

**JOIN HANDS TO ERADICATE  
BONDED LABOUR !**



**NOVEMBER 2025**

# **REPORT ON MIGRANT BONDED LABOUR IN INDIA**

**IMPLEMENTATION GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN THE BONDED LABOUR SYSTEM (ABOLITION) ACT  
1976 AND THE CENTRAL SECTOR SCHEME FOR THE REHABILITATION OF BONDED LABOURER 2016**



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### Message

The report offers a clear and carefully documented account of the circumstances in which bonded and migrant labourers continue to live and work. The testimonies and data bring forward situations marked by coercion, wages withheld, unsafe working conditions, and, at times, violence and discrimination. These accounts provide an important reminder that many people in our country still labour without access to the protections guaranteed by law, and that the burdens of such exploitation often fall most heavily on women, children, and those from historically marginalised communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire nation witnessed the real and harsh conditions faced by migrant labourers across India. It is a fact that members of society, trade unions, and the judiciary all extended their helping hands to support the migrant labourers during that difficult time. However, this report reveals that many migrant bonded labourers both those who have been rescued and those who remain in bondage, are still struggling for their fundamental rights and have yet to receive adequate facilities even today.

The condition of women workers is even more concerning. Many of them face not only economic exploitation but also physical insecurity, social discrimination, and denial of access to health, education, and other essential services. Their vulnerabilities must receive special attention in all rehabilitation and policy measures.

I acknowledge the considerable effort undertaken by the National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labour (NCCEBL) in compiling these narratives and field findings. Bringing such experiences into the public record is necessary for understanding the lived realities of those who remain most vulnerable to exploitation. It is my hope that the voices documented here will continue to form a deeper awareness of these conditions and reinforce the ongoing responsibility of all institutions to uphold the constitutional rights and dignity of every worker.

Justice Kurian Joseph

Former Judge, Supreme court of India



### Message

India is one of the few countries where non-payment of minimum wages and forcing any person to work against their will are recognised as serious offences under the law. Despite such stringent legal provisions, workers continue to suffer under inhuman and exploitative employment practices. Many are compelled to work in conditions that deprive them of their basic dignity and humanity. It is deeply concerning that the administration and bureaucracy often choose to overlook or undermine this issue. Their ignorance, recklessness, and insensitivity only serve to perpetuate and encourage the problem.

Denying the release orders and release certificates to identified bonded labourers amounts to denying them their right to rehabilitation. These documents are not mere formalities; they are essential instruments of justice and recovery. Therefore, the administration must issue them promptly and without hesitation or delay, ensuring that every rescued labourer receives timely rehabilitation and justice.

The data and findings presented in this report are both distressing and revealing. They highlight the urgent need for collective action. Civil society organisations, trade unions, the administration, the bureaucracy, the government, and the judiciary must all come together with renewed commitment to eradicate the bonded labour system in all its forms. The existing laws, schemes, and safeguards designed to protect workers must be implemented earnestly and effectively at every level.

I deeply appreciate and commend the efforts of the National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labour (NCCEBL) for their dedicated work in bringing to light the grim realities of bonded labour and for their unwavering commitment to justice, human dignity, and equality.

#### **Justice D.H. Waghela**

Former Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court,  
Odisha High Court and Bombay High Court



### Message

Despite the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, and the judgments of the Supreme Court recognising bonded labour as a serious issue of violation of human and constitutional rights, the condition of bonded labour has scarcely changed. The facts documented in this report show that the problem persists due to the continuous exploitation of vulnerable sections of society for various socio-economic reasons. The lack of effective and proactive involvement of the State to secure even basic protection to the bonded labour is yet another major factor. The National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labour (NCCEBL) deserves recognition for documenting these realities with clarity and for showing how distant legal protections remain from those who need them most.

Therefore, a meaningful rehabilitation of the bonded labour is needed and not just their release and grant of statutory wages. This rehabilitation effort is required to be rigorously monitored. The Government of India has articulated its commitment to ending bonded and forced labour by 2030. But such a goal cannot be realised without addressing the conditions that repeatedly drive workers back into re-bondage. Freedom from bondage cannot be meaningful unless workers are granted employment, adequate healthcare, shelter and education, in short, a dignified life for them and their future generations.

This report illuminates the pathways essential to the complete eradication of bonded labour.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sanjay Parikh', written over a horizontal line.

**Sanjay Parikh**  
**Senior Advocate**  
**Supreme Court of India**



### Message

The reality of bonded labour reflects some of the deepest injustices in our society such as practices of bonded labour in 21st Century. In this remarkable report, the National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labour (NCCEBL) has not only exposed these truths but has also infused new courage into our collective movement for freedom and dignity.

As a lifelong activist for workers' rights, I see this document as a rallying call, not only for policy makers and institutions, but for every conscience that cannot tolerate oppression. NCCEBL's commitment, empathy, and solidarity echo the voices of the voiceless, and remind us that every rescued worker is a victory for humanity.

On behalf of Hamal Panchayat, my heartfelt gratitude goes to everyone who contributed to this transformative report, especially Nirmal Jee who has devoted all his life for the cause of bonded labour. Let us carry its spirit and insights forward until every chain is broken, and justice prevails for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be in Devanagari script, located below the typed name.

**Dr. Baba Adhav,  
President, Hamal Panchayat**



### Message

The *Report on Migrant Bonded Labour* in India offers a clear and compelling account of the lived realities of bonded migrant labour, realities that remain largely invisible in public discourse and development policy. Through rigorous empirical work and sensitive documentation, the authors illuminate the continuing injustices faced by some of the most marginalised communities in the country.

The survey findings echo what scholars, activists, and workers' organisations have long observed: bonded labour is not an aberration or a relic of the past, but a persistent and systemic feature of India's labour markets. The overwhelming representation of Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi workers among those rescued underscores the deep links between caste hierarchies and economic exploitation. The case studies further reveal the violence women endure, the forced labour of children in place of schooling, and the denial of basic dignity to families. These structural realities enable coercion, abuse, and wage theft to continue with impunity despite decades-old legal prohibitions. Delayed FIRs, negligible conviction rates, weak accountability mechanisms, and the near absence of rehabilitation support reveal an institutional system unable to deliver justice where it is most urgently needed. Such failures push workers back into re-bondage, deepening the very vulnerabilities the law aims to eradicate.

I commend the National Campaign Committee for the Eradication of Bonded Labour (NCCEBL) for creating this vital record of harm and call to action. As India moves toward its commitments to eliminate forced labour by 2030, such work is indispensable. The futures of thousands of workers depend on turning these findings into real action.

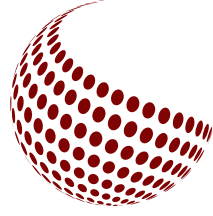
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deepanshu Mohan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Deepanshu Mohan**

Professor and Dean, IDEAS, Office of Interdisciplinary Studies  
O.P. Jindal Global University

# CONTRIBUTORS

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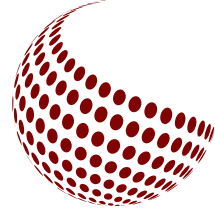
This study is led by Nirmal Gorana, convenor of the National Campaign Committee for the Eradication of Bonded Labour (NCCEBL). He authored it with Pankhuri Agarwal, Preethi Krishnan, Aishwarya Thanigaivel, and Vinayak Krishnan. We are also grateful to Ali Zia Kabir Choudhary, Arun Kumar, and Hari Bapuji for their guidance and feedback while writing the report.

We thank the following people for their commitment, dedication and assistance in collecting data from across India: Ajay Kumar and Suresh Kumar (Chhattisgarh); Trilochan Punji and Golap Nial (Odisha); Govind Prajapat, Sister Kirti, Yashwant Lohar and Rinku Parihar (Rajasthan); Amar Chand (Punjab); Ganesh Kumar and Paramjeet Singh Badola (Haryana); Surendra Kumar, Nathan Kumar, Roshan Kumar, Qamar Intakhab, Mohmmad Danish, Santosh Kumar Pandey and Harshita Bansal (Uttar Pradesh); Ameen Khan, Shivam Kumar, Narendra Bhadoriya, Dilip Ahirwar, Manish Dangi and Abdur Rauf Khan (Madhya Pradesh); Deo Kant Singh, Poonam Jagta, Rubi and Nehal Ahmed (Bihar); Anowar Hussain Ahmed (Assam); Jeena Hrangkhwal, Payal Debbarma, Mathia Debbarma, Bahai Debberma, Aaijak Debberma and Priti Debbarma (Tripura); Arun Kumar (Tamilnadu); Chinna and Prasad (Andhra Pradesh); T. Aishwarya and Ganga Shekhar (Karnataka); Rahi Riyaz Ahmed (Jammu and Kashmir); Sumayya Khatun, Kochurani CJ , Vinod Kumar, Advocate Rani Punnaserril, Chandan Kumar, Father Jaison, Varun Pathak, Sunil Kanti Chakma, Asra Ahmid Rashid, and Thalia Garnett (Delhi).

We sincerely thank Abul Kalam Azad, Tulsi Swarna Lakshmi, and Dr. Rekha Pachauri for designing the report and Gaana Jayagopalan for proofreading the report. We thank Professor Deepanshu Mohan, Dean of IDEAS at O.P. Jindal Global University, for his support.

Above all, we thank the 950 rescued workers who generously agreed to participate in the survey and nearly 1000 workers who trusted us with their stories and experiences. Workers' names have been omitted or changed (pseudonym used) in the report in line with our commitment to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality.

**Please contact us at [nccebli@gmail.com](mailto:nccebli@gmail.com) for any feedback, questions or concerns.**



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In light of the Union Government’s 15-year vision to achieve “total abolition of forced and bonded labour” by 2030<sup>1</sup> and the NITI Ayog’s commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 8.7 on the eradication of forced labour<sup>2</sup>, this report examines the prevalence of the bonded labour system and the post-rescue condition of rescued workers. In particular, the report aims to assess the implementation of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976 (BLSAA) and the accompanying Rehabilitation Scheme (Central Sector Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer 2016).

The BLSAA abolished the bonded labour system and created district-level enforcement mechanisms. District Magistrates (DMs) are responsible for identifying bonded labourers, while Vigilance Committees (VCs) are tasked with overseeing their rehabilitation. The Rehabilitation Scheme, intended to support the reintegration of rescued workers, mandates debt cancellation, cash assistance, and government support for employment, healthcare, education, housing, land, ration, and caste-based welfare schemes.

*Data and methods:* Data for this report is drawn from surveys of 950 rescued workers with Release Certificates and qualitative research from four regional-level meetings and group discussions involving nearly 1,000 workers from nineteen states. Together, this evidence evaluates how effectively the BLSAA and the Rehabilitation Scheme have been implemented. Worker testimonies highlight their lived experiences of bondage and the lack of institutional accountability in securing their freedom. Survey data further outlines the demographic profile of rescued workers and exposes major gaps in the implementation of the rehabilitation scheme. The main findings are summarised below:

**Failures in Rescue Procedures:** In violation of the BLSAA, workers are rarely rescued as mandated by the law. Their statements are rarely recorded in safe or neutral conditions, civil society organisations are seldom involved in rescue operations, and summary trials are not conducted within the stipulated timeframe. In many cases, Release Certificates are not issued and FIRs are not filed, even though the law requires these steps to be completed within 24 hours of receiving a complaint.

**Caste and gender based vulnerabilities:** All 950 rescued workers surveyed belong to historically marginalised social groups—Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC)—with SC communities alone accounting for 63% of those surveyed. Despite clear evidence of caste-based abuse, threats, and discrimination, protections under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act were not invoked. Women constitute 46 percent of the surveyed workers, many of whom faced sexual and physical violence without access to effective redress. These findings underscore the enduring link between caste and gender based hierarchies and bonded labour in India.

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1 Rajya Sabha. 2016. Rising number of bonded labourers, Unstarred question no.347, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. [Check Link](#).

2 Niti Ayog. 2024. SDG India Index 2023-24. [Check Link](#).

**Poor implementation of Rehabilitation Scheme:** Although the Rehabilitation Scheme was revised in 2016 to enhance cash assistance, implementation remains extremely weak. A majority of workers (63 percent) rescued after 2016 did not receive even the interim travel assistance mandated immediately upon rescue. Despite eligibility for ₹2 lakh, more than half of rescued children (53.8 percent) and one-third of rescued women (33 percent) received no compensation at all; only one woman received an amount between ₹1–2 lakh. Not a single man among the survey respondents received the ₹1 lakh compensation for which they were eligible.

**Limited access to welfare:** Over 85 percent of surveyed workers did not receive employment under MGNREGA. Fewer than 2 percent were provided land for housing or agriculture post-rescue. Nearly 70 percent had not been issued an Ayushman Bharat health card. Furthermore, 99.67 percent had not received any skill development or training opportunities, reflecting a critical gap in long-term rehabilitation and livelihood recovery.

**Educational deprivation of rescued children:** A staggering 67% of surveyed rescued workers had no access to formal education, underscoring how educational deprivation is both a cause and consequence of bonded labour. Among 55 rescued children, only 14 (25 percent) were admitted to school following rescue, while 20 children (36.4 percent) were pushed back into exploitative labour, indicating an alarming failure in child rehabilitation and protection systems.

**Breakdown of legal and institutional accountability:** Over 80% of rescued workers had no First Information Report (FIR) filed regarding their bondage or rescue. Not a single case involving rescued labourers resulted in conviction before 2016, and after 2016, only 3.6% of cases led to conviction. Although debt is often portrayed as the defining feature of bonded labour, our survey shows that the average debt per rescued worker (₹5,283.14) was six times lower than the average unpaid wage (₹32,514) owed to them. None of the workers had their wages recovered from the employers.

The report is structured as follows: *Chapter 1* provides an introduction; *Chapter 2* outlines the historical background of the law and the Rehabilitation Scheme; *Chapter 3* examines international and national responses to bonded and forced labour; *Chapter 4* details the methodology; and *Chapter 5* presents findings across five thematic areas: demographic profile of rescued workers, wages and debt, access to justice and legal redress, implementation of rehabilitation provisions, and post-rescue livelihoods. *Chapter 6* provides recommendations, and *Chapter 7* presents twenty case studies.

As the 2022 ILO report<sup>3</sup> show, forced labour remain urgent concerns, even as the Government of India sought to discredit the ILO's findings<sup>4</sup>. This report offers actionable, time-bound recommendations to strengthen enforcement, close accountability gaps, and make rehabilitation a lived reality, moving toward the abolition of forced and bonded labour by 2030.

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3 International Labour Organization. 2022. Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage. [Check Link](#).

