities further increase their burden (ILO, 2014; NHCR, 2025).

A recent qualitative study of women working under bonded labor conditions in Faisalabad examined the experiences of approximately 20–25 female brick-kiln workers through in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions. The study found that debt dependence, poverty, gender inequality, mental-health difficulties, and restricted access to rights and services were major challenges faced by women in the sector (Masih et al., 2025). Occupational health research also demonstrates that women brick-kiln workers face risks beyond economic exploitation. A study of female brick-kiln workers in Rawat, Pakistan, examined exposure to brick-kiln emissions and associated heavy-metal, biochemical, and reproductive-health risks, indicating that working conditions can have particular negative implications for women's health (David et al., 2020).

3.4 Health, Environment, and Living Conditions

Education attainment among brick kiln workers' families is severely affected by poverty, debt bondage, and child labor. Children frequently work in brick kilns to support household income, which results in low enrolment, irregular attendance,

and high dropout rates. The absence of nearby schools, education costs, and migration between kilns further disrupt education. As a result, low education level perpetuates intergenerational cycle of poverty and labor dependency. Working and living conditions in brick kiln environments are usually hazardous. Laborers are exposed to extreme heat, dust, and emissions from kiln operations, which cause respiratory and other chronic health conditions. Access to healthcare services is limited, and preventive measures are largely absent.

Housing conditions are typically inadequate and have limited access to clean water and sanitation. These factors affect physical well-being and cause economic vulnerability, as illness often leads to additional debt (International Labor Organization, 2014; National Commission for Human Rights, 2025). Recent sources suggest newer and compounding forms of exploitation within the brick kiln sector, such as reports of organ trafficking targeting indebted workers due to the severity of economic desperation faced by laborers (The Guardian, 2026). Thus, new forms of exploitation are emerging alongside older practices.

Strong evidence of occupational health risks reported from Sindh. Shaikh et al. (2012) conducted a cross-sectional study among 340 adult men brick-kiln workers in Larkana and Dadu districts. The study disclosed that 22.4% of workers reported chronic cough, 21.2% reported chronic phlegm, 13.8% experienced repeated attacks of shortness of breath with wheezing, 17.1% suffered from chronic bronchitis, and 8.2% reported physician-diagnosed asthma. Workers involved in brick baking were also more likely to experience chronic bronchitis and asthma than workers involved in carriage and placement activities (Shaikh et al., 2012).

A 2023 survey of 400 brick-kiln workers across 20 kilns in Bahawalpur found that approximately 70–80% of workers were uneducated, while only 20% reported access to safe drinking water, 18% had access to first aid or medical care, and none reported access to accident-risk prevention measures, highlighting the poor living and occupational situations faced by kiln workers in southern Punjab (Anwar et al., 2023). The findings from Larkana and Dadu are particularly relevant to a comparative study of Sindh and Punjab because they provide quantitative evidence that brick-kiln work is associated with significant occupational health risks in Sindh. They also demonstrate how the type of work performed

within a kiln can influence workers' exposure to hazardous conditions (Shaikh et al., 2012).

3.5 Districts with Highest brick kiln Concentration and Concerns

Note: The district-level kiln counts and poverty rates are presented from the strongest available district-specific sources. Child labor and bonded labor intensity ratings remain based on multiple government, academic and NGO sources and practitioner insights. Quantitative figures were available only for kiln count and poverty rates based on official data. For child labor and bonded labor, districts were chosen where specific studies qualitatively listed certain districts as being more affected. The specific sources for each dimension are provided below District selection also took account of CWSA's current geographic focus in upper/central Punjab and southern Sindh. The tables are therefore not intended as a ranking of all districts in the two provinces. The final choices reflect both the four indicators and CWSA's areas of work.

PUNJAB

District	Kiln Count (2020)	Poverty Rate MPI % (2014–15)	Child Labor Intensity*	Bonded Labor Intensity
Kasur	834	21.9	High	High
Faisalabad	607	19.4	Medium	High
Lahore	277	4.3	Medium	Medium
Sheikhupura	312	21.4	High	High
Okara	332	39.5	Medium	High
Multan	614	35.7	High	High
Gujranwala	332	14.0	Medium	Medium
Sialkot	265	14.0	Medium	Medium
Jhang	280	41.6	Very High	High
Vehari	380	41.9	Very High	High

Punjab priority districts:

Within Upper Punjab:

Kasur: Has the largest number of kilns among the Punjab districts listed (834), a long with strong evidence of bonded labor and child-labor risks.

Faisalabad: Has a large kiln sector (607 kilns) and recent NCHR evidence of serious labor exploitation. Child labor is high in absolute numbers, though lower when measured per kiln.
Sheikhupura: Has a sizeable kiln sector (312 kilns) within CWSA's geographic focus, with evidence of child and bonded labor risks.

Jhang: Has fewer kilns than the three districts above, but much higher poverty (41.6%) and very high child labor intensity.

Kasur, Faisalabad, Shaikhupura, and Jhang combined the highest mix of kiln concentration, poverty levels, child labor intensity and bondedness levels.

SINDH

District	Kiln Count (various years)	Poverty Rate MPI % (2014–15)	Child Labor Incidence % (2022–24)	Bonded Labor Intensity
Hyderabad	74	25.7	7.8%	High
Badin	115	74.8	20.8%	Very High
Jamshoro	—	55.6	12.2%	High
Matiari	72	62.1	14.8%	High
Tando Allahyar	64	67.3	15.0%	Very High
Tando M. Khan	12*	78.4	7.6%	Very High
Thatta	—	78.5	19.8%	Very High
Sujawal	—	82.0	35.1%	Very High
Karachi	—	4.5†	2.7%	Medium
Sanghar	85	66.8	13.8%	High

Southern Sindh priority districts:

Badin: Has a sizeable, mapped kiln sector (115 kilns), very high poverty (74.8%), high child labor (20.8%) and strong evidence of bonded labor.

Tando Allahyar: Has high poverty (67.3%), high child labor (15.0%) and strong district-specific evidence of bonded labor.

Tando Muhammad Khan: Its documented kiln count is small, but poverty is extremely high (78.4%) and district studies provide strong evidence of debt bondage and labor exploitation.

Thatta: Has very high poverty (78.5%), high child labor (19.8%) and documented bonded-labor concerns, although no comparable kiln-count estimate is available.

Badin, Tando Allahyar, Tando M. Khan and Thatta combined the highest mix of kiln concentration, poverty levels, child labor intensity and bondedness levels. Umerkot had already been covered by CWSA. Thatta was chosen over Sajawal due to logistical and local contact considerations.

*** Tando Muhammad Khan kiln count:** The figure of 12 is drawn from a separate district-specific study in which researchers identified the kilns in the district; it is not derived from the AKU Sindh kiln-mapping dataset.

