

Joint Press Release

Ending forced and child labour in Nepal's brick industry - Need for a holistic approach

On the eve of the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, a new survey on Employment Relationship in the Brick Industry in Nepal unveils important information on forced labour, bonded labour and child labour in the sector. The report calls for a concerted effort by all key stakeholders – government, industry employers and workers – to work for decent work agenda in the country's brick production industry.

Nepal has made remarkable progress in fighting traditional bonded labour practices. Nepal became a pathfinder country of the Alliance 8.7 that is working to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 8.7: take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and end child labour in all its forms by 2025. However, new evidence collected through an Employment Relationship Survey, jointly carried out by the CBS, ILO and UNICEF, indicates that bonded and forced labour still exist in the country's private sector, including in the brick industry.

The report, first nationally representative research on the brick industry in South Asia, captures major findings that will inform government, industry and other stakeholders' efforts to end child and bonded labour practices in the sector. It also highlights the linkages between internal and cross-border migration and vulnerability to child labour and economic exploitation.

The survey exposes prevalence of labour exploitation with 6,229 (3.5%) workers in forced labour among the 176,373 manual labourers in the brick kilns (including family members). An estimated 34,593 children (between ages of five and 17) are living in brick kilns. Children account for approximately 10% (17,738) of total workers, and 96% of these working children (17,032) were identified as being in child labour.

"The study, first of its kind in Nepal, and jointly conducted by CBS, ILO and UNICEF has highlighted the important insights about the child labour situation in the brick kiln industry, which would greatly contribute to monitor child labour related policies and programs implemented by the government of Nepal" said Nebin Lal Shrestha, Director General of the Bureau.

The research also found that migrant workers represent a high proportion of workers in the brick kilns: only 22% of total workers are originally from the same district as where the kiln is located; 32% of the workers come from other districts of Nepal, and 46% of the workers have migrated from India. Rolpa, Rautahat, Dang, Kailali and Sarlahi are the top 5 source-districts of Nepali brick kiln workers that supply nearly 46% of workers in different kilns across the country.

"The report highlights important statistics on decent work-deficit that leads to forced and child labour situation in Nepal, and while the challenges to overcome it are multi-faceted, ILO Nepal is committed to supporting the government and the development partners through its programmes by implementing preventive as well as responsive measures," said Richard Howard, Director of the ILO Country Office for Nepal.

In terms of payment modality, over three quarters (75.7%) of the workers receive an advance payment from the naikes (labour contractors), and 3.5% - directly from the employers. The advance payments having no clarity on repayment usually tends to turn as debt for next years thereby increasing vulnerability to forced labour.

Illiteracy was found to be an important vulnerability factor for child and forced labour. This could have direct impact on the awareness of the labour laws and regulations amongst workers and employers. The survey revealed that only 4% of workers were aware of current minimum wage rate; 4% say they are aware of labour law or rules. Membership in trade unions is almost non-existent. Employers' knowledge of the legal framework is more common: 66% of employers are aware of the Labour Act; 42% of the Animal Act; 88% of the Child Labour; and 63% of the Security and Health Act.



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“As we enter the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, this report is a reminder of the critical need to strengthen concerted action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in all sectors of society. This new evidence will inform and guide government policy makers, brick kiln industry stakeholders and development actors in their collective action to tackle economic exploitation of children and their families. UNICEF is committed to continued collaboration with the Government of Nepal, and industry leaders to ensure children are removed from the industry, and to support children and their families to access social rehabilitation and protection services. Above all, we must work together to ensure that the cost of producing construction materials is not borne by the children of Nepal” said Elke Wisch, UNICEF Nepal Representative.

This research is part of a broader ILO project entitled *From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labour* (the Bridge Project)*. The main aim of the Bridge Project is to support global and national efforts aimed at combating forced labour under the ILO Protocol and Recommendation on Forced Labour (2014).

The report is a joint initiative of the International Labour Organization (ILO), as part of a USDOL-funded ILO project, and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), in collaboration with the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Government of Nepal.

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