4 Safi, M. 2017. Indian government advised to 'discredit' slavery research. The Guardian. [Check Link](#).

**Preparation of Fifteen – Year Vision Document (2030), Seven Year Strategy Document (2017-18 to 2023-24) and Three-Year Action Plan (2017-18 to 2019-20) of the Ministry of Labour & Employment on Total Abolition of Bonded Labour**

**Perspective (15 years)**

- (i) To identify, release and rehabilitate an estimated 1.84 crore Bonded Labourers
- (ii) To strengthen the prosecution machinery and reaching 100% conviction rate for preventing creation of new bondages
- (iii) To deal with the altered forms of bondage such as organized begging, forced prostitution, commercial sexual exploitation, forced marriage, forced recruitment for insurgency activities, domestic service, etc. under the BLS (A) Act.
- (iv) To pay special attention to the needs of child, women, transgender, disabled and vulnerable people rescued from aggravated conditions of servitude
- (v) To adopt convergence approach at district level for complete rehabilitation and state care including vocational training, general education, marriage, etc.
- (vi) To provide a sustainable monthly earning system for preventing return to bondage

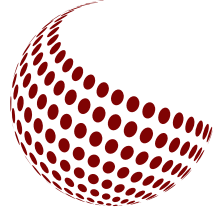
**Strategy (07 years)**

- (i) To bring down the number of bonded labourers to 50% of the present estimate
- (ii) To augment the annual budget to cater to the needs of at least 12 lakh bonded labourers
- (iii) To strengthen the labour enforcement machinery so as to provide due and admissible relief under the provisions of Contract Labour Act 1970, ISMW Act 1979, BOCW Act 1996, Maternity Benefit Act and Minimum Wages Act
- (iv) To amend the labour laws relating to organized sector to widen the ambit of coverage of the vulnerable workers including released bonded labourers within their fold

**Action Plan (03 Years)**

- (i) To monitor bonded labour cases through the regular criminal justice system
- (ii) To release the rehabilitation grants to the district national child labour project society for speedy assistance through DBT mechanism
- (iii) To have a district level Rehabilitation Fund with a minimum corpus of Rs.10 lakh at the disposal of District Magistrate for immediate cash assistance
- (iv) Awareness Generation programmes in 18 states (one in each State per year)
- (v) Reconnaissance Survey of bonded labour system in 18 states @ two per State per annum
- (vi) Evaluatory studies in 18 states (one in each state per year)

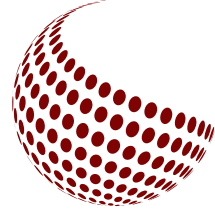
**Image 1: Copy of the Union Government's 15-year vision for total abolition of bonded labour**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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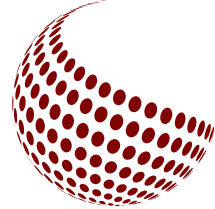
Title	Page No.
Abbreviations	i
List of Tables	iii
List of Images	iv
List of Figures	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Historical background	3
Chapter 3: Commitments and Response	10
Chapter 4: Methodology	14
Chapter 5: Findings	21
• Demographic Details	21
• Wages and Debt	26
• Post-rescue Legal Process	29
• Post-rescue Rehabilitation and Welfare	31
• Present Situation of Rescued Migrant Workers	41
Chapter 6: Recommendations	46
Chapter 7: Case Studies	52



# ABBREVIATIONS

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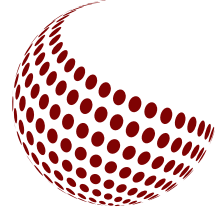
BLSAA	Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976
BOCW	Building and Other Construction Workers
BOCW	Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DCP	Deputy Commissioner of Police
DLSA	District Legal Services Authority
DMs	District Magistrates
FIR	First Information Report
ISMWA	Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment
NCCEBL	National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labour
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
OBC	Other Backward Class
PDS	Public Distribution System
PIB	Press Information Bureau
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
RC	Release Certificate
RTI	Right to Information
SC	Scheduled Caste



# ABBREVIATIONS

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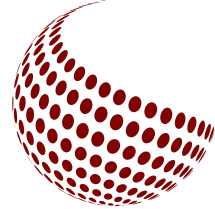
SC/ST Act	The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act,1989
SDM	Sub-Divisional Magistrate
SHO	Station House Officer
SLIC	Socio Legal Information Center
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SP	Superintendent of Police
SSP	Senior Superintendent of Police
ST	Scheduled Tribe
VCs	Vigilance Committees



# LIST OF IMAGES

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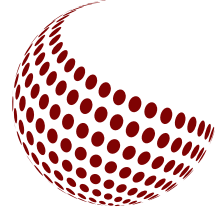
Sl. No	Title
1	Copy of the Union Government's 15-year vision for total abolition of bonded labour
2	A collage of the three laws, BLSAA, CLRAA and the ISMWA
3	Format of the release certificate from 2016
4	Sample survey form
5	State-level meeting in Madhya Pradesh
6	State-level meeting in Jammu and Kashmir
7	State-level meeting in Odisha



# LIST OF TABLES

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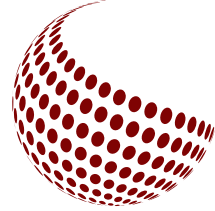
Sl. No	Table Name
1	Details of respondents by source and destination state
2	Education among rescued children
3	Unpaid wages owed to rescued workers
4	Workers reporting debt
5	Details of trial/conviction for workers rescued after 2016
6	Children who received monetary rehabilitation assistance
7	Women who received monetary rehabilitation assistance
8	Men who received monetary rehabilitation assistance
9	Pre-rescue occupation
10	Post-rescue occupation
11	Post rescue daily wages
12	Minimum wages in study states
13	Post rescue piece rate wages of workers in brick kiln



# LIST OF FIGURES

---

Sl. No	Figure Name
1	Caste distribution
2	Migrant Status
3	Gender composition
4	Educational qualification
5	Educational qualification among children
6	Workers reporting unpaid wages
7	Workers reporting debt
8	Status of FIR registration
9	Interim support received
10	Provision of Ration Card
11	Provision of BOCW Among Eligible Workers
12	Skill Development Among Eligible Workers
13	Land for housing
14	MNREGA support
15	Health card
16	School admission for self or their children
17	School admission for children
18	Present occupation of children
19	Daily wages in present occupation



# INTRODUCTION

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Despite the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976 and subsequent policy initiatives, bonded labour remains a persistent reality in India, especially among marginalised caste communities. This persistence highlights not only gaps in enforcement but also the entrenched social and economic structures that sustain exploitative practices. The continued existence of bonded labour represents more than a technical shortcoming: it is a visible contradiction to India's national and international commitments to social justice, inclusive growth, and human rights. India is a signatory to multiple international frameworks including the International Labour Organization's Conventions on Forced Labour (No. 29 and No. 105) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 8.7), which call for the eradication of forced and child labour. Yet, the persistence of bonded labour reflects a widening gap between formal commitments and ground realities.

For instance, in Maharashtra, for instance, sugarcane farm labourers often find their entire families tied to a single farm for the duration of a year under a system known locally as *bhag ki kheti*. This system effectively binds families to exploitative labour arrangements, with little scope for exit or legal recourse. Recognising the severity of these conditions, the Bombay High Court in 2025 took suo motu cognizance of the issue and declared that such workers should be treated as workmen under the Industrial Disputes Act 1947.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in Gujarat, the *Chakar Pratha* system ties workers into long-term debt servitude. Under this arrangement, workers remain in the service of their employers until they can repay the debt—often accumulated over generations.

This form of debt bondage operates informally but with deeply institutionalised social legitimacy. In Madhya Pradesh, the *Harwai* system—also referenced in Chapter 1, Section 2(b) of the 1976 Act—illustrates another variation of bonded labour. Here, workers take loans from moneylenders (locally known as *sahukaars* or *Patels*) and are forced to work on their land in return. The interest charged on such loans routinely exceeds 10%, and wages paid to labourers are as low as Rs. 200–250 for 12 hours or more of daily work. Since this is far below the minimum wage, the debt accumulates over time, entrapping workers, and often their families, in a cycle of lifelong servitude, that includes verbal and physical abuse.

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<sup>5</sup> High Court on its own Motion versus the State of Maharashtra and others, 2025, [Check Link](#).

Similarly, in Odisha, the Goti Mukti Andolan has documented how barbers from marginalised castes (OBC) are still required to provide grooming services for dominant caste households without monetary payment, receiving only grain or old clothes in exchange. These arrangements function as a form of customary bondage, maintained through caste hierarchy and social coercion. At the heart of the problem lies the adaptability of bonded labour. Far from disappearing with the enactment of the 1976 law, it has re-emerged in different sectors and forms, embedding itself in both agrarian economies and industrial production systems.

Recent reports highlight the overwhelming presence of the bonded labour system in brick kilns in Uttar Pradesh<sup>6</sup>, hotels in Pune<sup>7</sup>, charcoal-making units in Maharashtra<sup>8</sup>, toy factories in Delhi<sup>9</sup>, distilleries in Madhya Pradesh<sup>10</sup>, construction sites in Kashmir<sup>11</sup>, a jute factory in Delhi<sup>12</sup>, sugarcane farming in Maharashtra<sup>13</sup>, jewellery-making units in Tamil Nadu<sup>14</sup>, agriculture in Karnataka<sup>15</sup>, among others. These examples show that both traditional and modern forms of bondage continue to flourish, disproportionately impacting Dalit workers and other historically marginalised groups<sup>16</sup>.

This persistence reflects a serious failure of state institutions tasked with implementing the BLSAA and its rehabilitation scheme. Media reports point to gaps at every stage: rescue and raid practices<sup>17</sup>, registration of FIRs<sup>18</sup>, investigation<sup>19</sup>, responses to workers seeking help<sup>20</sup>, schooling for migrant working children<sup>21</sup>, and rehabilitation after rescue<sup>22</sup>. The challenge is not only technical but tied to political will and accountability. Unless bonded labour is treated as a systemic governance failure—with clear responsibility for state and district administrations, steady monitoring, and proper resources—small fixes will fall short. The following chapter traces how long neglect has entrenched these practices and why stronger accountability is urgent.

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12 Express News Service. 2024. Nine arrested as 18 children rescued from forced labour in Delhi jute factory. The New Indian Express. [Check Link](#).

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17 Sridevi, P. 2025. Baghpat Bonded Labourers: Attacked, Rescued, Then Abandoned. The Probe. [Check Link](#).

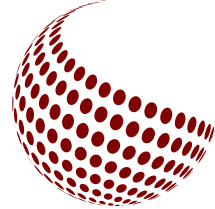
18 Choudhary, D. 2025. Days after Rescuing Teen From Bonded Labour, Delhi Police Still Haven't Filed FIR. NewsLaundry. [Check Link](#).

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21 Srinivas, R. 2023. Migrant workers in AP lodged over 100 complaints of harassment in 5 years, says Odisha official. The Hindu. [Check Link](#).

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# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the stroke of midnight on 15 August 1947, India achieved independence from over 190 years of colonial rule. Three years later, the Constitution of India was adopted on 26 January 1950, declaring the country a “sovereign democratic republic.” The Constitution, the longest surviving in the postcolonial world, engaged with the aspirations of minorities such as Dalits and Muslims. Article 23 of the Constitution prohibited “traffic in human beings, begar and other similar forms of forced labour,” embodying the vision of a free and equal India. An examination of the Constituent Assembly’s debates in 1948 reveals the urgency of abolishing begary and forced labour rooted in caste-based feudal hierarchies<sup>23</sup>.

Following these constitutional ideals, the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (BLSAA), 1976, was enacted. The BLSAA formally abolished bonded labour system and established legal definitions and mechanisms to identify and rehabilitate bonded labourers. It identified five forms of obligations that could cause bondage (advance/debt, social customs, succession, economic considerations, or birth into a caste or community) and four rights whose forfeiture signalled bonded labour (freedom of employment, freedom of movement, minimum wage rights, and the right to sell goods at market value). In parallel, other protective labour laws were introduced – notably the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 (CLRAA) and the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 (ISMWA) – aiming to regulate precarious forms of employment and migrant work in independent India.

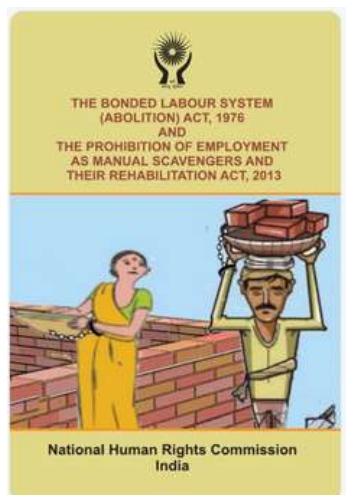
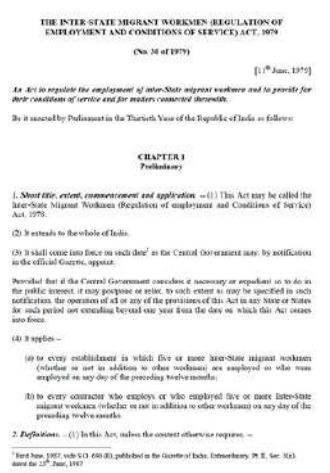


Image 2: A collage of the three laws, BLSAA, CLRAA and the ISMWA

23 Tiwari, R.K. 2002. Parliament and Public Policy - A Case Study of Bonded Labour.' In Fifty Years of Indian Parliament, edited by G.C., pp. 164-76. New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat.

The BLSAA envisioned district-level enforcement mechanisms, notably by the District Magistrates (DMs) to identify bonded labourers and the establishment of district-level Vigilance Committees (VCs) for rehabilitation. However, since the enactment of the Act, evidence shows that the processes of identification, release, and rehabilitation have been mired in bureaucratic delays, subjective decision-making, and often outright negligence<sup>24</sup>, as shown by previous research as well as this research study<sup>25</sup>. These issues in the implementation of the scheme and the law are not new. In its annual report<sup>26</sup> in 1976, the Government of India noted the state-wise issues in implementing the BLSAA and the rehabilitation scheme. These issues included the non-acceptance of the existence of bonded labour by the states and hence non-enforcement of the law<sup>27</sup> and sometimes the members of the VCs itself being employers of bonded labour<sup>28</sup>.

Researchers have also critically analysed these issues and discussed them concerning the definitional scope of the BLSAA<sup>29</sup>. For example, researcher S.D. Kulkarni<sup>30</sup> notes differences amongst states in identifying which contract labourer is a bonded labourer. The confusion in the definition of bonded labour was further discussed in a national seminar organised by the National Labour Institute in 1983.<sup>31</sup> The issues identified were: the massive gap in identification, release, and rehabilitation; the non-communication between states and districts; the lack of alternate forms of employment due to which bonded labourers do not come forward to authorities for support or are re-bonded upon release; and widespread opposition from politicians and bureaucracy<sup>32</sup>, who themselves benefitted from the practice of bonded labour.

Subsequently, a Planning Commission report during 1981–83<sup>33</sup> investigated many issues in the implementation of the law and the rehabilitation scheme. The report revealed that the mechanism of rehabilitation did not match the needs of the beneficiaries. For example, since many bonded labourers were landless, giving them cattle without supporting resources like veterinary cover and training was unsuitable. Even where land was given, the Planning Commission noted, the land quality was poor, which made cultivation uneconomical. The report noted that non-cash assistance is managed by multiple district-level departments without a central coordination system, causing long delays before labourers receive support, leading in many cases to re-bondage.<sup>34</sup>

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24 Raj, A. (2025). Modi Govt Rehabilitated Only 468 Bonded Labourers in 2023-24 Against Annual Target of 13 Lakh. The Wire. [Check Link](#).

25 Parts of writing and research for this chapter are taken from the following doctoral thesis: Agarwal, P. (2021). Journeys of freedom? Post-rescue ethnography of sex workers and bonded labourers in India. Doctoral Thesis. University of Bristol.

26 Ministry of Labour. 1976. Annual Report 1974-75. New Delhi: Government of India.

27 Pandit, V. 1990. Bonded Labour System: Is There Will to Abolish? Mussoorie: Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration.

28 Tiwari, R.K. and Verma, B.M. 1980. Evaluation Study of Bonded Labour Rehabilitation Scheme in Tehri-Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh. New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration.

29 Devi, M. 1981. 'Contract Labour or Bonded Labour.' Economic and Political Weekly, 16 (23): 1010-13.

30 Kulkarni, S.D. 1979. 'Bonded Labour and Illicit Money Lending in Maharashtra: Review of a Report.' Economic and Political Weekly, 14 (10): 561-64.

31 National Labour Institute. 1983. Identification and Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour: Report of a National Seminar. New Delhi: National Labour Institute.

32 Mouli, V.C. 1990. Of Human Bondage: an Indian Experience amongst the Agrarian Work Force. Mussoorie: Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration.

33 Mishra, L. 1984. On the Spot Studies regarding Identification, Release of Bonded Labourers and Rehabilitation of Freed Labourers in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. New Delhi: Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, Government of India.

34 Nair, P. and Sen, S. 2005. Trafficking in Women and Children in India. Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

Since the process of identification and release was slow and ineffective, a separate scheme, the **Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers** in 1978 (further amended in 1986, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2016, 2017, and most recently in 2021), was announced to focus on the needs and vulnerability of the rescued bonded labourers. Under the scheme, once bonded labourers are identified and released from bondage, the DM is responsible for issuing a release certificate. This certificate authorises the cancellation of the labourer's debt, stipulates freedom from bondage and eligibility to claim government assistance for rehabilitation and reintegration. For this purpose, the scheme has both cash and non-cash components for assistance. Besides cash assistance, non-cash elements of this scheme include a provision of a ration card to avail subsidised groceries through the public distribution system (PDS); a community certificate as proof of one's caste to claim caste- based welfare measures, and a house site patta document that ensures that the land belongs to the person in whose name the house is registered. The scheme also includes employment, education, health, medical care, and enrolment in self-help groups <sup>35</sup>.

**Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer - 2016**

**Format for Release Certificate**    BL Case NO.....

(Order of the JMFC/JMSC under Section 12 of the Bonded Labour System  
(Abolition) Act, 1976)

A Colour passport  
sized photograph  
of the bonded  
labourer released  
should be pasted in  
this box

1. Name :
2. Father/Mother's Name :
3. Age :
4. Whether special category\* : Y/N
5. If yes, details thereof :
6. Whether physically disabled# : Y/N
7. If yes, details thereof :
8. Address where bonded labour is identified :
9. Male/Female/trans-gender:
10. Aadhar/UWIN(NSS) No. (if available) :
11. Jan Dhan A/e No with IFSC code:
12. Address of Bonded Labour
13. Name of the Captor/Bonder :
14. Aadhar Card no. of Captor/Bonder :
15. Address of Captor/Bonder :
16. Date of conviction & Release Order :
17. Quantum of Punishment under Chapter VI:
18. Amount of Debt Extinguished u/s 6:
19. Extent and nature of property freed u/s 7:

*\* Special/ Other category as specified at para 5 (iii) and 5 (iv) of this Scheme*

*# "Person with disability" means a person suffering from not less than forty per cent of any disability as certified by a medical authority, medical authority is Hospital funded by Central or State Government.*

Given under my hand and seal on date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature  
Name  
District Magistrate/ Sub- Divisional Magistrate  
District....., State.....  
Seal

CSS for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer-2016 w.e.f. 17.05.2016 - (File No.5-11012/01/2015-8L)

**Image 3: Format of Release certificate from 2016 (MoLE, 2016).<sup>36</sup>**

Researchers have shown that despite a comprehensive scheme, a large chunk of rescued workers end up not being provided assistance; many of them also go back to working in similar exploitative conditions from which they were rescued<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Labour 2016. Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer 2016. Government of India: Ministry of Labour and Employment. Available online. [Check Link](#).

<sup>36</sup> The release certificate has a different form across provinces in terms of language and format.

<sup>37</sup> Agarwal, P. 2024. What it's really like to be rescued from modern slavery. *The Conversation*. [Check Link](#).

## Expansion of the scope of the law and the PIL movement of the 1980s

In light of the above challenges in the implementation of the law and the rehabilitation scheme, the Supreme Court through Public Interest Litigation (PIL) compelled the executive to fulfil its statutory obligations. The Court also directed both the executive and the legislature to expand the scope of the law and the rehabilitation scheme, underscoring the judiciary's role in ensuring the effective enforcement of legal and constitutional mandates.

For example, during the Asian Games construction in 1982<sup>38</sup>, the Government hired contractors. These contractors recruited migrant workers and paid them less than minimum wages, and kept commissions for themselves. The working conditions of the workers were also exploitative. Subsequently, the Supreme Court of India, in the case of PUDR v. Union of India<sup>39</sup>, found a violation of Article 23 prohibiting forced labour. Justice Bhagwati opined that freedom of contract had low relevance in India given its high poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Hence, even voluntary contracts could be involuntary<sup>40</sup>. In this judgment, forced labour is described as:

physical force... exerted through a legal provision... or it may even be compulsion arising from hunger and poverty, want and destitution. Any factor which deprives a person of a choice of alternatives and compels him to adopt one particular course of action may properly be regarded as 'force', and if labour or service is compelled as a result of such 'force', it would be 'forced labour'. Where a person is suffering from hunger or starvation,... he would have no choice but to accept any work... even if the remuneration offered to him is less than the minimum wage... And in doing so, he would be acting not as a free agent with a choice between alternatives but under the compulsion of economic circumstances and the labour... would be clearly 'forced labour.'

This interpretation of the law translates into an understanding that any labour paid at a level lower than the minimum wage would be defined as forced labour under Article 23. Further, in the case of Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India<sup>41</sup>(1983, hereinafter Bandhua case), the Supreme Court held that, given that it was likely for a forced labourer to receive an advance on his earnings:

Whenever it is shown that a labourer is made to provide forced labour, the Court would raise a presumption that he is required to do so in consideration of an advance ... and he is, therefore, a bonded labourer.

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38 Fernandes, W. 1986. Construction Workers Powerlessness and Bondage: The Case of the Asian Games. Archives of Indian Labour. [Check Link](#).

39 People's Union for Democratic Rights and Others VS Union of India and Others, 1982, [Check Link](#).

40 Kotiswaran, P. 2014. 'Beyond Sexual Humanitarianism: A Postcolonial Approach to Anti-Trafficking Law.' UC Irvine Law Review, 4 (1): 353-406.

41 Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India & Others, 1983. [Check Link](#).

In response to these Supreme Court judgments, the Indian Parliament passed an amendment to the BLSAA in 1985<sup>42</sup>. The Amendment states that:

“Where any contract labourer or migrant labourer worked in a system of forced labour under the conditions listed in Section 2(g)<sup>43</sup>(which included the payment of below the minimum wage level), it would amount to bonded labour.

However, despite these expansions in legal interpretation and policy frameworks, the practice of bonded labour persists across India because the implementation remains bleak, with cases going on in courts for several years<sup>44</sup>(see case studies in chapter 7).

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42 The Bonded Labour System Abolition (Amendment) Act, 1985. [Check Link](#).

43 Under the BLSAA 1976, “bonded labour system” means the system of forced, or partly forced, labour under which a debtor enters, or has, or is presumed to have, entered, into an agreement with the creditor to the effect that,— (i) in consideration of an advance obtained by him or by any of his lineal ascendants or descendants (whether or not such advance is evidenced by any document) and in consideration of the interest, if any, due on such advance, or (ii) in pursuance of any customary or social obligation, or (iii) in pursuance of an obligation devolving on him by succession, or (iv) for any economic consideration received by him or by any of his lineal ascendants or descendants, or 3 (v) by reason of his birth in any particular caste or community, he would— (1) render, by himself or through any member of his family, or any person dependent on him, labour or service to the creditor, or for the benefit of the creditor, for a specified period or for an unspecified period, either without wages or for nominal wages, or (2) forfeit the freedom of employment or other means of livelihood for a specified period or for an unspecified period, or (3) forfeit the right to move freely throughout the territory of India, or (4) forfeit the right to appropriate or sell at market value any of his property or product of his labour or the labour of a member of his family or any person dependent on him, and includes the system of forced, or partly forced, labour under which a surety for a debtor enters, or has, or is presumed to have, entered, into an agreement with the creditor to the effect that in the event of the failure of the debtor to repay the debt, he would render the bonded labour on behalf of the debtor.

44 Agarwal, P. (2024). What happens after ‘modern slavery’ rescues? A case of rescued bonded labourers in ‘waiting’ in India. *The Sociological Review*. [Check Link](#).

### **An account of the workers' present condition that informed the Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs Union of India Judgment in 1983**

In the early 1980s, some social workers spotted a group of over 3,000 migrant labourers from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh working and living in 'inhuman and intolerable conditions' in a group of stone quarries in Haryana in India. The social workers enquired into their situation and subsequently wrote a letter to the Supreme Court stating that many of these labourers were bonded under the BLSAA, which was enacted to give effect to Article 23 of the Constitution of India. The letter was then treated as a writ petition by the Court (a PIL), recognising the apparent disadvantage of the labourers in accessing justice in relation to the employers and the state. This led to a 90-page judgment in 1983 which recognised them as bonded labourers.

The case is considered a landmark judgment in the history of the advocacy and work against bonded labour in India. The judiciary was quick to act against the exploitative work and living conditions of the labourers by upholding their fundamental right under Article 23 of the Constitution of India. The court proclaimed, "whenever it is shown that a labourer is made to provide forced labour, the Court would raise a presumption that he is required to do so in consideration of an advance or other economic consideration received by him and he is therefore a bonded labourer". Accordingly, the state of Haryana and the central government were directed to release and rehabilitate the labourers. However, the state of Haryana refuted that these people were bonded labourers.

The court, therefore, sent a committee to conduct a socio-legal investigation into the situation. This committee found that the labourers worked and lived in exploitative conditions, suffering from fatal health injuries and workplace deaths with no medical aid or compensation; unavailability of clean drinking water (people drank water "from a shallow rivulet covered with thick algae after a walk over a dangerous steep incline"), accommodation (people lived in jhuggis, temporary huts covered with iron/plastic sheets, which filled with rainwater), school and toilet (for women, "the only privacy is that provided by the curtain drawn by the turned down eyes of women and the turned away eyes of men"). Consequently, the court gave 21 directions to the state of Haryana and the central government to improve the living and work conditions of labourers who wanted to stay or go back to their village and thus free them from 'bondage and deprivation of liberty'.

Subsequently, between 1983 and 1991, the court appointed at least four committees comprising officials from the public sector and government authorities to enquire if the state was complying with the 21 directions and passed another judgment in 1991. As these committees went on to identify labourers who were bonded and to investigate if they were provided with adequate work and living conditions, the committees submitted different estimates of the number of people who were bonded. This is because, during this time, some people died, others moved cities or travelled to work on other sites. For instance, when the local administration conducted a survey, some of the workers were migrant workers who had gone to some other cities and therefore, they found only 268 workers at the site.<sup>45</sup> However, all these different committees found that the state had not complied with court orders. The court reprimanded the state for its lethargy and inaction by stressing that 'human problems in their normal way do not wait for a time-schedule for attention'.

<sup>45</sup> The Haryana government constructed 365 one-room tenements. Out of these, till date, 97 tenements remain unallotted. And about 200 of the workers whose names were mentioned in the original petition have not received any housing.

Despite this, the social workers, the state of Haryana and the central government continued to debate on the number of bonded labourers and whose responsibility it was to rehabilitate them. During this time, the labourers continued to work and live in exploitative conditions in the stone quarries.

The stone quarries were closed in 1992 but not because of concerns about labour abuse. Rather, according to the labourers, it was to control pollution. People then started working in different occupations such as construction work or domestic work, albeit with similar levels of abuse and exploitation. The case was reopened in 2001 to initiate contempt proceedings against the state for not implementing the directions of the court. This continued until 2015 when the state built one-room tenements for the labourers in a district in Haryana, and the case was disposed of. There were many reasons for the delay in the provision of houses including: the absence of state authorities and employers from court hearings, the long gap between court hearings, and labourers arranging for resources to fight the legal battle, amongst others. Much time was spent in identifying the bonded labourers from 1983, how many were yet to be rehabilitated, who is responsible to monitor the 21 directions of the 1983 judgment, who is responsible for the construction of one-room tenements, and who will discharge funds for the same. The court pronounced that 'it is rather unfortunate that an order passed many years ago to settle and rehabilitate certain bonded labourers, who had been released, has still not been implemented'.

## **2019**

In 2019, room allocation remained incomplete as the issue of who is eligible for allocation continued to be a political playground between social workers and the state of Haryana. Some labourers from 1980s continue to live in jhuggis where there is no protection from sun or rain.

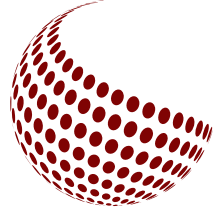
Labourers who have been allocated rooms do not have access to toilets and have to rely on community toilets or the forest, which creates a safety risk especially for women and children. Electricity meters have not been installed and the school constructed in the area has no teachers and is now home to cows. Further, the rooms are so small that they can barely fit a double bed properly. At the same time, the struggle to access state benefits continues. The labourers shared that due to their lower caste and internal migrant status, they are restricted from accessing state benefits and citizenship rights. Older women wait for widow pensions as there is a delay in transferring the same to their accounts. People are denied treatment in government hospitals and are forced to incur debt as a result of seeking treatment in private facilities or risk death. Further, regular monthly rations and gas cylinder for cooking are not available. More importantly, most of the labourers continue to be employed in construction sites, brick making sites and domestic work where they face routine labour abuse including non-payment of minimum wages.

## **Current Status**

In 2020, the labourers made repeated appeals to the District Collector of Faridabad for housing allocations. Yet, many workers are still waiting for housing. In 2025, they finally received electricity - 42 years after the Supreme Court's judgment. But, to date, they have no assured livelihood at the minimum wage rate or proper toilet facilities in and around these one-room tenements.

# COMMITMENTS AND RESPONSE

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## INDIA'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

India is party to a series of international instruments requiring it to eradicate bonded labour, viz.—ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour (ratified by India, 1954): Suppression and penalization of forced labour; ILO Convention No. 105 on Abolition of Forced Labour (ratified): Prohibits specified uses of forced labour including as coercion or discrimination; Protocol of 2014 to ILO Convention No. 29 (P029): Prevention, victim protection, remedies, sanctions, national action plan; India has processed it in Parliament and uses it as policy guidance; ILO Recommendation No. 203 (2014): Supplementary measures for effective suppression; policy guidance for data, time-bound plans, and victim-centered approach; 1926 Slavery Convention and 1956 Supplementary Convention: Abolition of slavery-like practices, including debt bondage, with obligations to eradicate “as soon as possible”; ICCPR Article 8 and related obligations to prevent servitude and forced labour; complemented by ICESCR protections of freely chosen dignified work and safe conditions; and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 4, itself.

Indian Constitution at Article 51(c) states that the “State shall endeavour to—foster respect for international law and treaty obligations”. The Indian Supreme Court has repeatedly held that even though the direct enforceability of an international treaty requires a legislation to that effect passed by the parliament<sup>46</sup>, long and widely held provisions of international law which have become customary forms part of the law of the land unless in direct contradiction with a domestic legislation. Further international law has been used to fill gaps in domestic laws, interpreting and expanding them.<sup>47 48</sup>

The conventions address the eradication of slavery, human trafficking and bonded labour. These are hard won, universally recognised and long held principles, and are therefore customary international human rights law. And since they are obviously not in contradiction with any domestic legislation, they form binding obligations upon India. In addition, even as a matter of realpolitik, failure to adhere to them cause national embarrassment and isolation, affecting India’s soft power and bid of international leadership.

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46 Jolly George Vergese v. Bank of Cochin, (1980) 2 SCC 360, held “until the municipal Law is changed to accommodate the [treaty], what binds the courts is the former not the latter”.

47 Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan, (1997) 6 SCC 241, landmark judgment on sexual harassment of women at workplaces, held “regard must be had to international conventions and norms for construing domestic law when there is no inconsistency between them and there is a void in the domestic law”.

48 National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India, (2014) 5 SCC 438, recognising transgender as a third category of gender, held “if parliament has made any legislation which is in conflict with the international law, then Indian courts are bound to give effect to the Indian law, rather than international law. However, in the absence of a contrary legislation, municipal courts in India would respect the rules of international law”.

Further, one of the key international development agendas that India has committed to is the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>49</sup>. These are a set of 17 globally agreed goals adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all by 2030. While such international provisions may not always be legally binding, it is particularly embarrassing when governments publicly recognise the SDGs yet bring about little or no tangible change in the lives of workers on the ground.

The NITI Aayog, in its SDG India Index 2023-24<sup>50</sup>, has positioned itself as the central institution responsible for embedding these goals within the country's national development framework. In this index, the government explicitly acknowledges the significance of addressing forced labour under SDG 8.7 that commits countries to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

The recognition of forced labour by NITI Aayog is important because it signals an alignment between India's domestic development agenda and its international obligations. However, the reality presented in the report is deeply troubling. Despite decades of legislation such as the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, and more recent policy commitments, the widespread prevalence of bonded labour across multiple sectors, agriculture, brick kilns, construction, domestic work, fisheries, and garment production, remains stark.

Equally concerning is the persistent laxity in the implementation and enforcement of these laws (as the previous chapter on historical background has also shown). Court cases often take years to conclude, local administrations are reluctant to identify and release bonded labourers, and rehabilitation schemes are inconsistently applied (see chapters 5 and 7 for details). Even though these international obligations may or may not be legally binding, this gap between legislative intent and lived reality is not just a technical failure but an embarrassing contradiction to India's claims of progress. It highlights a profound disjuncture between the aspirational vision projected through the SDG Index and the entrenched structural inequalities that sustain forced labour on the ground.