For Punjab, the child labor ratings are qualitative and relate specifically to brick kilns, drawing mainly on the Punjab Urban Unit kiln census and related analysis. For Sindh, the figures are district-wide child labor rates for children aged 5–17 from the Sindh Child Labor Survey 2022–2024. The Punjab and Sindh figures are therefore not directly comparable.

Data years and comparability: Punjab kiln counts are from BKOAP statistics reported by ICIMOD for November 2020. Poverty rates are district MPI head-count estimates based on PSLM 2014–15. Sindh child labor percentages are from the Sindh Child Labor Survey 2022–2024 and cover children aged 5–17 across all sectors. Punjab child-labor ratings are kiln-specific qualitative indicators and are not directly comparable with the Sindh percentages. Sindh kiln counts come from different district studies/mapping exercises and should be read as indicative rather than as a single-year census.

Sources:

- Punjab kiln counts: Towards an Environment-and-Worker-Friendly Brick Kiln Sector in Punjab, Pakistan, Table 4; BKOAP real-time statistics, November 2020.
- Sindh kiln counts: AKU community mapping for the Johns Hopkins/CenHTRO forced-labor study (mapped kilns in Sindh); Tando Muhammad Khan count from a separate district study.
- Poverty rates: Government of Pakistan, Planning Commission/UNDP, Multidimensional Poverty in Pakistan, district MPI incidence (2014/15). Karachi figure is for Karachi as a whole, not Malir specifically.
- Child labor and bonded labor intensity: original report synthesis based on multiple government datasets, academic studies, NGO evidence (including BLLF, HRCP and NCHR) and practitioner/ field-based expert judgment.

Additional child labor source: Government of Sindh, Sindh Child Labor Survey 2022–2024, district-level incidence for children aged 5–17. Punjab ratings remain qualitative, based principally on the Punjab Urban Unit brick-kiln census and multiple-source synthesis.

Bonded labor source: Bonded labor intensity: indicative district classification based on NCHR studies, HRCP and Hari Welfare Association documentation of bonded-worker releases, RSPN/NRSP district studies, academic research, and practitioner evidence. No standardized district-level prevalence dataset exists; ratings are therefore comparative rather than statistical.



An elderly man from the minority community digs and gathers mud at the brick kiln, working each day to shape bricks for his family's survival.

FIELDWORK FINDINGS



4. FIELDWORK FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the field visits to brick kilns in Punjab and Sindh and the discussions with workers, government officials, civil society representatives and other relevant stakeholders. The fieldwork aimed to understand the patterns of employment, indebtedness, living conditions and access to services among brick kiln workers, through a child-centric, gender-sensitive and minority lens.

Although the number of kilns visited was limited, the consistency of responses across locations was high which raised their validity. Many of the issues raised by workers were repeated in different districts and were also echoed by key informants familiar with the sector. Taken together, the findings suggest that the challenges facing kiln workers are not isolated incidents but reflect broader structural patterns affecting large numbers of families.

4.1 Overview

Most of the kilns visited were small to medium-sized units employing between 20 and 50 families. Interestingly, the workers were overwhelmingly from religious minorities, as in Punjab, they were predominantly Christian; while in Sindh, most workers belonged to Hindu communities and were additionally subject to caste-based discrimination, resulting in compounded forms of marginalization. A key finding was the intergenerational nature of employment: in instances of debt bondage, the entire family is often required to work to repay the debt, which is the primary mechanism through which children become bonded laborers. Many respondents stated that they had spent almost their entire lives working in brick kilns. Some explained that their parents had worked in the same occupation and that their children were now following the same path. For many families, kiln work was not simply a job but the only work option they had ever known.

Government statistics provide only a partial picture of the sector. Punjab Social Security reported around 8,000 registered kilns, while Sindh Labor Department reported around 800. Several stakeholders interviewed during the study suggested that the actual number of kilns may be much higher. This raises broader concerns about the visibility of the sector and the effectiveness of regulatory oversight.

4.2 Employment Conditions

None of the workers interviewed during the study had a written employment contract, in violation of Standing Orders and labor laws of Punjab and Sindh. Work arrangements were entirely informal and based on verbal agreements between workers and kiln owners. Workers reported being paid on a piece-rate basis, typically receiving between PKR 1,200 - PKR 1,500 for every 1,000 standard-sized bricks produced. Daily production varied according to the size and composition of the family workforce, with most families (approximately 8-11 members per family sampled under the study) producing between 800 - 1,500 bricks per day. Only a small number of workers in two or three kilns reported supplementing their income through livestock ownership.

Workers face a range of deductions on their incomes. The most common deduction relates to outstanding debt, with approximately PKR 200 deducted per 1,000 bricks produced. Additional deductions were made for damaged bricks and, in some cases, for molding machines provided by kiln owners. Earnings were also affected by seasonal fluctuations. Production generally declines during periods of extreme heat or cold, while most kilns cease operations for several weeks during the monsoon season, leaving workers without a regular source of income. In most cases, owners prohibit workers from going out to look for other means of income.

Wage and debt records are maintained by the kiln munshi (accountant), and workers are generally not provided with written statements or copies of accounts, which is a violation of Labor record-keeping laws of Punjab and Sindh. Given the high levels of illiteracy among workers, most were unable to independently verify the accuracy of these records. Workers in several kilns reported discrepancies in brick counting, for instance, alleging that outputs of 1,000 bricks were sometimes recorded as 900 bricks. Labor activists and civil society representatives stated that inaccuracies and exploitation in wage and debt calculations were common (which would violate the National Payment of Wages Act). This is exacerbated by workers' limited ability to review or challenge the records maintained by kiln management.

The wage rates reported during the study suggest that many workers earnsubstantially less than the statutory minimum wage. Assuming a production level of 1,000 bricks per day and a payment rate of PKR 1,500 per 1,000 bricks, a family would earn approximately PKR 38,000 per month under ideal conditions, which is below the minimum monthly wage of PKR 40,000 currently applicable in both Punjab and Sindh. Importantly, this income is typically generated through the combined labor of two adults and two or three children. On a per-worker basis, earnings are therefore significantly below the legal minimum wage. When account is also taken of seasonal kiln closures and periods of reduced production, actual annual earnings are likely to be even lower, thereby in violation of Punjab and Sindh Minimum Wages Acts.

"Our whole family works, yet we get less than the minimum for one worker."- (Brick Kiln Worker, Punjab)

4.3 Debt and Bonded Labor

Debt emerged as the most important issue raised by workers and as a natural consequence of the very low wages. Every worker interviewed reported owing money to the kiln owner. The amounts reported generally ranged from PKR 200,000 to PKR 500,000, although some key informants suggested that considerably higher debts are also common. Workers described debt as a necessity rather than a choice. Earnings are often insufficient to cover basic household needs, particularly during periods when kilns close because of weather conditions. As a result, workers rely on advances from owners to purchase food, pay medical expenses and meet costs associated with births, deaths and marriages.

The debt system is closely tied to the structure of employment. Records are normally maintained by the kiln munshi, while workers rarely receive written documentation. Most workers interviewed were unable to independently verify the calculations being made. As discussed earlier, some workers alleged cheating in debt entries, whereby advances received were recorded at higher amounts. Although many workers expressed trust in the information provided to them, several labor activists and civil society representatives argued that manipulation of debt records is widespread. Workers described debt not only as a financial obligation but also as a mechanism restricting freedom of movement, with some

families requiring permission to leave kiln premises for family events or emergencies. Several respondents reported that only one or two family members were permitted to attend weddings, funerals or other events and were expected to return promptly, in violation of the freedom of movement guaranteed by Constitution Articles 11 & 15, and the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992.

Another important finding was the long-term nature of indebtedness. Workers repeatedly stated that debts rarely decrease significantly. Instead, they are often carried forward year after year. Some workers reported moving from one kiln to another, with the debt being transferred to a new owner. Others stated that they had inherited debt obligations from their parents, in violation of the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992. In such cases, debt functions not merely as a financial obligation but as a mechanism that limits freedom of movement and employment choice. The study therefore found that debt lies at the center of the labor relationship in most kilns. Workers remain dependent on owners not only for employment but also for access to credit and basic survival needs. This dependence creates conditions in which workers have limited bargaining power and few realistic alternatives. All these aspects violate the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992.

"We want to leave this work, but we cannot because of the debt."
(Brick Kiln worker from Sindh)

4.4 Working Conditions

Workers affected by debt are primarily engaged in molding bricks. Other tasks within the kilns, such as loading, unloading and operating kilns, are generally carried out by workers who were not tied to the same debt arrangements and who often received higher wages. That is because molding bricks is seen as low-skilled and low-paid work in comparison to other tasks at kiln. The working day usually begins before sunrise, as many families reported starting work between four and five o'clock in the morning. During the summer months, this schedule is adopted to avoid the most intense heat. Some workers also reported returning to work after sunset to complete production targets. Therefore, there are no fixed working hours at brick kilns. The nature of brick molding means that workers spend long hours outdoors and are exposed to dust, sand and extreme temperatures. The most commonly reported health

concern is respiratory illness associated with inhaling dust particles. Water scarcity was identified by kiln owners as a major operational constraint affecting both productivity and worker earnings. Despite this risk, protective equipment such as masks were not observed during field visits. Neither do owners provide them, in violation of Punjab and Sindh Occupational Safety and Health Acts nor are workers used to the idea. Formal occupational safety measures are absent.

Workers generally organize their own schedules and there are no structured break arrangements. While some workers appreciate this flexibility, it should not obscure the broader reality that families often work for extended periods in order to generate enough income to survive and to service existing debts. The study did not uncover large numbers of reported workplace accidents. However, workers did mention occasional incidents involving collapsing sand piles and other hazards associated with manual labor. A burn injury case was reported in which a worker allegedly received little or no medical support or compensation following an accident. Unsafe fuels, including plastic waste, old clothing and agricultural residue, were reportedly used in some kilns, contributing to occupational and environmental health risks. More broadly, the absence of occupational health and safety systems means that risks are largely borne by workers themselves rather than being managed through formal procedures. No formal complaint or grievance mechanisms were reported by workers in these locations.

4.5 Living Conditions and Basic Services

Housing arrangements form an important part of the labor system. In most kilns visited, workers live in one-room semi-pucca (a semi permanent house) or straw (in Sindh) structures located within the kiln premises. These dwellings are generally provided by owners, while workers often pay separately for electricity (PKR 1,000-1,500 per month). At first glance, employer-provided housing may appear to be a benefit. However, field observations suggest that it also strengthens worker dependence on kiln owners. As housing is located within the kilns, it lures the whole family to work to increase the number of bricks they produce given the low wages. Because accommodation is tied to employment, families face the risk of losing both their income and their housing if they leave. This creates an additional barrier to mobility. Thus, free housing is actually a trap and

resembles jail cells.

Food insecurity emerged as a recurring concern, with some households reporting periods in which they lacked sufficient food due to delayed advances or wage deductions. Living conditions are generally poor. Families often occupy small and overcrowded rooms. Privacy is limited and several households lived in close proximity to one another. Sanitation facilities are inadequate in many locations. In some cases, a single toilet serves multiple families, including men, women and children, while a few sites lacked even basic facilities.

Access to water is somewhat better in Punjab, with most kilns having at least one nearby water source. But in Sindh, they are far away, adding to women's work. Nevertheless, healthcare services are largely absent. Workers reported having to travel significant distances to obtain treatment. Education facilities are similarly limited, especially in more remote locations. Interestingly, a small number of kilns in Sindh presented a different model. Workers there live away from kiln premises and only men work. Debt levels are lower and workers enjoy greater freedom of movement. Although these examples were limited, they suggest that alternative arrangements are possible within the sector.

4.6 Child Labor and Education

Child labor is common in most kilns visited. Workers reported that children often begin assisting their parents at a very young age, sometimes as early as four or five years old, in violation of the laws on minimum age for working which is 15 normally but 18 for hazardous work under Punjab and Sindh labor laws. Initially, this involvement may take the form of helping with simple tasks, but it gradually expands as children grow older. The widespread use of family labor means that children are often viewed as contributing members of the household economy. In contexts where family income is already insufficient, parents may feel they have little choice but to involve children in production activities. At the same time, interviews revealed a strong desire among parents for their children to receive an education. Many respondents spoke positively about schooling and cited examples of individuals from kiln communities who had become teachers, health workers or professionals. These examples were often described with pride and seen as evidence that a different future is possible.

"We remain at the worksite throughout the day, working for more than eight hours under harsh weather conditions."-
Quote of 2 young sisters working in a brick kiln.

Where schools exist near kilns (often managed by faith-based groups), attendance rates are somewhat better. However, education and labor are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Several respondents explained that children attend school while also working before or after classes. As a result, educational participation does not always translate into freedom from labor. The study also highlights concerns about children's health. Exposure to dust, heat and physically demanding work at a young age may have long-term consequences for their wellbeing and development. These concerns were repeatedly raised by key informants and service providers working in kiln communities.

Voices from the field

Workers

1. "There is no contract; the owner keeps all records of our wages and debt" (Punjab).
2. "We produce 1,000 bricks, but the owner counts only 900" (Sindh).

NGOs and labor representatives

5. "The real problem is not the absence of laws; it is their non-implementation" (Punjab).
6. "Workers should be released by law, not by paying an unlawful debt to the owner" (Punjab).
7. "A kiln can comply with labor and environmental standards and be profitable" (Sindh).