### **National response**

While recent state-level efforts and official directives suggest some administrative focus on rehabilitation efforts, a closer look at parliamentary data and Press Information Bureau (PIB) communication reveals a persistent gap between reported figures and the realities on the ground.

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49 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. [Check Link](#).  
50 Niti Ayog. 2024. SDG India Index 2023-24. [Check Link](#).

Despite the increase in rescue numbers cited in official reports, there is little evidence to show that these translate into meaningful change for those affected. A key issue lies in the continued ambiguity surrounding the notion of "rehabilitation." Financial compensation is often treated as a substitute for comprehensive rights-based rehabilitation, overshadowing critical needs such as land allocation, access to education, and healthcare. As a result, the support remains fragmented and insufficient to enable genuine empowerment.

For example, The Government of India continues to report significant numbers of rescued and rehabilitated bonded labourers. According to the Parliamentary Question Answer No. AU347 (March 2025)<sup>51</sup>, the government states that 2,97,038 bonded labourers have been rescued and rehabilitated since 1978. However, a closer examination of the breakup provided in these parliamentary responses reveals discrepancies compared to the ground reports and independent assessments:

- The definition of "rehabilitation" remains vague. The term often includes immediate monetary compensation without evidence of long-term reintegration or sustainable livelihoods.
- The Sansad annexure shows aggregate state-wise figures, but it does not specify if the rescued individuals received full rehabilitation package (e.g., land allotment, housing, education support) as mandated under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 and the Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers.

Similarly, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour, Textiles, and Skill Development, chaired by MP Basavaraj Bommai (March 2025), highlighted persistent issues:

- Between April 2024 and January 2025, about 250 bonded labourers were rescued nationwide, showing limited progress.
- Expenditure for rehabilitation has decreased — Rs 5.15 crore spent in 2022-23 fell to just Rs 1.34 crore in 2023-24, signalling a troubling trend of lower prioritisation despite the ongoing prevalence of bonded labour.
- The committee urged a multifaceted approach beyond monetary relief, recommending vocational training and employability programs for sustainable rehabilitation — a crucial gap identified in field observations as well (see case studies in chapter 7).

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51 Rajya Sabha. 2016. Rising number of bonded labourers, Unstarred question no.347.Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. [Check Link](#).

52 Ramesh, S. 2025. Enforce laws against bonded labour strictly.Times of India. [Check Link](#).

In parallel, some local governments have launched workshops and directives focused on eradicating bonded labour:

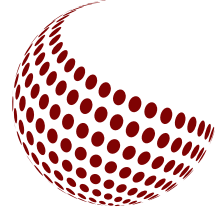
- Mysuru, Karnataka (March 2025)<sup>52</sup>: Senior Civil Judge and District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Secretary B.G. Dinesh, alongside Zilla Panchayat head, conducted a workshop, stressing strict adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for identification, rescue, and rehabilitation. Officials were instructed to proactively identify cases instead of waiting for complaints.
- Prakasam, Andhra Pradesh (April 2025)<sup>53</sup>: District Collector A. Thameem Ansariya organised a sensitisation workshop, emphasising a comprehensive approach to eliminating bonded labour, ensuring not just rescue but also rehabilitation with improved living standards.
- Odisha (December 2024): The Odisha government sought detailed reports from district collectors regarding the aid provided to 2,411 rescued workers since 2016-17. Worryingly, a majority had not received meaningful rehabilitation, exposing gaps in implementation and monitoring mechanisms.
- Delhi High Court (January 2024)<sup>54</sup>: Delhi HC issued directions on recovery of back wages, financial aid to rescued bonded child labourers.

To bridge the gaps in implementation, in a core group meeting in July 2024, The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) advocated for the creation of a national portal for the registration of informal workers, particularly migrant workers seeking employment outside their home states. This initiative aims to prevent trafficking and bonded labour risks through better visibility and regulation of workers' movements. The implementation of this initiative also remains to be seen and assessed. This report is not only timely but also urgent, as it provides a crucial and up-to-date account of the Act and the scheme, capturing both the prevalence of bonded labour and the legal status of affected individuals before and after rescue.

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<sup>52</sup> Nandam, N. 2025. Collector calls for eradication of bonded labour system. The Hans India. [Check Link](#).

<sup>54</sup> Prasad, M. 2024. Delhi HC issues directions on recovery of back wages, financial aid to rescued bonded child labourers. The Indian Express. [Check Link](#).



# METHODOLOGY

This report uses a mixed-methods approach that brings together survey data from 950 rescued workers and qualitative data based on four regional-level meetings and group discussions involving nearly 1,000 workers from nineteen states. These states were identified through news clippings, previous rescue experience of the NCCEBL, referrals from partner organisations, and information obtained via the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act (BLSAA) and the Rehabilitation Scheme, as well as the lived experiences of rescued bonded labourers across India.

Source state	Destination states	No of respondents
Andhra Pradesh	Delhi	8
Assam	Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh	24
Bihar	Haryana, Uttar Pradesh	157
Chattisgarh	Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir	70
MP	Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh	87
Odisha	Telangana, TN, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh	332
Rajasthan	Rajasthan	11
Tripura	Himachal Pradesh	5
Uttarakhand	Punjab	16
Uttar Pradesh	Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab	240
<b>Total</b>		<b>950</b>

**Table 1: Details of respondents by source and destination state**

## **Survey Data**

Between April 2024 and February 2025, we surveyed 950 rescued workers who had been issued Release Certificates under the BLSAA. The survey was designed with two objectives. First, we aimed to gather comprehensive information that was either missing or unavailable through RTI applications, especially workers' post-rescue experiences. Second, we sought to understand the demographic profiles of rescued workers, including caste and migration status, to assess whether these factors influenced the support they received after rescue.

Key focus areas in the survey included:

- The registration or status of legal cases filed post-rescue
- Post-rescue employment conditions and whether workers re-entered exploitative work
- Access to entitlements such as minimum wages, rehabilitation support, and welfare schemes such as MGNREGA and the Public Distribution System (PDS)
- Demographic information to identify patterns related to caste, migration, and other vulnerabilities.

Image 4 presents the sample survey form. All survey responses were systematically entered into an Excel database for analysis. Throughout the process, the privacy and safety of workers were paramount. Identities were anonymised, and no names appear in the report to protect respondents from potential retaliation by employers, contractors, or local authorities.

## **Access and Participant Selection**

Access to participants was facilitated through networks of previously rescued workers, local civil society organisations, and activists working in affected regions. Given the sensitivity of the subject, establishing trust was essential. Only workers who had received Release Certificates and felt comfortable sharing their experiences were included.

All 950 survey respondents were bonded labourers officially recognised as such by statutory authorities through the issuance of Release Certificates. This ensured that the classification of bonded labour did not depend on the research team's interpretation. However, this approach also means that the survey excludes individuals who were in bonded labour but had not been issued a Release Certificate, likely resulting in an underestimation of the scale of bondage.

Below is a sample survey form:

**1. PERSONAL DETAILS**

- D. A. Name..... B. Age..... C. Gender.....
- E. Permanent Address.....  
.....
- F. Present Address.....
- G. Category (SC/ST/OBC/Others)..... G. Mobile No.....
- H. Qualification..... I. Migrant Labour (Yes/No) .....
- J. Whether physically disabled (Yes/No)..... K. Single Women (Yes / NO).....

**2. PARTICULARS OF FAMILY MEMBERS LIST**

S.N	NAME	RELATION	AGE	GEN DER	QUALIFICATI ON	OCCUPATION

**3. PARTICULARS OF OCCUPATION (Past/ Present)**

- A. Present Occupation ..... B. Unemployed (Yes/No).....
- C. Wages (per day/wceck/month).....
- D. Past Occupation..... E. Wages (per day/wceck/month).....
- F. Unpaid Wage Amount..... G. Any Debt (If yes mention the amount).....

**4. F.I.R (Registered/Pending)**

**5. Release Certificate : (Received/Pending)**

**6. Rescued date :**

**7. Rescued from :**

**6. REHABILITATION OF THE BONDED LABOUR**

		Yes/No	*if yes(amount)
	Interim Relief Amount		
	First Instalment		

<b>6.1 Economical</b>	Second Instalment		
		<i>Total:</i>	

<b>6.2 Social Rehabilitation</b>	<i>Social Security Scheme:</i>	Yes/No
	PDS Ration Card	
	Skill Development Training	
	Land for Housing (*if Yes! What benefits are received)	
	Land Provided for Agriculture/Other work by Govt.	
	Owned House	
	Housing Facility provided by Govt.	
	E-Shram Card (*if Yes! What benefits are received)	
	Building And Other Construction Worker (BOCW) Card (*if Yes! What benefits are received)	
	Enrolled in any other Govt. Scheme (If yes mention the schemes)	

### 6.3 EDUCATION

#### 6.3.1 Education for Childrens \*If Yes:

School Admission	
Is Educational Material provided by the Govt.	
Is the educational fee provided by the Govt.	

### 6.4 HEALTH BENEFITS

Yes/No

Registered in any Health Scheme (*if Yes! Under what scheme and What benefits are received)	
Medical Check-up	

### 6.5 EMPLOYMENT

Yes/No

Employment card	
Did the Government provided any job	
Present work (*If Yes)	
Wage (per day/week/month)	

### 6.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL REHABILITATION

Yes/No

Counselling/Emotional Support	
Society Mainstream	

Image 4: Sample survey form

## **Qualitative Data: Regional-Level Meetings and Group Discussions**

To supplement the survey findings, qualitative data were gathered through four regional-level meetings and additional group discussions with around 1000 workers. These discussions covered workers' experiences of bondage, the rescue process, and challenges in accessing legal and rehabilitation support.

Four regional-level meetings were organised:

1. Kantan Banjil, Odisha (approximately 400 participants)
2. Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh (approximately 100 participants)
3. Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir (approximately 50 participants)
4. Beed, Maharashtra (approximately 50 participants)

Regional level meetings brought together rescued workers, trade union leaders, civil society representatives, local activists, and informal sector workers. By conducting both surveys and regional level meetings, we were able to cross-verify data and embed individual experiences within the broader macro realities of workers' post-rescue lives and journeys. Images 5,6, and 7 show photographs of regional level meetings held in Jammu Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha.

While the survey data covered 950 rescued workers, qualitative data were collected from approximately 1,000 workers. The regional-level meetings brought together around 700 workers while additional group discussions were held with around 300 workers. These discussions informed the development of detailed case studies that shed light on workers' experiences of bondage, implementation of the Act and the Rehabilitation Scheme.

The twenty case studies included in this report capture the diversity of these experiences, reflecting differences in the application of specific provisions of the Act, access to rehabilitation, the forms of exploitation faced, and the trajectories of workers' post-rescue lives.



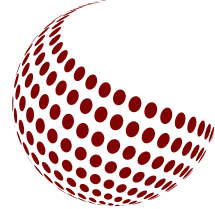
Image 5: State-level meeting in Madhya Pradesh



**Image 6: State-level Meeting in Jammu and Kashmir**



**Image 7: State-level Meeting in Odisha**



# FINDINGS

## SECTION 1 - DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

This section includes the demographic details of the 950 surveyed workers in terms of caste, gender, migrant status, and education all of which impact people's experience of bonded labour.

### Caste Demographics

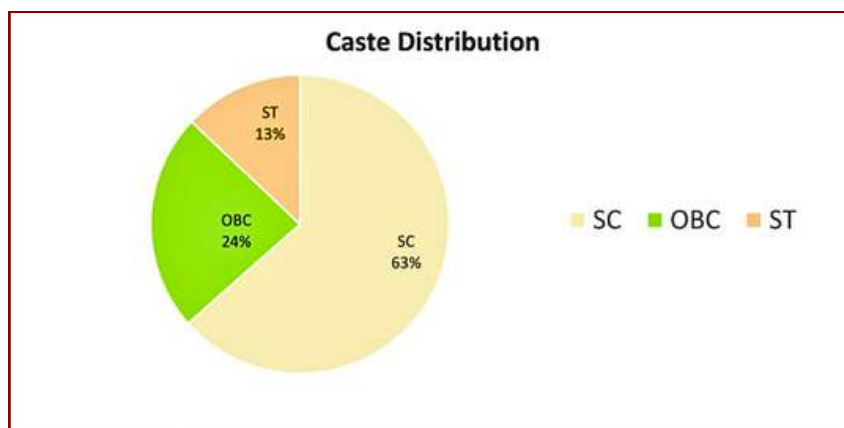


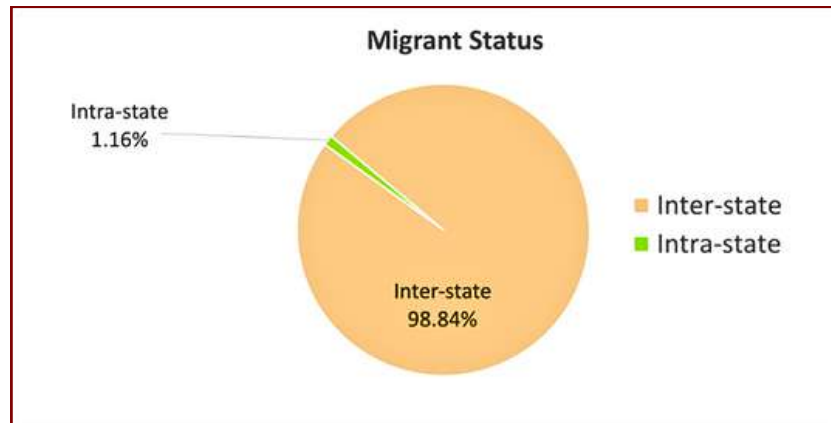
Figure 1: Caste Distribution

All workers included in the report belong to marginalised caste groups, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), or Other Backward Classes (OBC). Not a single individual from the General category was identified among the rescued workers. The caste-wise distribution is rather telling: 63% of the workers were from SC, 13% from ST, and 24% from OBC. These figures demonstrate that bonded labour in India is not just an economic issue, but a structural outcome of the caste system.<sup>55</sup> The over-representation of SC individuals, almost two-thirds of all rescued workers, reveals the continuing legacy of caste-based occupational segregation and socio-economic exclusion. Historically oppressed and denied access to land, education, and secure livelihoods, SC communities remain systematically pushed into the most exploitative and unprotected forms of labour. Similarly, the presence of ST (13%) and OBC (24%) individuals in bonded labour further reflects how structural marginalisation intersects with geography, education, and access to state protections. Tribal communities, often located in remote or resource-rich areas, are particularly vulnerable to displacement and labour exploitation. OBCs, while legally recognised as disadvantaged, are often invisibilised in labour exploitation narratives, yet this data shows their significant representation in bonded conditions.

Thus, the caste-wise breakdown shows how bonded labour is a caste-based system of control, rather than the outcome of poverty or illiteracy alone. The data demand that policy responses go beyond welfare measures and instead directly confront caste-based discrimination and structural inequality embedded in the labour market.

55 Mander, H. 2023. India's Ignored Bonded Labour System Exacerbates Inequality and Caste Discrimination. EPW Engage. [Check Link](#).

## Migration



**Figure 2: Migrant Status**

The data reveal that the vast majority of bonded labourers were inter-state migrant workers, with only 1.16% having migrated within their home state. This pattern highlights the structural vulnerabilities that compel individuals to cross state boundaries in search of work, often out of desperation due to poverty, landlessness, debt, caste discrimination, and lack of local employment opportunities. Internal migration of this kind, though often under-acknowledged in policy frameworks, represents a significant demographic and economic trend.