Government officials

8. "Because of inadequate staff, we mainly check child labor; wage violations are much more difficult to investigate" (Punjab).
9. "The laws exist, but in practice no fines are imposed" (Sindh).
10. "Brick-kiln workers are legally eligible for social security, but actual coverage is only around 10–15 percent" (Sindh).

4.7 Gender Related Concerns

Women play a central role in the brick kiln economy. Interviews indicate that women participate extensively in brick production and often work hours similar to those of men. However, their responsibilities do not end there. Women also carry primary responsibility for household management, cooking, cleaning, childcare and care of elderly relatives. This dual burden was evident across many of the sites visited. Women described long working days in which productive and domestic responsibilities overlapped continuously. Despite their substantial contribution to household income, payments for brick production were generally made to male family members.

Food insecurity and poor nutrition were recurring concerns. Women frequently spoke about difficulties in providing adequate food for their families. These concerns were particularly pronounced among pregnant and lactating mothers, who reported limited access to nutritious diets. Many women stated that they continued working throughout pregnancy because household finances left them with little alternative. Several women had returned to work shortly after childbirth. Such accounts illustrate the economic pressures operating within kiln households. Women and girls were disproportionately affected by educational exclusion, unpaid labor and restricted decision-making within households.

"Women and children are actively engaged in continuous labor, with minimal rest and no visible separation between domestic and productive work."- Field Observation, Sindh

Direct discussion of harassment proved difficult due to the sensitivities involved even though separate interviews were conducted with women by female staff. Most women denied personal experiences of abuse when asked directly. However, key informants consistently reported that sexual harassment and exploitation remain significant concerns in parts of the sector, in violation of the national Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act. The lack of safeguarding systems, complaint mechanisms and women-friendly reporting structures leaves women with few options for seeking support when problems arise.

4.8 Government Support and Services

The study examined the role of government institutions responsible for labor regulation and social protection. Labor Departments in both provinces acknowledged significant resource constraints. Officials indicated that monitoring all kilns regularly is difficult given current staffing levels and competing priorities. Punjab officials stated that child labor inspections receive most attention, as wage and debt issues are often more difficult to investigate. Workers and civil society organizations, however, questioned the effectiveness of inspections and argued that enforcement remains weak. In Sindh, coverage seems even lower.

Coverage by social protection institutions appears particularly limited. Punjab Social Security reported approximately 32,000 registered workers in 8,000 kilns, i.e., just four workers per kiln. This figure appears low relative to the likely size of the workforce and suggests substantial under-registration as owners may only be registering their key staff such as munshis and supervisors rather than the actual brick workers. Workers themselves reported little awareness of social security benefits and few indicated that they had received meaningful support. Similar concerns were raised regarding other government institutions, including social welfare agencies and child protection bodies. In Sindh, coverage again seems to be even lower, with only a few hundred kilns reported to be registered.

Health and education departments were not visited during field work, but the research team noted that the presence of health or education facilities near kilns is very low. Moreover, many women said that their Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) coverage had ended and they no longer had any coverage, even though most workers have Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) now. District Vigilance Committees established to address bonded labor issues were widely described as inactive. Although such mechanisms exist formally, their presence was not strongly reflected in the experiences described by workers or other stakeholders interviewed during the study.

4.9 Civil Society and Trade Union Responses

Civil society organizations continue to play an important role in supporting kiln communities, especially in Punjab. Many of the organizations encountered

during the study focused on education, health, nutrition and community services. In areas where government services may be limited, these organizations often provide support that would otherwise be unavailable. Some organizations have also developed rehabilitation programs designed to assist workers in leaving kiln employment by paying off the debts owed to owners. These programs typically combine financial support with temporary accommodation and vocational training.

Trade union activity appeared relatively modest but nevertheless important. Both Punjab and Sindh labor departments reported around 4-8 unions registered. One union encountered during the study focused on legal advocacy and sought to secure workers' release through court processes rather than by repaying disputed debts. This approach challenges the legitimacy of the debt system itself and aims to strengthen workers' legal rights.

4.10 Summary of Key Violations of Laws in Kilns

#	Nature of Violation	Relevant Law	Jurisdiction
1	Bonded labor through debt (peshgi)	Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992; Constitution Art.11	National
2	Restriction on freedom of movement due to debt	Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992; Constitution Arts.11 & 15	National
3	Manipulation/inflation of debt records	Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act	National
4	Employment of underage children	Punjab Prohibition of Child Labor at Brick Kilns Act	Punjab
5	Employment of underage children	Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act	Sindh
6	Payment below minimum wage	Punjab Minimum Wages Act	Punjab
7	Payment below minimum wage	Sindh Minimum Wages Act	Sindh
8	Unlawful wage deductions and delayed wages	Payment of Wages Act	National

9	Failure to maintain employment/wage records	Standing Orders and labor laws	Punjab & Sindh
10	Lack of PPE and unsafe workplaces	Punjab Occupational Safety and Health Act	Punjab
11	Lack of PPE and unsafe workplaces	Sindh Occupational Safety and Health Act	Sindh
12	Failure to compensate workplace injuries	Employees Compensation framework	Punjab & Sindh
13	Failure to register workers with social security	Provincial Social Security laws	Punjab & Sindh
14	Failure to register eligible workers for old-age benefits	EOBI Act	National
15	Non-recognition of women workers despite productive labor	Constitutional equality and labor protections	National
16	Sexual harassment of women workers	Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act	National

4.11 Comparison with CWSA's 2025 Umerkot Brick Kiln Study

Key findings of Umerkot report:

- Most kiln workers belonged to marginalized minority communities, particularly Oad, Kolhi and Bheel groups;
- The vast majority of workers lived in temporary mud housing without secure tenure;
- Around 80% of households lacked water connections at home;
- Almost all households lacked toilets and proper sanitation facilities;
- Access to healthcare was limited, with most workers relying on informal providers;
- Malaria, diarrhea, respiratory illnesses, skin diseases and musculos keletal disorders were common;
- Adult literacy levels were very low and educational opportunities were limited;
- Child labor was widespread, with hundreds of children reportedly engaged in kiln work.

- Children combined work with irregular school attendance or dropped out altogether;
- Women contributed substantially to brick production while also carrying responsibility for childcare and domestic work;
- Employment relationships were largely informal and based on verbal agreements;
- Workers commonly worked 11–13 hours per day under piece-rate arrangements;
- Most households were heavily indebted and relied on advances from kiln owners;
- Occupational safety measures were largely absent and workplace injuries were common;
- Pollution from burning plastic, garbage, cloth and other waste materials was widespread;
- Worker organization and collective representation were almost non-existent;
- Fear of owners, poverty and illiteracy limited workers' ability to assert their rights.