This finding aligns with global evidence showing that internal migration vastly exceeds international migration, especially in countries like India<sup>56</sup>. With over 93% of India's economy dependent on informal labour, internal migrants play a crucial, yet highly precarious role in sustaining key sectors such as agriculture, construction, brick kilns, textiles, and mining. Their work is often invisible, unregulated, and unprotected by labour laws. Despite the relevance of inter-state migration to India's labour economy, none of the inter-state workers in the sample had been registered under the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 (ISMWA), a legislation specifically designed to protect this vulnerable group. This complete failure of implementation at both source and destination states exposes a systemic disregard for migrant workers' rights. Without registration under ISMWA, workers were denied access to even the most basic entitlements guaranteed by the Act, such as minimum wages, displacement allowance, journey allowance, medical care, and decent living conditions.

This widespread regulatory neglect underscores how legal invisibility and geographic dislocation intersect to deepen exploitation. While migration itself is not inherently exploitative, in the absence of legal protection and state accountability, it becomes a key axis of vulnerability, one that facilitates debt bondage, withholding of wages, restriction of movement, and forced labour.

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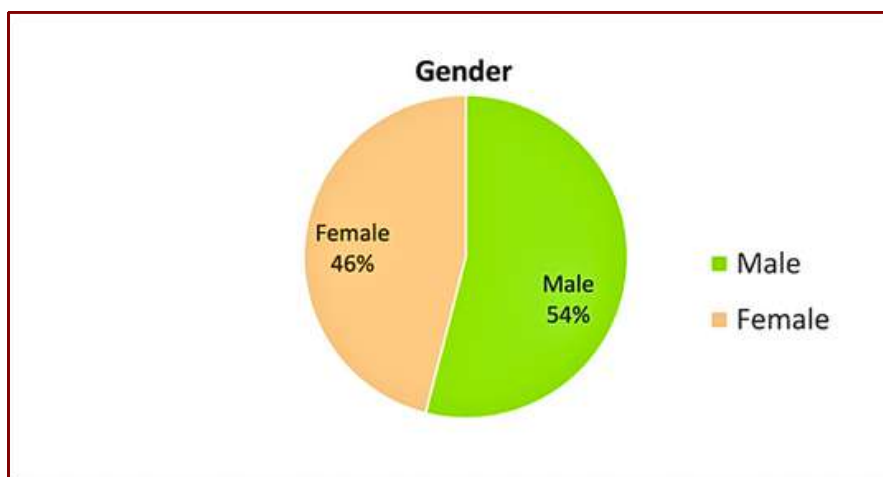
<sup>56</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2024. World Migration Report 2024. [Check Link](#).

## Gender

Gender plays a critical role in shaping the lived realities of bonded labour, with the data showing that 54% of the rescued workers were men and 46% women. While both groups experienced exploitative conditions, women, particularly those from marginalised caste groups, faced intensified and intersectional forms of vulnerability due to their caste, gender, and migrant status.<sup>57</sup>

Women workers encountered unique challenges, including sexual harassment, denial of reproductive health care, and exclusion from key state support services (see case studies for further details). Crucial schemes such as anganwadi centres and the services of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), which provide maternal and child health support, were largely inaccessible to them.

Moreover, many women were not recognised as workers in their own right. Payments were often routed through male family members, or women received no wages at all, rendering their labour invisible and reinforcing patriarchal control over their economic agency. This practice not only erases their contribution but also denies them legal recognition and protection as workers.



**Figure 3: Gender composition**

In some cases, exploitation took on extremely violent forms. In Maharashtra's sugarcane belt, Dalit and OBC women workers have reportedly undergone forced hysterectomies, a coercive practice intended to increase their productivity by preventing menstruation during harvests. In response to the same, the Bombay High Court in a *Suo Moto Writ* petition stated that women's labour under such conditions should be considered a form of bonded labour.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Elena Samonova. 2022. Lifeworlds of female bonded labourers among the Sahariya tribe. *Development in Practice*, 33(2), 205–214. [Check Link](#)

<sup>58</sup> High Court on its own Motion versus the State of Maharashtra and others, 2025, [Check Link](#).

## Education

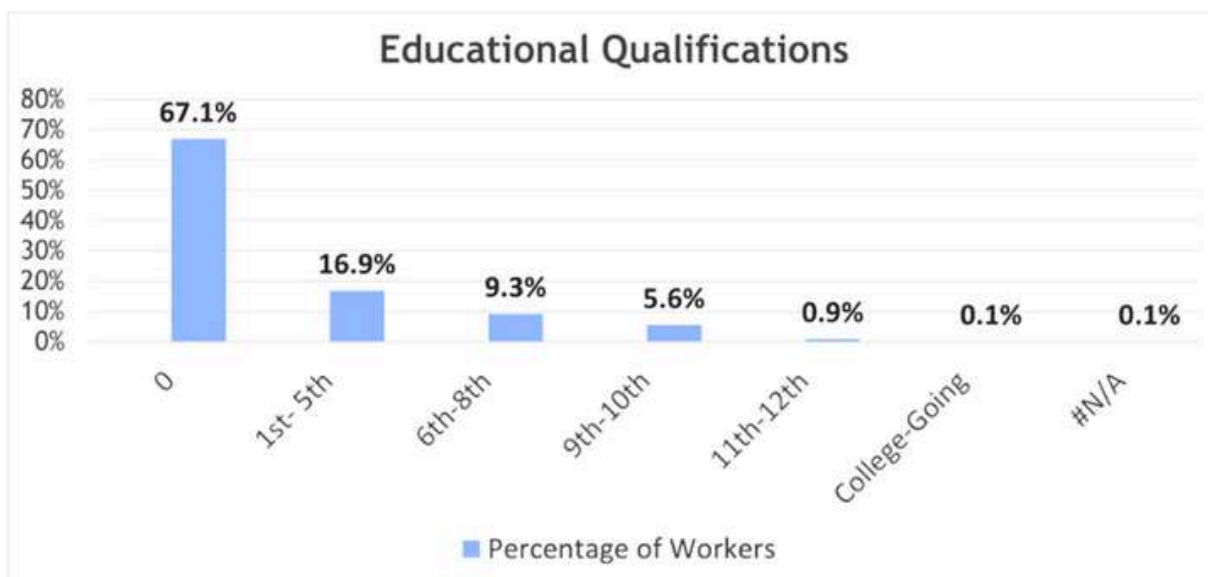


Figure 4: Educational Qualification

Out of 950 workers, a striking 67% of rescued workers had no access to formal education, underscoring how educational deprivation is both a cause and consequence of bonded labour. This lack of schooling limits workers' ability to access critical information, assert their rights, or navigate legal and bureaucratic systems. Without education, and often lacking social capital or support networks, workers remain trapped in cycles of dependency and exploitation. Employers and contractors exploit this vulnerability, knowing that workers without formal education are less likely to resist or seek help. (Our sample included the details of a two year old girl who was rescued from a Brick Kiln in Uttar Pradesh. Her details have been shown as Not Applicable (N/A) as she is too young to access formal education).

### Children's Education

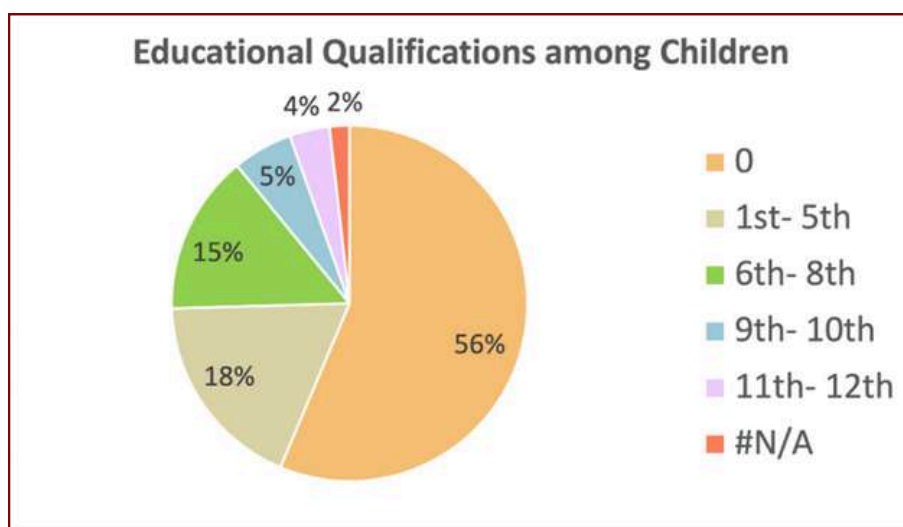
The presence of 55 children among the rescued bonded labourers, with 56% never having attended school, reveals a deep systemic failure to protect children from intergenerational exploitation. Among those aged 15 to 17, half had no access to education, while the others dropped out early, often due to poverty, migration, or lack of institutional support. Furthermore, most of the children were sent to school with the help of NGOs with minimal motivation or support from government.

These figures highlight how bonded labour is perpetuated across generations, with children denied not just their childhood, but also tools like education, that could offer a way out. This violates both the spirit and letter of the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976, which mandates rehabilitation, especially through access to education. Vigilance committees, tasked with enforcing these protections, have clearly failed to ensure even the most basic rights for rescued children.

Education	15 to 17 years old	11 to 14 years old	7 to 10 years old	3 to 6 years old	Less than 3 years old	Total
0	11	7	9	4		31
1st- 5th	3	1	5	1		10
6th- 8th	5	3				8
9th- 10th	1	2				3
11th- 12th	2					2
#N/A					1	1
Total	22	13	14	5	1	55

**Table 2: Education Among Rescued Children**

Further, through state-level meetings, participants shared that for children who did not go to school or left school due to being in bonded conditions, there is no counselling or other mechanisms to assess their educational level and reinstate their interest in formal education. This is aptly due to non-availability of education and schools in the destination areas where migrants travel for work with their children especially those working in construction, agriculture or brick kilns. Here, the issue of language is key where migrant children in destination states cannot understand the local language and struggle to keep up. The government should, therefore, be cognizant of migrant children’s need for education including issues of assimilation due to language differences.



**Figure 5: Educational Qualification among Children**

## SECTION 2 - WAGES AND DEBT

This section provides information on the prevalence of wage theft and debt dependency among the 950 surveyed workers.

### Unpaid Wages

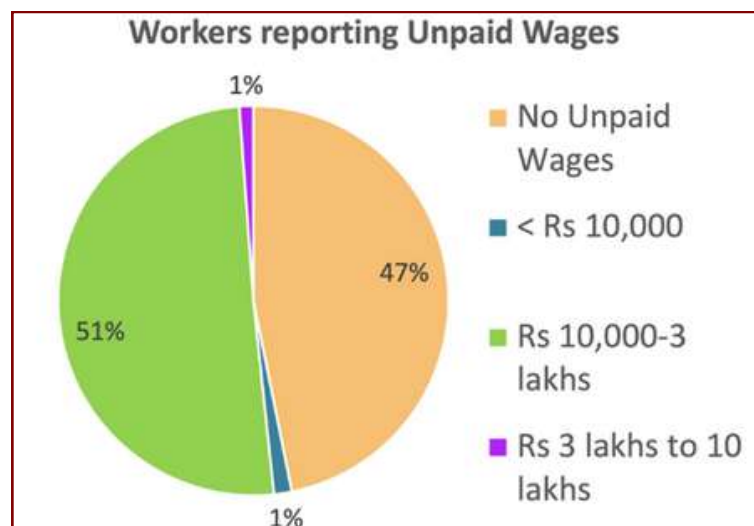
Among the 950 rescued workers, 53% reported unpaid wages, revealing that wage theft is a widespread and systemic feature of bonded labour. With 51% of these workers owed amounts ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹3 lakh, and 1.2% owed over ₹3 lakh each, the scale of this financial exploitation is staggering. The average wage owed per worker—₹32,514—represents not only a loss of income but a denial of dignity and justice. As per the Act, the concerned DMs must have ensured recovery of earned wages for these 53% workers which did not happen for these workers.

Unpaid wages	Number of workers	Percentage
Zero	445	46.90%
< Rs 10,000	14	1.40%
Rs 10,000-3 lakhs	480	50.50%
Rs 3 lakhs to 10 lakhs	11	1.20%
Total	950	100%

**Table 3: Unpaid Wages Owed to Rescued Workers**

(For this analysis, the unpaid wage amounts have been proportionately divided among family members to reflect the scale of individual losses.)

Importantly, this data challenges dominant narratives that focus primarily on debt as the defining characteristic of bonded labour. These figures show that exploitation in bonded labour extends beyond debt bondage to include the outright withholding of earned wages, a tactic that sustains control over workers and impedes their ability to break free from exploitative systems.

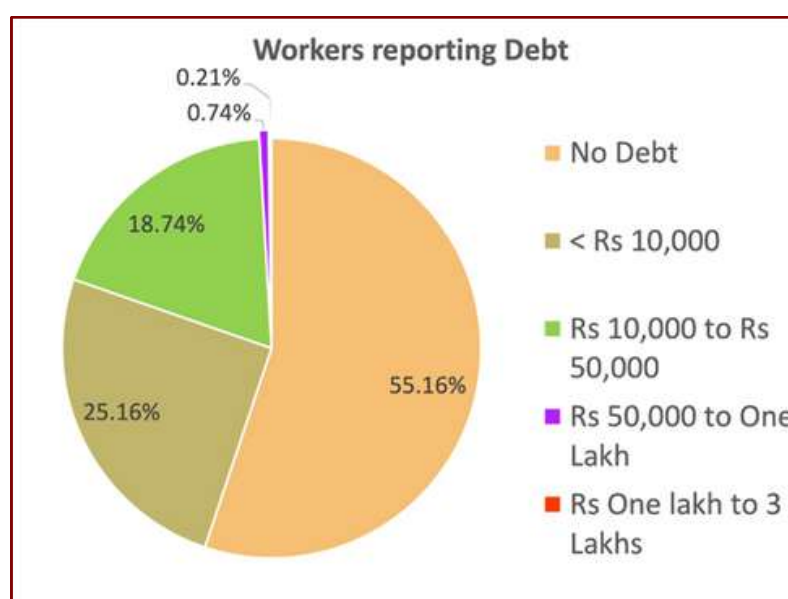


**Figure 6: Workers reporting Unpaid Wages**

Data reveal that wage theft is not incidental, but central to how bonded labour systems function, especially in sectors like brick kilns, where family-based wage payments blur individual entitlements<sup>59</sup>. This not only renders women and children's labour invisible but also entrenches economic dependency.<sup>60</sup>

## Debt

The data on debt among rescued workers reveals a complex and deeply caste-embedded mechanism of labour exploitation that goes far beyond the simplistic notion of debt bondage. While the average debt per rescued worker was ₹5,283.14, this is six times lower than the average unpaid wage amount of ₹32,514, exposing the flawed rationale often used to justify exploitative labour conditions: that workers are being compensated through debt repayment. In reality, workers are owed significantly more than they supposedly owe, demonstrating that debt is not compensation, but a tool of coercion and control.



**Figure 7: Workers reporting debt**

59 Breman, J. 1994. Wage Hunters and Gatherers: Search for Work in the Lean Season of Rural South Gujarat. *Modern Asian Studies*, 28(4), 815-849. [Check Link](#).

60 Kubasiewicz, L.M., Watson, T., Nye, C., Chamberlain, N., Perumal, R.K., Saroja, R., Norris, S.L., Raw, Z. and Burden, F.A. 2023. Bonded labour and donkey ownership in the brick kilns of India: A need for reform of policy and practice. *PubMed Central*. [Check Link](#).

<b>Debt owed to employer</b>	<b>Number of workers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Zero	524	55.16%
< Rs 10,000	239	25.16%
Rs 10,000 to Rs 50,000	178	18.74%
Rs 50,000 to One Lakh	7	0.74%
Rs One lakh to 3 Lakhs	2	0.21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4: Workers reporting debt**

Workers reported taking on debt for various survival needs such as health treatments, marriage, funeral ceremonies, food, and prior advances from employers. These needs are not incidental; they reflect systemic deprivations linked to caste-based socio-economic exclusion, where Dalit and marginalised caste communities are denied access to public goods such as free healthcare, education, housing, and social safety nets. Thus, caste not only determines who is likely to incur debt but also shapes the conditions that make debt necessary in the first place.

Crucially, 55% of workers did not owe any debt to their employers at the time of rescue, directly challenging the dominant policy and legal frameworks that equate bonded labour with debt bondage. Among those who did owe money, 25% had debts below ₹10,000, and only 1% carried debts over ₹50,000. These relatively small amounts suggest that the issue is not the scale of debt, but the conditions under which it is manipulated. Employers and contractors use even minor debts, often extended informally, without documentation, to create a sense of obligation, which is then enforced through social, physical, and psychological coercion.

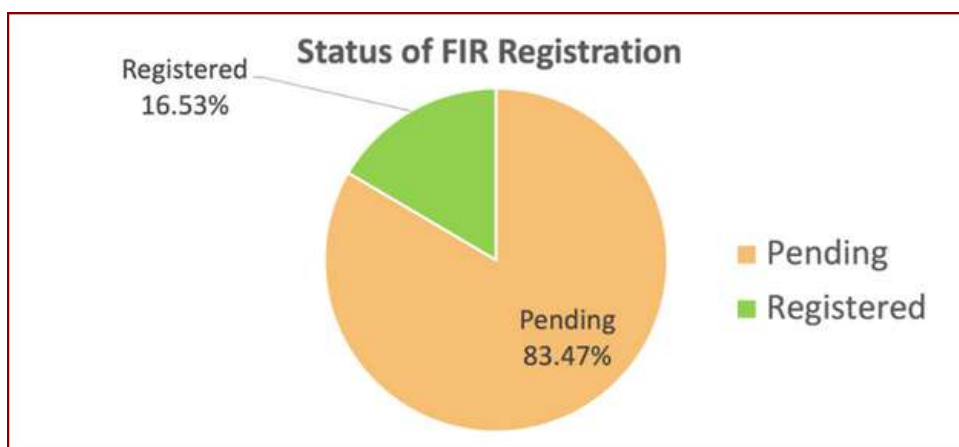
Among the non-indebted 55%, many were indebted to external actors such as sahukaars (moneylenders), peers, or local community members. So, while not formally tied to their employer through debt, they remained embedded in a broader web of financial precarity. In such cases, the pressure to remain in exploitative work is driven by the need to repay loans elsewhere, making them vulnerable to secondary forms of bondage, often unrecognised by law.

More disturbingly, workers described non-monetary coercion: restrictions on physical movement, threats to harm family members, and verbal and physical abuse, particularly targeting Dalit workers. These practices mirror historical patterns of caste-based domination, where Dalits and other marginalised castes are not only economically disadvantaged but are treated as inherently subordinate and controllable bodies.

In conclusion, the data demands a fundamental shift in how bonded labour is understood and addressed. Rather than focusing narrowly on debt, interventions must reckon with the intersection of caste, wage theft, informal migration, and coercive control, all of which conspire to keep marginalised workers in cycles of exploitation.

### SECTION 3 – POST-RESCUE LEGAL PROCESS

The post-rescue legal process for bonded labourers reveals profound systemic failures, deeply intertwined with caste-based marginalisation. Our data shows that only 17% of rescued workers had a First Information Report (FIR) registered, meaning over 80% of workers had no official recognition of their grievances under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Acts. This lack of legal acknowledgment effectively silences the majority of rescued workers, denying them access to justice and reinforcing their marginalised status.



**Figure 8: Status of FIR Registration**

Caste plays a critical role in this neglect. Workers from marginalised groups often face discrimination not only at the workplace but also within the legal system. The failure to file FIRs or to provide survivors with copies of documents crucial for legal tracking and empowerment, reflects institutional apathy rooted in caste biases (see also case studies for details).

Moreover, vigilance committees, legally mandated to oversee post-rescue processes, routinely fail to communicate with workers. This absence of engagement disproportionately affects marginalised caste workers, who already encounter barriers in accessing information and resources. With the introduction of the revised Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers in 2016, which advanced a more holistic framework of rehabilitation, many of our analyses take 2016 as a critical reference point.

<b>Trial/convicted</b>	<b>Record Count</b>
No	559
Yes	21
Total	580

**Table 5: Details of Trial/Conviction for workers rescued after 2016**

Our data shows that before 2016, no conviction was done. A majority of the cases post 2016 i.e. 559, received no conviction. After 2016, 21 cases had conviction, underscoring a complete breakdown of the legal process following rescue. Rescued workers reported no awareness of trials or convictions, and even proactive efforts through Right to Information (RTI) applications failed to yield any information about case progress or outcomes. This lack of legal follow-through is particularly striking given the official mandates.

Following the 2016 revision of the rehabilitation scheme, summary trials were mandated to be initiated within 24 hours of rescue and concluded within three months<sup>61</sup>, a directive reiterated by the Ministry of Labour and Employment in 2018. The failure to hold any trials perpetuates a culture of impunity for employers engaging in bonded labour, denying workers meaningful legal redress. This issue is compounded for workers from marginalised caste backgrounds who already face systemic discrimination and barriers within the justice system.

61 Rajya Sabha. 2018. Measures taken by the Government to rehabilitate bonded labourers, Unstarred question no.259. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. [Check Link](#)

## SECTION 4 – POST-RESCUE REHABILITATION AND WELFARE

The revised Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers of 2016 recognizes that abolition of bonded labour requires a “holistic approach for law enforcement as well as a comprehensive rehabilitation mechanism for social, psychological, educational, and economic rehabilitation.” Besides economic assistance, District Administration shall ensure that released bonded labourers are provided with basic necessities such as shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and land where available, by linking them to relevant Central and State welfare schemes.

### Rehabilitation Assistance

The rehabilitation scheme for freed bonded labourers has evolved, with significant increases in cash assistance. In terms of economic rehabilitation, the scheme originally offered Rs 4,000, which was gradually raised to Rs 6,250 in 1986, Rs 10,000 in 1995, and Rs 20,000 in 1999, and Rs 30,000 in 2021,<sup>62</sup> all aimed solely at rehabilitation assistance. Specifically, in 2016, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme was revamped, greatly enhancing cash assistance:

- Rs. 1,00,000 for each adult male beneficiary
- Rs. 2,00,000 for special category beneficiaries, such as children (including orphans or those rescued from forced child labour) and women
- Rs. 3,00,000 for extreme cases of deprivation or marginalisation, including transgender individuals, victims of sexual exploitation or trafficking, and differently-abled persons

In addition, non-monetary compensation in the forms of land, housing, education and livelihood were also included in the scheme to prevent rebondage and complete rehabilitation of rescued workers. This extended cash and non-cash assistance is dependent on the completion of summary trial.

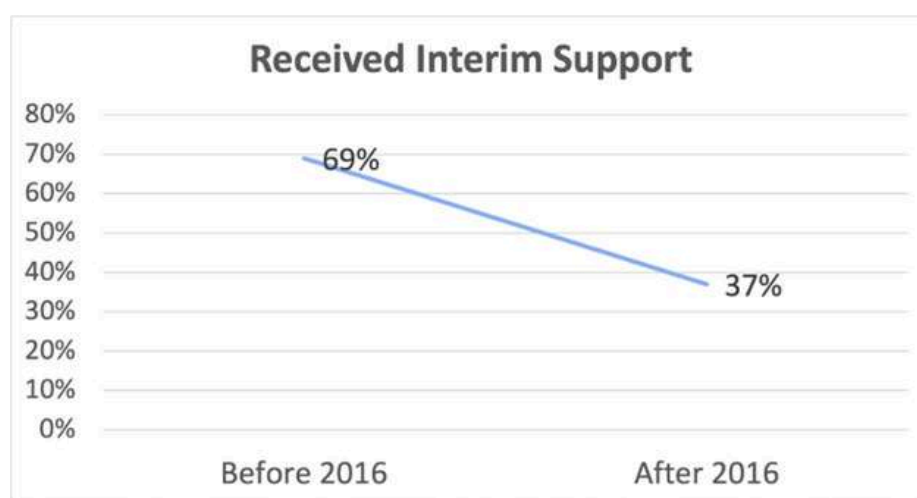


Figure 9: Interim support received

As a part of the post-rescue rehabilitation efforts, workers are entitled to an immediate, interim assistance such as travel expenses back to their source town, food, lodging, medical assistance, legal aid, among others. However, a troubling trend emerges when analysing the disbursement of this interim assistance. The disbursement of the interim amount, especially after 2016, drastically worsened. Only 37% of the rescued workers reported receiving an interim amount, that too after considerable delay and continuous struggles by organisations and workers, many of whom have also filed cases in court. A majority of workers (63%) freed after 2016 did not receive interim travel assistance, highlighting a significant decline in the effective implementation of the rehabilitation scheme in recent years. For example, there are 55 children and 895 adults, including 405 adult women and 490 adult men in our sample.

### Children

The table below shows that 29 out of 55 children did not receive any rehabilitation (the total rehabilitation here includes interim relief amount as well). After 2016, the 52 rescued children in our survey were eligible for Rs 2,00,000. 28 children (53.8%) of the children did not receive any rehabilitation at all. There is one person with Disability who did not receive the promised 3 lakh rupees as well.

Rehabilitation Amount	Number of children	After 2016	Before 2016
Zero	29	28	1
Less than Rs. 20,000	1	1	0
Rs 20,000	23	21	2
50k to 1 lakh	2	2	0
	<b>55</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>3</b>

**Table 6: Children who received monetary rehabilitation assistance**

### Women

Take the case of women among our survey respondents. Out of the 405 adult women, 240 women were rescued after 2016 and were eligible for Rs 2,00,000 as rehabilitation amount. Only one person has received Rehabilitation amount between 1 to 2 lakhs. 104 women (43.3% of adult women rescued after 2016) received only Rs 20,000. 80 women (33% of the adult women) rescued after 2016 did not receive any compensation, although they were rightfully eligible for 2 lakh rupees.

Rehabilitation Amount	Number of women	After 2016	Before 2016
Zero	99	80	19
< Rs 20,000	90	46	44
Rs 20,000	170	104	66
Rs 20,000 to Rs.50,000	40	4	36
Rs 50000 upto One Lakh	5	5	0
Rs One lakh upto 2 Lakhs	1	1	0
	<b>405</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>165</b>

**Table 7 : Women who received monetary Rehabilitation assistance**

### Men

Similar to women, men also did not receive adequate rehabilitation amounts. Out of the 490 men, 289 men were rescued after 2016 and were eligible for Rs 1,00,000 each. However, not even a single man among the survey respondents had received that amount. 123 men (42.6% of men rescued after 2016) received only Rs 20,000. 97 men (33.6% of men rescued after 2016) had not received any compensation, even as they were eligible for one lakh each.

Rehabilitation Amount	Number of men	After 2016	Before 2016
0	132	97	35
< Rs 20,000	101	53	48
Rs 20,000	202	123	79
Rs 20,000 to Rs.50,000	42	3	39
Rs 50000 upto One Lakh	13	13	0
Rs One lakh upto 2 Lakhs	0	0	0
	<b>490</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>201</b>

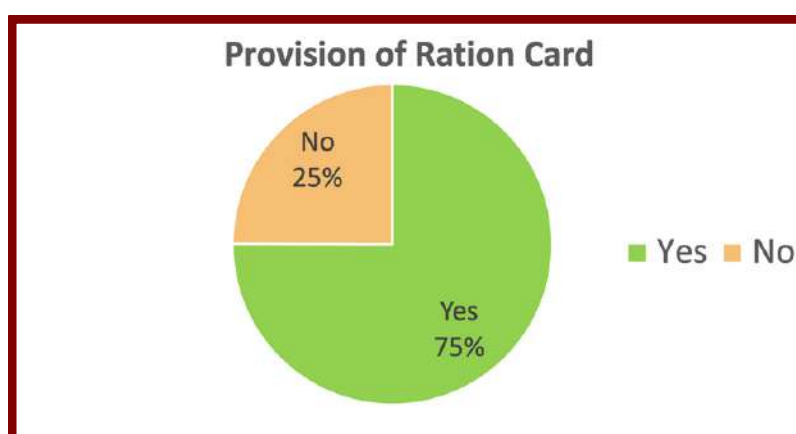
**Table 8: Men who Received monetary rehabilitation assistance**

## Welfare Benefits

Welfare benefits such as ration cards, BOCW cards, health cards, and MNREGA entitlements are essential pathways for the rehabilitation of those rescued from forced labour. However, our survey reveals that the implementation of these welfare measures among rescued labourers remains far from adequate.

### Ration Card

The pie chart in Figure 10 reveals that 75% of rescued workers possess a PDS (Public Distribution System) ration card, indicating formal enrolment in government welfare schemes intended to provide subsidized food and essential supplies. However, having a ration card does not necessarily translate into effective access to ration supplies.



**Figure 10: Provision of Ration Card**

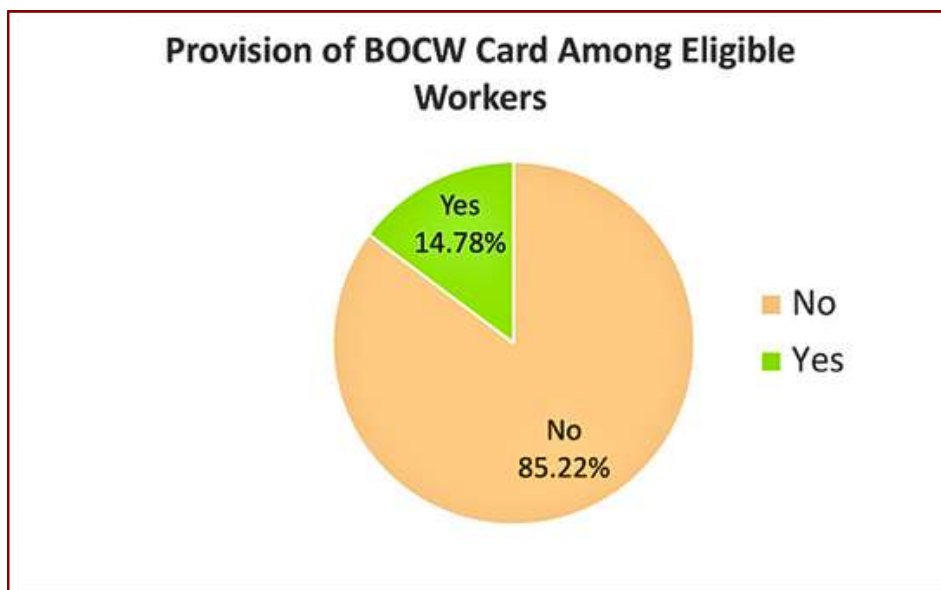
Many workers, especially migrant labourers, face significant barriers in utilising their ration cards. Since their workplaces are often located far from their hometowns - where their ration cards are registered - regional restrictions of the current PDS system prevent easy portability of benefits. This geographic disconnect means that even though workers hold valid ration cards, they frequently cannot redeem rations where they currently live and work. Therefore, while the pie chart suggests widespread formal inclusion in welfare programs, the reality exposes systemic gaps that undermine food security and social protection. The inability to effectively use ration cards due to migration and bureaucratic inflexibility highlights how welfare policies fail to accommodate the lived realities of migrant and marginalised workers, perpetuating their vulnerability despite nominal access to government schemes.

his gap becomes even more striking in the light of the June 2021 Supreme Court suo moto judgement titled, Re: Problems and Miseries of Migrant Labourers, which explicitly held that the migrant workers must not be denied access to ration on the grounds of lacking a ration card.<sup>63</sup> The Court further directed that the workers without ration cards should be provided with the same as soon as possible without delay, in order to safeguard their right to food and resources.

63 Saraigi A. 2021. COVID coverage:Migrant labourers June 28th 2021. Supreme Court Observer. [Check Link](#).

## BOCW (Building and Other Construction Worker) Card

A BOCW card provides registered construction workers access to welfare benefits such as health insurance, education support, and financial assistance under the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996.



**Figure 11: Provision of BOCW Card Among Eligible Workers**

Our survey data reveals that a significant majority, 85% of workers in brick kiln and construction sectors, do not hold BOCW (Building and Other Construction Workers) cards, despite these cards being a crucial entitlement for accessing social security benefits provided by state governments.