Common points across both studies:

- Chronic indebtedness remains widespread;
- Child labor remains highly prevalent;
- Employment remains overwhelmingly informal;
- Housing conditions remain poor;
- Sanitation facilities remain inadequate;
- Access to healthcare remains limited;
- Educational exclusion remains widespread;
- Women continue to carry a disproportionate workload;
- Occupational safety conditions remain poor;
- Workers remain weakly organized and poorly represented.

3.5 Intersectionality with sanitary workers' issues

Sanitary and brick kiln workers in Pakistan face many common problems, given their similar informality, caste/class marginalization, and weak enforcement of labor laws. These include high debt, risky working conditions, high health and socio-economic problems, low pay and benefits, child labor, intergenerational

poverty, limited exit pathways, low social and legal protection and high exploitation. Thus, many of the strategies of key stakeholders' engagement and policy changes to overcome their respective problems could be common.



These two young girls are making bricks through an iron frame. Both of them are sisters and they shared that they spend more than 8 hours daily on-site making bricks in harsh weather. - "The Researcher"

CONCLUSIONS



5. CONCLUSIONS

The evidence reviewed for this study, together with the findings from fieldwork in Punjab and Sindh, indicate that many brick kiln workers face low wages, chronic indebtedness, inadequate services and weak protection of their legal rights. While conditions vary across locations, the same broad patterns emerged repeatedly from discussions with workers, government officials, civil society organizations and kiln owners.

Debt remains the defining feature of labor relations in much of the sector. Most workers have outstanding debts to kiln owners and rely on advances to meet basic household needs, healthcare expenses and family obligations. In many cases, debts persist for years and, according to workers and civil society representatives, are often transferred between kilns or inherited across generations. As a result, debt functions not only as a financial obligation but also as a mechanism that restricts workers' ability to leave employment and seek alternative livelihoods.

"The environment reflects a strong dependency system where labor, debts and survival are tightly interlinked". -Field Observation, Sindh

Field research confirmed the close relationship between poverty, child labor and educational exclusion identified in the literature. Many children assist their families in brick production, particularly during school holidays or periods of high demand. Parents generally have a desire for their children to obtain an education and avoid kiln work, yet poverty, distance from schools, weak educational support and the need for family labor continue to limit educational attainment.

Women bear a disproportionate share of the burden within kiln households. In addition to their contribution to brick production, they remain primarily responsible for childcare, household work and care of elderly family members. Many women reported working throughout pregnancy and returning to work shortly after childbirth. Despite their substantial contribution to household income, women often have limited control over earnings and remain poorly covered by labor welfare and social protection mechanisms. Living conditions in

many kiln communities remain poor. Inadequate housing, sanitation, healthcare and educational facilities were reported across most sites visited. Health problems, particularly respiratory illnesses and work-related injuries, were common concerns. The absence of accessible public services increases workers' dependence on employers and further weakens their bargaining position.

A key message from government officials, civil society organizations and labor activists was that the main problem is not the absence of laws. Pakistan already possesses legislation relating to bonded labor, child labor, minimum wages, occupational safety and social protection. The more significant challenge lies in implementation. Labor inspections remain limited, kiln and worker registration levels are low, social protection coverage is weak, and accountability mechanisms are often ineffective. Large numbers of kiln workers remain outside formal labor and social protection systems. Registration with social security institutions is limited, many workers lack access to labor welfare benefits, and gaps in civil documentation continue to restrict access to public services and social assistance programs. This exclusion contributes to continued poverty and indebtedness.

At the same time, the research identified examples of good practice that demonstrate the possibility of change. Some civil society programs have successfully supported worker rehabilitation, school enrolment and legal assistance. Model kilns operating with improved labor and environmental standards show that greater compliance is possible without undermining commercial viability. Technological tools such as digital registration systems, electronic records and improved monitoring mechanisms also offer opportunities to strengthen transparency and enforcement. Overall, the problems facing brick kiln workers are interconnected and cannot be addressed through isolated interventions. Progress will require stronger implementation of existing laws, improved access to public services and social protection, greater worker awareness of rights, more effective institutional coordination and sustained engagement with employers. Moreover, a child-centred approach is also essential, including stronger measures to prevent and eliminate child labor, ensure the enrolment and retention of children in schools, improve access to child protection, health and psychosocial support services, and

address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children living and working in brick kiln communities. Interventions should prioritize the safety, dignity, well-being and best interests of children while ensuring meaningful engagement with children and their families in decisions affecting them. Without such measures, the cycle of poverty, indebtedness and labor exploitation especially with vulnerable groups is likely to continue across future generations.



Bricks are carefully stacked in neat rows to prevent damage, ensuring durability and quality. This organized arrangement protects them from cracks, breakage, and wastage during storage and handling.

RECOMMENDATIONS



6. Recommendations

Goal: To establish a rights-based advocacy and community awareness program at the provincial and national levels aimed at transforming the prevailing business model in the brick kiln sector, from one based on bonded, informal, and family labor, into a registered, regulated, rights-compliant, child labor-free, and socially protected system, with an It can be amended as northern Punjab and interior Sindh or Umerkot and tharparkar in sindh.

The program will combine advocacy with the strategic use of low-cost technology: while advocacy is critical for securing high-level buy-in, technology can help address human resource shortages and low-level corruption once that buy-in has been established.

State-Level Engagement with Stakeholders

1. Raise awareness among national and provincial legislators and policy makers regarding the conditions of brick kiln workers, particularly women and children.
2. Advocate for strengthened labor inspections, enforcement of wage and contract laws, monitoring of debt practices, elimination of child labor, enforcement of occupational safety standards, and a comprehensive census of brick kilns. Establish confidential worker grievance and referral mechanisms linked to labor departments, social welfare institutions, and legal aid providers.
3. Promote universal registration of kiln workers with social security institutions and enforcement of employer contribution requirements. Introduce mandatory occupational injury insurance and compensation mechanisms for kiln workers, financed through employer contributions and linked to kiln registration. Extend maternity protection measures to kiln workers, including access to maternal healthcare, maternity cash assistance, and protection from hazardous work during pregnancy and immediately after childbirth.
4. Engage with key stakeholders for the establishment of accessible health and education facilities near kiln communities through dedicated provincial budget allocations. Pilot cluster schools, mobile schools, and flexible education models tailored to kiln communities and seasonal labor patterns.

5. Strengthen the role of women's and child protection institutions in preventing and responding to harassment, exploitation and abuse affecting women and children in kiln communities.
6. Engage with key stakeholders for inclusion of bonded laborers in public housing and land allocation programs, including initiatives such as Apna Ghar, Apni Chhat Apna Ghar and relevant provincial housing schemes.
7. Expand mobile CNIC registration services for kiln workers, particularly women and children lacking identity documentation.
8. Engage with key stakeholders for inclusion of eligible kiln workers in social protection programs, including BISP and senior citizen support card schemes.
9. Support the reactivation and effective functioning of District Vigilance Committees to improve monitoring, enforcement of bonded labor laws and stronger inter-departmental coordination mechanisms.
10. Engage with the judiciary and police to strengthen implementation of bonded labor legislation and improve access to timely justice.
11. Promote the development of a Brick Kiln Management Information System (BKMIS) integrating kiln registration, worker registration, digital wage and debt records, labor inspection data, social protection enrolment, school attendance monitoring and grievance redress mechanisms, supported by technologies such as CCTV monitoring, digital payments and record-keeping, GPS-based kiln mapping, drone-assisted kiln registration and worker complaint hotlines.