There are several reasons for this low coverage. First, many workers are informal or migrant labourers who face administrative hurdles in card registration, including lack of proper documentation, unstable employment, and frequent movement across regions. Secondly, poor outreach and awareness about the BOCW scheme among workers mean many are simply unaware of their eligibility or the application process. Thirdly, bureaucratic delays and procedural complexities within state departments often result in cards not being issued in a timely manner or being denied altogether.

Consequently, the vast majority of these vulnerable workers remain excluded from social protections such as health insurance, pensions, and accident compensation that the BOCW card is designed to provide. This exclusion exacerbates their precarity and limits their ability to seek formal support or legal recourse, perpetuating cycles of exploitation and economic insecurity within these sectors.

## MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee)

Over 85% of the rescued workers reported not receiving any government employment opportunities, including work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA).

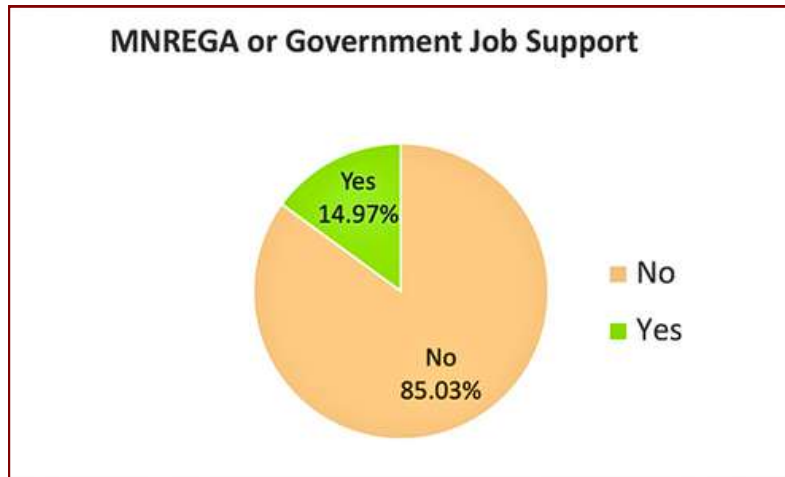


Figure 14: MNREGA Support

Among the minority who did access MNREGA jobs, very few received the legally guaranteed 100 days of work, highlighting significant gaps in the delivery of this critical social protection scheme. Stable employment and income generation are essential components of the rescue and rehabilitation process, providing rescued workers with financial security and a pathway out of exploitation. The widespread denial of government jobs not only undermines these goals but also perpetuates the cycle of vulnerability that bonded labourers face. It is important to note that children were excluded from this analysis, as they are ineligible for such employment programs.

## Health Card

Most workers lacked the mandated health card, and even those who had one, reported that accessing hospitals with that card was not easy. Sometimes they would have to wait for long hours or the hospital staff would say that their card is not working.

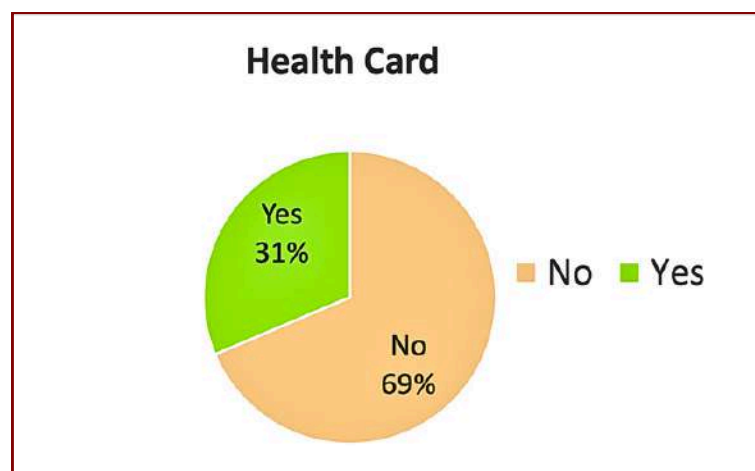


Figure 15: Health Card

Our observations and interviews also reveal that mental health support is crucial for rescued workers who have endured severe abuse, trauma, and exploitation. Without adequate emotional care and guidance, many continue to struggle with psychological distress, which severely hampers their ability to rebuild their lives. This untreated trauma leaves them vulnerable to repeated exploitation and increases the risk of returning to bonded labour conditions. Thus, addressing mental health is essential for effective rehabilitation and breaking the cycle of bondage.

### Skills Development

The data shows that an overwhelming 99.67% of rescued workers were not provided with any skill development opportunities, a critical gap in their rehabilitation process.

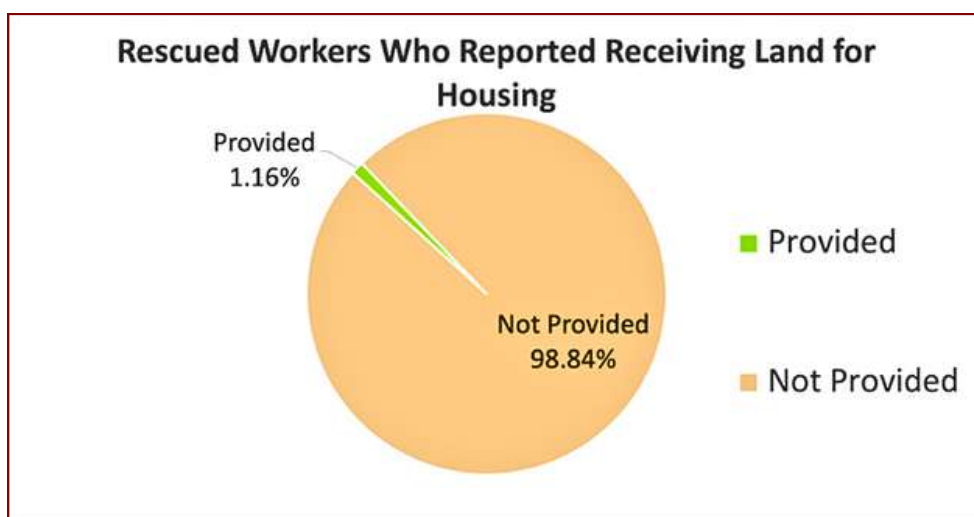


Figure 12: Skill Development Among Eligible Workers

Skill development programs are essential as they can empower workers to acquire new skills, seek alternative employment, and ultimately escape the cycle of bonded labour. However, only three workers in the entire survey reported access to such training. The vigilance committees (VCs), legally mandated to oversee rescued workers' rehabilitation and specifically tasked with facilitating skill development programs, appear to have neglected this responsibility. The absence of skill-building initiatives leaves workers trapped in precarious conditions, unable to improve their economic prospects or break free from exploitative labour arrangements.

## Land for Housing and Agriculture

Data reveal a glaring shortfall in the provision of land for housing among rescued workers, with only 1.2% of surveyed individuals having received any land to build a house. This strikingly low figure highlights a critical failure in the implementation of rehabilitation policies, especially since land ownership is a fundamental component of securing long-term stability and dignity for workers emerging from bonded labour conditions. Access to land not only provides a physical space for shelter but also represents social and economic security, enabling families to establish roots, access resources, and build a sustainable livelihood. Without land, rescued workers face continued vulnerability to displacement, homelessness, and economic insecurity, which can force them back into exploitative labour conditions to survive.

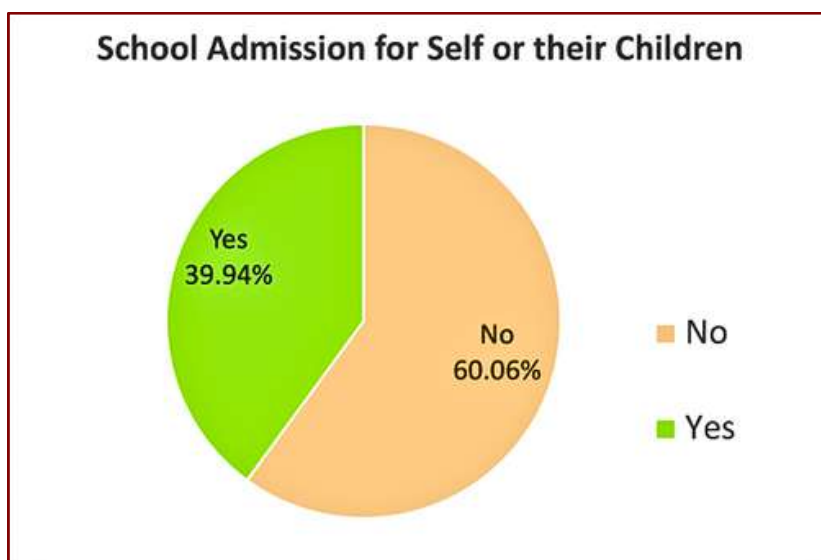


**Figure 13: Land for Housing**

As part of the rehabilitation process, rescued labourers and their families are legally entitled to receive land for housing or agricultural use, along with housing facilities aimed at securing their long-term stability. However, our data reveals significant shortcomings in fulfilling these entitlements. While around 45% of workers reported receiving some form of housing assistance, the majority of this support was limited to financial aid—approximately Rs 20,000—which proved grossly inadequate for constructing durable “pucca” (permanent) homes. Consequently, most beneficiaries ended up living in “kutchha” (temporary) structures that offer little protection or security. The majority who reported receiving houses were individuals who already had a house: these were not houses allotted after their rescue from bonded labour. Furthermore, no workers received any land for agriculture.

## School Admission

The rehabilitation scheme mandates that rescued workers or their children of school-going age must be provided access to education through guaranteed school admissions.

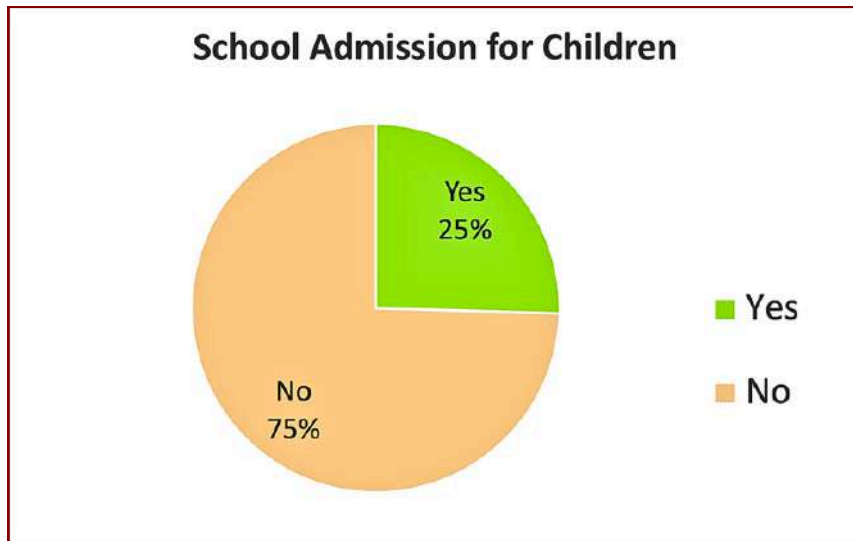


**Figure 16: School Admission for Self or their Children**

In our survey of 950 rescued workers, 691 labourers were eligible for school admission either for themselves (if children) or for their children. However, only 40% of these eligible workers managed to secure school admission, highlighting a significant gap in the implementation of this crucial rehabilitation measure. The remaining 60% were left without access to formal education, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and limiting opportunities for social mobility. Notably, 261 workers were excluded from this analysis as they had no children of school-going age, underscoring that even among those eligible, educational support remains critically insufficient and under-delivered in practice.

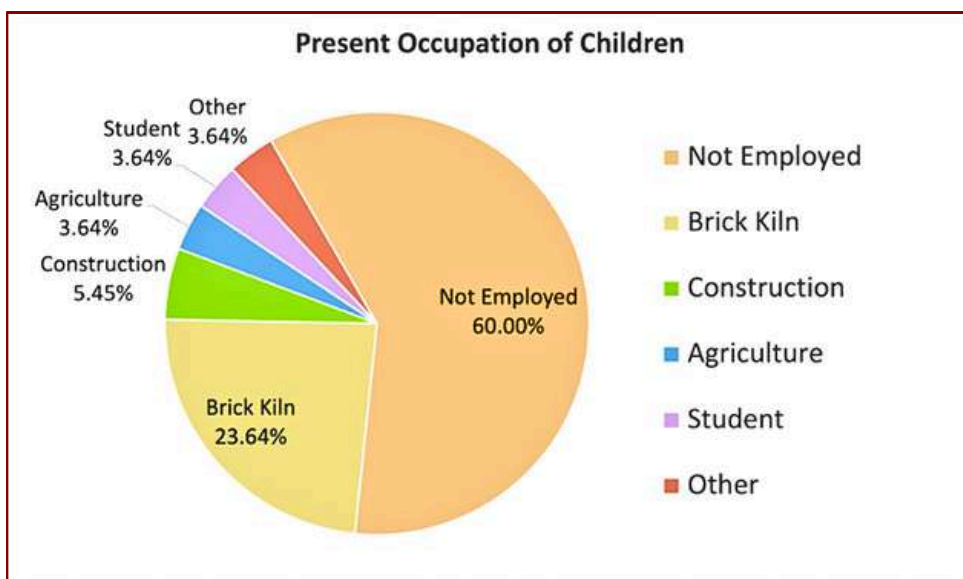
### School Admission: Children

Figures 17 and 18 expose a grim reality for children rescued from brick kilns. Despite rescue efforts, only 14 out of 55 children (25%) managed to access school or college, highlighting a severe gap in educational opportunities. More concerning, 20 children—over a third (36.4%)—have been forced back into similar exploitative labour conditions, demonstrating the cyclical nature of bonded labour. This regression reflects not only the failure of rehabilitation schemes but also the absence of adequate, long-term government intervention. Rescue alone is insufficient; without sustained support and systemic change, these children remain vulnerable to re-exploitation. The data emphasize the urgent need for stronger government commitment to ensure rescued children receive consistent education, healthcare, and social protection.



**Figure 17: School Admission for Children**

Of the 55 rescued children, only 14 (25%) secured school admission, leaving the vast majority without access to education. This lack of enrolment places these children at a heightened risk of falling back into bonded labour, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation across generations. Crucially, their admission was largely the result of persistent efforts by NGOs and activists rather than effective state action. Despite legal mandates, vigilance committees failed to fulfil their responsibility to ensure school enrolment. Following rescues, NGOs and activists frequently had to pressure authorities to facilitate admissions, exposing serious gaps in the state’s rehabilitation processes and its failure to safeguard children’s rights to education.



**Figure 18: Present Occupation of Children**

## SECTION 5 – PRESENT SITUATION OF RESCUED MIGRANT WORKERS

In this section, we compare pre-rescue and post-rescue occupations and wages of the 950 workers to see whether the rescue process has improved their life situation or whether they have returned to exploitative conditions. Of the 950 workers, a striking 94% workers were rescued from brick kilns. The "Other" category includes manual labour roles such as sawmill work, jaggery production, and barbering.

Pre-rescue Occupation	Number of Workers	Percentage
Brick Kiln	895	94.21%
Construction	20	2.11%
Agriculture	9	0.95%
Other	25	2.63%
#N/A	1	1.05%
Total	950	100%

**Table 9 : Pre-Rescue Occupation**

In Table 9 on Pre-Rescue Occupation, #NA refers to one girl child, aged 2, who was rescued from a brick kiln.

### Post-rescue occupation

Post-rescue, most workers have shifted to agricultural work (38%). Yet, 140 of the 950 rescued workers remain unemployed, heightening their risk of renewed exploitation.

Post Rescue Occupation	Number of Workers	Percentage
Agriculture	360	37.89%
Construction	227	23.89%
Brick Kiln	150	15.78%
Unemployed	140	14.73%
Other	37	3.89%
#N/A	36	3.79%
Total	950	100%

**Table 10 : Post-rescue Occupation**

In Table 10, "#NA" refers to 36 children who are either not engaged in child labor or are young adults currently attending college.

These data highlight a systemic failure in the implementation of rehabilitation processes mandated by the SOP under the Act. Without full enforcement of these provisions, many rescued workers are left vulnerable to falling back into similar exploitative conditions. The persistence of poor wage conditions post-rescue further illustrates this ongoing vulnerability and the urgent need for comprehensive, effective rehabilitation measures to prevent recidivism in bonded labour.