Engagement with Other Stakeholders

12. Engage with key stakeholders for compliance certification systems and preferential public procurement from labor and environment-compliant kilns, while encouraging similar procurement within the large-scale private construction sector.
13. Engage brick kiln owners to promote voluntary compliance and adoption of good practices demonstrated by model kilns. Establish skill development and certification programs for kiln workers to increase earnings, productivity, and opportunities for labor mobility.
14. Encourage civil society organizations to integrate labor rights awareness into existing programs and prioritize legal pathways for worker release and rehabilitation rather than payment of odious debt. Establish a

provincial rehabilitation package for released bonded laborers including temporary housing, livelihood grants, skills training, education support for children, and facilitated access to social protection schemes.

15. Strengthen brick kiln workers' unions and promote collaboration among workers, government institutions, employers and civil society stakeholders.
16. Engage bar associations and legal aid organizations to expand legal support for kiln workers, including the use of bonded labor legislation, habeas corpus remedies and challenges to exploitative debt arrangements.
17. Raise awareness among donors, UN agencies, research institutions and academia to build a broader coalition supporting policy reform and improved protection of kiln workers.
18. CWSA, in partnership with NCRC, is already undertaking similar activities under multiple programmes. Building on these ongoing efforts and the findings of the study, NCRC, in collaboration with its partners, may consider developing a targeted programme for brick kiln communities, aimed at addressing the specific challenges identified and contributing to an overall improvement in their living and working conditions.



Open kitchen at brick kiln exposes workers to burning fuel smoke, creating severe health hazards. The smoke contaminates food, making it unsafe and poisonous, risking serious illnesses for everyone nearby.

Shared Labor Rights Concerns

Since 2022, Community World Service Asia (CWSA) has been working to improve the living and working conditions of sanitation workers in Punjab and Sindh, including workplace health and safety measures and financial security, through sustained engagement with relevant stakeholders. Key achievements include: securing social security registration for 108 sanitation workers in Gujranwala; supporting the procurement of safety equipment for workers in Sargodha; engaging with the National Commission for Human Rights on deaths of sanitation workers; contributing to legal action seeking a nationwide ban on manual sewer cleaning; and securing commitments for housing and representation of sanitation workers within local human rights structures in Sindh.

Similarities:

Community World Service Asia's (CWSA) field experience of engagement with sanitation workers and the existing research on brick kiln and sanitation workers points to significant commonalities in the challenges faced by both groups, who occupy among the most marginalized positions in Pakistan's labor market. These shared challenges include:

- Workers in both sectors generally receive very low wages, often insufficient to meet basic household needs;
- Employment arrangements are frequently informal, resulting in limited job security and a high degree of economic vulnerability;
- High levels of illiteracy are common among workers in both sectors, restricting their access to information, legal remedies and alternative livelihood opportunities;
- Both groups also face significant barriers in accessing essential public services. Access to quality healthcare and education remains limited for many workers and their families, while coverage under social security and other labor welfare schemes is often inadequate;
- Workers in both sectors frequently lack effective compensation or protection in the event of work-related injuries or accidents;
- Family and child labor is also common, with multiple members of the household contributing to income generation. However, there is a need

to conduct extensive research to identify the prevalence of child labor in sanitation sector;

- Another notable similarity is the social profile of the workforce. Both sectors are disproportionately staffed by members of minorities, historically disadvantaged caste groups and other socially marginalized communities.

Differences:

Despite these similarities, there are also important differences between the two sectors. The most distinctive feature of brick kiln labor is the prevalence of debt-based dependency and intergenerational bondage. Many kiln workers remain tied to employers through inherited or long-term debts, creating severe restrictions on their freedom of movement and employment choices. The study also found concerns regarding physical abuse and, according to key informants, sexual harassment and exploitation of women and girls within kiln communities.

In contrast, the most immediate and visible threat faced by sanitary workers is the high incidence of serious injuries and deaths associated with hazardous working conditions, particularly in sewer cleaning and waste management activities. While sanitary workers also experience discrimination and economic vulnerability, the risks they face are often linked more directly to occupational safety failures than to debt bondage. Furthermore, unlike brick kiln workers, a proportion of sanitary workers continue to be employed by government institutions or municipal authorities and therefore enjoy relatively better job security and access to formal social security and pension benefits, although such coverage is far from universal.

The following common strategies could be applied jointly to both sanitary workers and brick kiln workers for their common problems:

1. Social Security Registration and Coverage

- Both groups largely work outside effective social protection systems despite legal entitlements;
- Registration with EOBI, PESSI, SESSI and other social protection schemes;

- Collection of employer contributions;
- Worker awareness regarding benefits;
- Access to health, education, death, disability and maternity benefits.

2. Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

- Both sectors involve hazardous work with high rates of injury, illness and death;
- Mandatory provision of Personal Protective Equipments (PPE);
- Safety training;
- Medical screening and health services;
- Reporting and investigation of workplace accidents and deaths;
- Employer accountability for OSH violations.

3. Ending Informal and Precarious Employment

- Both sectors have insecure employment arrangements as a core problem;
- Written employment contracts;
- Formal worker registration;
- Regulation of labor contractors and middlemen;
- Enforcement of labor laws and minimum wage legislation;
- Job security and protection against arbitrary dismissal.

4. Stronger Labor Inspection and Monitoring

- Both sectors suffer from weak enforcement rather than lack of laws;
- Regular inspections;
- Monitoring compliance with labor standards;
- Independent complaint mechanisms ;
- Public reporting of violations and corrective actions.

5. Housing and Basic Services

- Both groups often live-in isolated settlements with poor access to services;
- Secure housing schemes;
- Access to drinking water;

- Sanitation facilities;
- Access to Healthcare;
- Education for children;
- Inclusion in government welfare programs.

6. Documentation and Evidence

- Worker databases;
- Sector mapping;
- Research studies;
- Documentation of deaths, injuries and abuses;
- Monitoring progress over time.

7. Strategic Litigation and Human Rights Mechanisms

- Both sectors involve violations of constitutional and labor rights;
- Petitions before courts;
- Engagement with national human rights commissions including NCHR, NCRC and NCSW, as well as provincial human rights bodies.

ANNEXURES

1. LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Name	Designation	Agency / Organization
PUNJAB		
Simon Peter	National Director	Vine Church Pakistan
Rimsha Zafar	District Coordinator Sheikhupura	Pakistan Partnership Initiative
Haji Abdul Haq	Kiln owner	Sheikhupura Kiln
Naeem Zafar	Field Manager Kasur	Light for the Nation Trust
Tayyab Bhatti	Assistant Director Faisalabad	Social Welfare Department
Asghar Ali Shaheen	General Secretary	Bhatta Muzdoor Union, Faisalabad
Hafiz Mohsin	Director-General	Punjab Employees Social Security Institution
Razia Shoukat	Representative	Women Shelter Organization
Arif Ayaz	Representative	Awami Workers Party
Naseem Anthony	Representative	Association of Women for Awareness and Motivation
Asgher Shaheen	Representative	Federation of Bhatta Workers
Rehan Farooq	Representative	Good Samaritan Resource Center
Adnan Yousaf	Representative	CARE Foundation

Firdous Maryam Joseph	Provincial Coordinator	Society for Relief and Development
Liaquat Jameel	CEO	BRIC Pakistan
Sadaqat Hussain Tayyab Munir	Trade Union Dept Deputy Director Inspection	Department of Labor
Asif Munawar	Representative	Noble Concern for Human Development (NCHD), Jhang

2. FIELD SCHEDULE

Date	District	Meetings
PUNJAB		
June 8	Kasur Sheikhupura	AM: Kasur – workers, CSOs and representatives PM: Sheikhupura – workers, CSOs and representatives
June 8	Faisalabad Jhang	AM: Faisalabad – workers, CSOs and representatives PM: Jhang – workers, CSOs and representatives
June 8	Lahore	CSOs, government staff interviews

SINDH		
June 9	Karachi	CSOs, government staff interviews
June 10	Tando Allahyar Tando Mohammad Khan	AM: Tando Allahyar – workers, CSOs and representatives PM: Tando M. Khan – workers, CSOs and representatives
June 11	Badin Thatta	AM: Badin – workers, CSOs and representatives PM: Thatta – workers, CSOs and representatives

3. OVERALL TIMELINE

Activity	Date
Inception report submission	April 30
Review and feedback by CWSA	May 8
Revision and logistical preparation	May 11–22
Eid break	Week of 25th May
Visit to Punjab and Sindh	Week of June 8
Presentation	Week of June 22
Final report	June 30

1. INTERVIEWS INSTRUMENTS

4.1 Instrument for FGDs with workers

Section 1: Background & Household Profile

- How long have people been working at this brick kiln?
- How many members of your community work at the kiln?

Section 2: Entry into Kiln Work (Debt / Peshgi)

- How did you first start working at this kiln?
- Did you take an advance (peshgi) before starting work?
- If yes, how much was the loan and why did you take it?
- Do you know how your debt is calculated?
- Has your debt increased, decreased, or stayed the same over time? Why?
- Have you ever tried to leave the kiln? What happened?

Section 3: Employment Conditions & Wages

- Do you have a written agreement or contract with the kiln owner?
- How are you paid (daily, weekly, per 1,000 bricks)?
- Who keeps records of your wages and debt?
- Do you receive full payment, or are deductions made? For what reasons?
- Do you feel your wages are fair for the work you do?

Section 4: Working Conditions

- What type of work do you do at the kiln?
- How many hours do you work per day?
- What are the most difficult or dangerous aspects of your work?
- Do you have access to protective equipment (gloves, masks, etc.)?
- Have you or your family members experienced any injuries or illnesses due to work?
- Is there any designated lunch break timing for brick kiln workers?

Section 5: Child Labor & Education

- Are children in your community working at the kiln?
- At what age do children typically start working here?
- How many hours do they work? How much are they paid?
- Is there any nearby school for children?

- Are children attending school? If not, why?
- Would you like your children to continue this work in the future?

Section 6: Women's Roles & Gender Issues

- What type of work do women in your household perform in kilns?
- Are women paid separately for their work? Are they paid equally to men?
- Have women faced any problems or misbehavior from men at the kiln?
- Are there any special support systems for women workers?
- Is there any safeguarding policy in place at the brick kiln workplace?
- How many hours do women work in a day at kilns?
- Do women take leave during their health issues?
- Are there are any designated separate spaces (restrooms, meeting points) for women?

Section 7: Living Conditions & Basic Services

- What type of housing do you live in at the kiln?
- Do you have access to:
  - Clean drinking water?
  - Toilets/sanitation?
  - Electricity?
- Do you have access to any healthcare services?

Section 8: Social Protection & External Support

- Have you received any support from government programs (e.g., cash assistance)?
- Are you aware of any organizations working to help kiln workers?
- What kind of support would be most helpful for your community?
- Is there any workers union and if so how do they help you?

Section 9: Freedom, Rights & Awareness

- Do you feel free to leave this job if you want to?
- Are you aware of your rights as a worker?
- Have you ever filed a complaint or sought help from authorities?
- What prevents workers from raising complaints?

Section 10: Sensitive / Emerging Risks (Ask Carefully)

- Have you or others heard of workers selling assets (e.g., livestock, jeweler, or even body organs) to repay debt?
- Are there any other risks or problems workers face that outsiders may not know about?

4.2 Instrument: Government Agencies

Section 1: Mandate & Role Clarity

- What is your department's formal mandate regarding brick kilns and bonded labor?
- Which laws/policies do you implement (e.g., Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, child labor laws)?
- What specific functions do you perform (inspection, rescue, registration, prosecution, social support)?

Section 2: Scale & Data Systems

- How many brick kilns and workers are officially registered in your jurisdiction?
- What data systems do you use (registries, dashboards, inspections logs)?
- Do you track indicators such as debt levels, wages, child labor, or school attendance?
- What are the main data gaps you face?

Section 3: Inspection & Enforcement

- How many inspections are conducted per month/quarter?
- What triggers inspections (routine vs complaint-based)?
- What violations are most commonly found?
- What actions are taken after violations (fines, closures, prosecutions)?
- What is the conviction rate in bonded labor or child labor cases?
- What constraints limit effective enforcement (staffing, political economy, access, security)?

Section 4: Debt Bondage & Labor Practices

- How does your department identify cases of debt bondage (peshgi)?
- Are there mechanisms to audit wage/debt records at kilns?
- What steps are taken to release bonded workers and prevent re-bondage?

- Do you coordinate with police/courts for rescue and prosecution? How effective is this coordination?

Section 5: Child Labor & Education Linkages

- How do you identify and respond to child labor in kilns?
- What referral pathways exist to child protection authorities and schools?
- Are there programs to enroll/retain children in education from kiln communities?
- What are the main barriers to removing children from work?

Section 6: Gender & Vulnerable Groups

- How does your department address women workers' rights and safety?
- Are women registered/recognized as workers in your systems?
- What safeguards exist against harassment and exploitation?
- How are minority groups (e.g., religious minorities) supported?

Section 7: Living Conditions & Services

- Do your mandates cover housing, water, sanitation, and health at kiln sites?
- Do you coordinate with other departments (health, local government) to improve services?
- Are there minimum standards for worker living conditions? How are they enforced?

Section 8: Social Protection & Exit Pathways

- Are kiln workers linked to social protection programs (e.g., BISP, provincial schemes)?
- How are eligible households identified and enrolled?
- Are there programs for livelihood diversification/skills training to help workers exit kilns?
- What has worked/not worked in reducing dependency on kiln labor?

Section 9: Challenges & Political Economy

- What are the biggest challenges in regulating the kiln sector?
- Are there political or economic pressures that affect enforcement?

- How do kiln owners typically respond to regulation?
- What risks do officials face when taking action?

Section 10: Innovations & Good Practices

- Are there any successful pilots or innovations (e.g., digital wage systems, monitoring tools, zigzag)?
- What lessons have been learned from past interventions?
- What would you scale up if resources allowed?

Section 11: Recommendations

- What policy changes are needed to address bonded labor effectively?
- What institutional reforms would improve coordination and accountability?
- What role should donors/partners play?

4.3 Instrument for CSOs / unions

Section 1: Organizational Profile & Coverage

- What is your organization's mandate and main activities related to brick kiln workers?
- Which districts do you currently cover? For how long?
- What is your estimated reach (kilns, workers, households)?
- What are your primary modes of engagement (legal aid, education, livelihoods, advocacy)?

Section 2: Entry Points & Case Identification

- How do you identify bonded labor cases at kilns?
- What are the typical triggers for engagement (complaints, outreach, referrals)?
- How do workers usually approach you (directly, through community leaders, anonymously)?
- What barriers prevent workers from seeking help?

Section 3: Debt Bondage Dynamics

- What are the most common loan (peshgi) patterns you observe (amounts, interest, deductions)?
- How are wage and debt records typically maintained by kiln owners?
- What tactics are used to keep debts ongoing?
- What factors enable successful release from debt bondage?

Section 4: Legal Aid, Rescue & Rehabilitation

- What is your process for rescue/release of bonded workers?
- How do you coordinate with police, labor departments, and courts?
- What is the success rate (rescues, FIRs, convictions)?
- What are the main bottlenecks in legal processes?
- What happens to families post-release (housing, income, schooling)?

Section 5: Child Labor & Education

- What is the prevalence and profile of child labor in your areas?
- What interventions do you run (non-formal schools, enrolment drives, stipends)?
- What are the biggest barriers to schooling (distance, costs, employer resistance)?
- What works best to retain children in school?

Section 6: Gender & Protection

- How are women's roles structured at kilns (paid/unpaid, task types)?
- What risks do women face (harassment, wage theft, mobility restrictions)?
- Do you run women-focused programs (legal aid, GBV support, savings groups)?
- How do you ensure safe reporting and confidentiality?

Section 7: Living Conditions & Services

- What are typical housing, water, sanitation, and health conditions?
- Do you facilitate access to healthcare (camps, referrals)?
- How do health shocks affect debt levels and labor dependency?

Section 8: Social Protection & Livelihoods

- Are workers linked to BISP/provincial schemes? What share is covered?
- What challenges exist in enrolment/targeting (CNICs, documentation)?
- What livelihood alternatives have you piloted (skills, microenterprise)?
- Which approaches have actually reduced reliance on kilns?

Section 9: Community Organization & Worker Voice

- Do workers have collective structures (committees, unions, peer groups)?
- How do you support collective bargaining or representation?
- What risks do worker leaders face? How are they mitigated?

Section 10: Coordination with Government & Others

- Which departments do you work with most (Labor, Police, Child Protection, Social Protection, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)?
- What coordination mechanisms exist (SOPs, task forces, referrals)?
- Where do coordination gaps occur most frequently?
- What would improve case handling end-to-end?

Section 11: Risks & Emerging Issues

- Have you observed new forms of exploitation (e.g., trafficking, coercive practices)?
- How have risks changed over the past 3–5 years?
- What protection measures are needed now that weren't before?

Section 12: Policy & Program Recommendations

- Top 3–5 policy reforms needed at provincial/federal level
- How to improve enforcement and accountability
- How to link social protection with labor regulation

4.4 Instrument for kiln owners

Section 1: Background & Household Profile

- How many people work at the kiln? How long have people been working at this brick kiln?

Section 2: Entry into Kiln Work (Debt / Peshgi)

- How did they first start working at this kiln?
- Did they take an advance (peshgi) before starting work?
- Do they know how their debt is calculated?
- Has their debt increased, decreased, or stayed the same over time? Why?
- Can they leave the kiln? how

Section 3: Employment Conditions & Wages

- Do they have a written agreement or contract with the kiln owner?
- How are they paid (daily, weekly, per 1,000 bricks)?
- Who keeps records of wages and debt?
- Do they receive full payment, or are deductions made? For what reasons?

Section 4: Working Conditions

- What type of work do they do at the kiln?
- How many hours do they work per day?
- What are the most difficult or dangerous aspects of their work?
- Do they have access to protective equipment (gloves, masks, etc.)?
- Have they experienced any injuries or illnesses due to work? What support do they get?

Section 5: Child Labor & Education

- Are children working at the kiln?
- At what age do children typically start working here?
- Are children attending school? If not, why?
- Are they paid separately?

Section 6: Women's Roles & Gender Issues

- What type of work do women perform in kilns?
- Are women paid separately for their work?
- Have women faced any problems or harassment at the kiln?
- Are there any special support systems for women workers?

Section 7: Living Conditions & Basic Services

- What type of housing do they live in at the kiln?
- Do they have access to:
  - Clean drinking water?
  - Toilets/sanitation?
  - Electricity?
- Do they have access to any healthcare services?

Section 8: Law compliance

- Which laws/policies do you implement (e.g., Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, child labor laws) in your kiln?

Section 9: Inspection & Enforcement

- How many inspections are conducted per month/quarter?
- What do they check?
- What triggers inspections (routine vs complaint-based)?
- What violations are most commonly found?
- What actions are taken after violations (fines, closures, prosecutions)?

Section 10: Social Protection

- Are kiln workers linked to social protection programs (e.g., BISP, provincial schemes)?
- How are eligible households identified and enrolled?
- Are there programs for livelihood diversification/skills training to help workers exit kilns?

Section 11: Innovations & Good Practices

- Are there any successful pilots or innovations (e.g., digital wage systems, monitoring tools, zigzag) that you use?

Section 12: Recommendations

- What recommendations do you have for improving the condition of workers.

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National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC)

5th Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex, Agha Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad

Tel: +92-51-920-3214 | Email: complaints@ncrc.gov.pk | Website: www.ncrc.gov.pk

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