## Post Rescue Wages : Daily Wages

In this section, we examine whether rescued workers have been able to live with dignity and earn a livable wage after their rescue. Of the 950 workers, 626 workers were employed in daily wages. The data suggests otherwise: far from earning livable wages, nearly 50% of workers do not even receive the statutory minimum wage.

Figure 19 indicates a stark disparity between actual earnings and statutory requirements among daily wage workers. Nearly half of the workers engaged on a daily wage basis receive less than ₹200 per day—an amount significantly lower than the statutory minimum wages in their respective states. This income shortfall is not marginal; it represents a substantial gap that undermines workers’ ability to meet even basic subsistence needs. More concerning still is the finding that some workers are compensated not in cash, but in kind, specifically in rice, reflecting deeply entrenched forms of labour devaluation and economic dependency that can perpetuate cycles of exploitation.

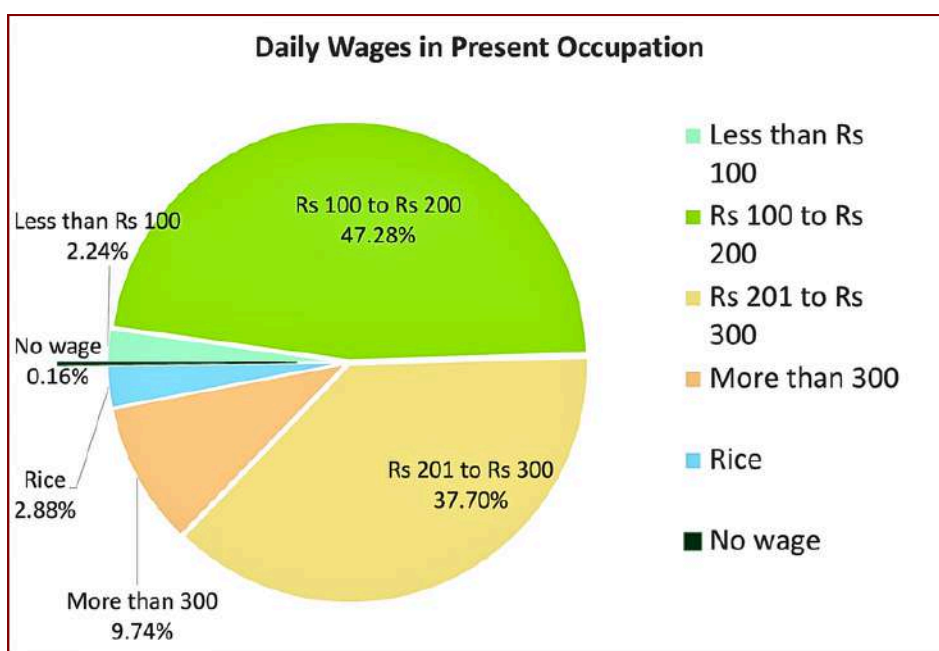


Figure 19: Daily Wages in Present Occupation

<b>Post-rescue Daily Wage</b>	<b>Number of Workers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No Wages	1	0.16%
Rice	18	2.88%
Less than Rs 100	14	2.24%
Rs. 100 to Rs. 200	296	47.28%
Rs 201 to 300	236	37.70%
More than Rs 300	61	9.74%
	<b>626</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 11: Post-rescue daily wages**

Despite having been “rescued” from exploitative labour arrangements, the majority of these workers remain trapped in employment situations that continue to undercut legal wage protections. This suggests that the interventions leading to their rescue have not been accompanied by structural changes in labour market conditions or enforcement mechanisms. The persistence of sub-minimum wages not only highlights the weakness of post-rescue rehabilitation and monitoring systems but also points to broader failures in labour regulation and rights implementation.

When these findings are read alongside Table 12 which outlines the statutory minimum wages for unskilled workers in the states studied, the scale of the violation becomes clearer.

<b>State</b>	<b>Minimum Wages Per Day (Unskilled)</b>
Andhra Pradesh	Rs 400
Assam	Rs 308
Bihar	Rs 363
Chhattisgarh	Rs 401
Delhi	Rs. 297
Haryana	Rs. 433
Himachal Pradesh	Rs. 425
Jammu Kashmir	Rs. 450
Karnataka	Rs. 579
Madhya Pradesh	Rs 321
Maharashtra	Rs. 479-529
Odisha	Rs 452
Punjab	Rs 438
Rajasthan	Rs 285
Tamil Nadu	Rs 464
Telengana	Rs. 427
Tripura	Rs 238
Uttarakhand	Rs 357
Uttar Pradesh	Rs 357

**Table 12: Minimum wages in study states**

Figures are representative of unskilled daily minimum wages for major zones in each state (as of April 2025). Actual wage schedules vary by occupation, skill level and zone.

## Post Rescue Wages : Piece Rate Wages in Brick Kiln

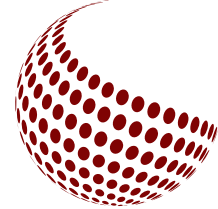
Of the 150 rescued workers currently employed in brick kilns post-rescue, only two are paid on a daily-wage basis, while 148 are paid piece-rate wages. Wages are calculated per 1,000 bricks produced, and the payment is made to the household—usually to the male member—even though all family members contribute to production.

Post-rescue Wage (Piece Rate per 1000 bricks)	Number of Workers	Percentage
Less than Rs 250	2	1.40%
Rs 250 to Rs 500	58	39.20%
Rs 501 to Rs 900	78	52.70%
More than 900	10	6.80%
	<b>148</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 13: Post Rescue Piece Rate Wages of workers in brick kiln**

As shown in Table 11, over 90% of rescued workers earn less than ₹900 per 1,000 bricks, and nearly 40% earn below ₹500 per 1000 bricks, indicating severely depressed wages even after rescue. The Supreme Court’s judgment in *Workmen v. Raptakos Brett & Co. Ltd.* (1992) held that the minimum wage must reflect the basic needs of the worker and their family not mere subsistence or historical rates. When assessed against this benchmark, the prevailing piece-rate wages in brick kilns fall far short of what the Court defined as a minimum wage consistent with human dignity, and District Magistrates must ensure piece rate wage evaluations align with the Raptakos Brett principles.

A closer look at the sample shows that most piece-rate workers earn the same or less than before their rescue. Forty-seven of 148 workers (32%) now earn less per 1,000 bricks than pre-rescue levels reflecting the structural stagnation that challenges the notion of rescue as a pathway to improved labour and economic empowerment.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the provisions of the Act, the scheme and various SOPs, we recommend the following based on the findings of the survey, the analysis of the case studies and the discussion and recommendations of workers and social workers at state-level meetings:

## PREVENTION AND IDENTIFICATION

### 1. Conduct and Fund Surveys on Bonded Labour

In state-level meetings, social workers and rescued workers shared that despite provisions and funding under the 2016 Scheme<sup>64</sup>, no timely surveys, awareness<sup>65</sup> programmes, or evaluation studies<sup>66</sup> on bonded labour prevalence have been conducted in affected districts. Many districts have not issued calls for proposals to NGOs and civil society organisations to conduct such surveys. Survey and evaluation reports, where conducted, are often left without follow-up or implementation of recommendations. Additionally, District Magistrates and Vigilance Committees are not being held accountable for acting on survey findings. So, we recommend:

- DMs should immediately call for proposals from NGOs and civil society organisations to conduct prevalence surveys and allocate the necessary funding under the 2016 Scheme.
- These calls for proposals should be publicly announced to ensure transparency and wider participation.
- All survey and evaluation reports must be acted upon within three months of submission.
- VCs should monitor progress on recommendations and be held accountable for implementation in a time-bound manner.
- District Magistrates should be directly accountable to ensure implementation of survey findings.
- The NHRC should monitor adequacy of implementation of survey findings across states.
- NHRC should take corrective action where state-level implementation is inadequate.

### 2. Direct Bank Transfers for Wages

- Employers must pay wages directly to workers' bank accounts.
- Where workers lack accounts, employers should facilitate account opening
- For migrant workers, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) should issue guidance ensuring any worker can open a bank account in any state.

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64 Section 5(x) of the scheme - "The amount of assistance for survey of bonded labourers shall be ~4 50 lakh per district. This amount can be utilised to finance the NGO efforts for identification of bonded labour as per State Government norms. Central Government will reimburse this amount upon satisfactory performance in each identification project."

65 Section 5(xi) of the scheme - "The expenditure on awareness generation shall be reimbursed on case by case basis subject to maximum limit of Rs 10 lakh per State per annum."

66 Section 5(xii) - "The existing norms of grants of 21 lakh for evaluatory studies shall be maintained as such."

### **3. Allowances and Facilities for Workers**

- Migrant and rescued workers should receive displacement allowance, housing allowance, and subsistence allowance (including electricity, water, and food) when migrating for work, in line with the ISMWA Act<sup>67</sup>.
- Drinking water, food, and sanitation facilities must be provided at the workplace, according to the directions of the 1983 Bandhua judgment.
- These allowances and basic facilities must be in addition to wages, with no deductions from wages for their cost.
- Migrant women and children must have access to reproductive health and nutrition-based services provided through Anganwadis and ASHA facilities in their destination sites.

### **4. Fair Wage Rates for Migrant Workers**

- For migrant workers, wages must be set at the higher of the minimum wage in the source or destination state, as mandated by the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act.
- Migrant workers should be paid equal to or more than the minimum wage at the destination State fixed under section 6 of the Code on Wages, 2019 (section 3 of the now subsumed Minimum Wages Act, 1948), which should be equal to or more than the National Floor Wage under section 9, Code on Wages, 2019.
- District Magistrates and other implementing authorities should use the Raptakos Brett framework to ensure piece-rate payments meet the minimum wage requirement.
- Piece rate payments at brick kiln should be made to every contributing member of the family, rather than to the male family member alone.

### **5. Address Gender and Caste-based Violence**

Informal sectors like brick kilns lack mechanisms to address sexual harassment and gender-based violence, leaving women, especially from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, vulnerable to intersecting discrimination and exploitation, with no clear avenues for redress under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. We recommend:

- DMs alongside Women's Commissions and Social Justice Departments, should develop grievance mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment and caste based discrimination in informal sectors such as brick kilns.
- Develop guidelines for instituting internal complaints committees for preventing and addressing issues of sexual harassment.
- Monitoring mechanisms should include violations of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (No. 33 of 1989)

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<sup>67</sup> Section 12 (b) (iv), Section 14, Section 15 and Section 16 of the ISMWA 1979

# INVESTIGATION AND RESCUE

## 1. Amend the Definition of Bonded Labour

- The current definition of “bonded debt” under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act<sup>68</sup> - an advance obtained, or presumed to have been obtained, by a bonded labourer - should be amended so that bonded labour is not limited to advances.
- In line with Neeraja Chaudhary judgment<sup>69</sup>, non-payment of minimum wages should be recognised as forced labour and therefore bonded labour.
- Piece-rate workers in sectors such as brick kilns who are not paid wages should also be classified as bonded labour.

## 2. Presume Bonded Labour in Certain Situations

- If civil society representatives or the complainant are denied participation or police protection during a rescue, this should be treated as presumptive evidence of bonded labour and administrative collusion.
- In such cases, the SDM/DM must personally ensure the rescue operation.

## 3. Immediate Issuance of Release Orders

- Release orders must be issued within 24 hours of rescue, to prevent workers from being kept in a state of limbo and to enable them to return home promptly.
- This requirement should be explicitly incorporated into the 2016 Scheme and the SOP.

## 4. Documentation and Updates for Workers and Complainants

- Rescued workers and complainants should receive written copies and regular updates on:
  - Release orders
  - FIR registration
  - Trial progress
  - Any other relevant legal or administrative action
- These updates should be provided by the relevant authority (DM, Vigilance Committee, NHRC, or others) so that workers and complainants can pursue timely justice and complete the post-rescue process without unnecessary delay.

## 5. Accountability for Administrative Refusal

- Administrative refusal to receive rescued labourers should trigger action under the Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita, 2023 for dereliction of duty under the Act.

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68 Section 2(d) of the BLSAA 1976

69 Neeraja Chaudhary v. State of Madhya Pradesh, 1984. [Check Link](#).

## **6. No Jurisdictional Barriers in Handling Complaints**

- Bonded labour complaints should face no jurisdictional barriers
- If a complaint is outside an authority's jurisdiction, it must be transferred to the competent authority within 24 hours.

## **7. Safe and Fair Recording of Workers' Statements**

- Statements must be recorded:
  - In a safe environment
  - In the worker's preferred language
  - Without the employer present
- Workers dissatisfied with the recording should have the right to appeal and request re-recording of their statement.

## **8. Budgetary provision for members of Vigilance Committee**

- Currently there is no set budget for members of the vigilance committee due to which they face barriers in undertaking their duties under the law and the rehabilitation scheme. We recommend that like other provisions in the scheme, a set budget be allocated to every vigilance committee.

## **POST-RESCUE REHABILITATION**

### **1. Immediate Interim Relief Payment**

- After issuing a Release Certificate, ensure an interim relief payment of Rs 30,000 in cash provided directly to rescued workers within 24 hours.
- A release order alone is insufficient for rehabilitation. Cash relief must be immediate to enable workers to survive for at least one month while other compensation is processed by the DM's office.
- Our study shows that transferring interim relief via bank accounts causes significant delays, often taking months or even years due to documentation lapses, defeating the purpose of interim relief and increasing the risk of rebondage.

### **2. Time-Bound Summary Trials and Monetary Compensation**

- Summary trials must be completed within three months of rescue
- Monetary compensation should be disbursed within one month of trial completion, ensuring timely financial support to rescued workers.

### **3. Delinking Non-Monetary Compensation from Trial Completion**

- Non-monetary benefits such as land, housing, jobs, and education must be provided within one month of the release order, independent of trial completion status.
- This prevents rebondage due to lack of livelihood and essential benefits immediately after rescue, as evidenced by case studies in this report.
- Alongside these, issue ration cards, Ayushman health cards, and BOCW cards to all rescued bonded labourers without delay.

### **4. Priority Ration Cards for Migrant Workers**

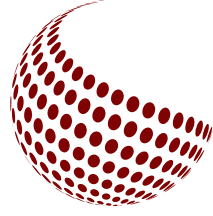
- In line with the Right to Food and the One Nation One Ration Card scheme, all rescued migrant workers should be given ration cards promptly.
- Proper implementation of Supreme Court Judgement 2021 to mandate state governments to bring appropriate schemes to deliver dry rations to all migrant workers, even if they do not have ration cards.

### **5. Amend Section 21 of the Bonded Labour Act**

- Amend Section 21 to replace “shall be deemed” with “should be deemed” to allow some procedural flexibility while maintaining the requirement that trials be completed within three months of rescue.

## WITH RESPECT TO INDIA'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATION

- Ratify the 2014 Protocol to ILO Convention No. 29 (P029) and align national law and practice ex ante with its four pillars – prevention, protection, remedies/compensation, and sanctions – so SDG 8.7 targets ride on a treaty-based compliance frame.
- Incorporate the bonded labour eradication explicitly into India's SDG commitments. SDG 8.7 should be converted in a measurable, time-bound, district-accountable programme, with legal triggers tied to Article 23 and the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, and with financing and monitoring aligned to ILO Convention No. 29/105 obligations and the Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer, 2016.
- Adopt a National Action Plan on Forced/Bonded Labour consistent with ILO C29/C105 and the 2014 Protocol's prevention, protection, remedies, and sanctions framework, and review it annually alongside the SDG India Index.
- Adopt a central sustainable public procurement standard requiring suppliers to implement ILO-aligned human rights due diligence, verify absence of debt bondage in recruitment/production, and face exclusion for substantiated violations, thereby linking SDG 12 and 8.7 to treaty norms.
- Make human rights due diligence (including bonded labour risk mapping and remediation) part of mandatory business responsibility and sustainability reporting for listed and large unlisted entities, aligned with ILO and UN Guiding Principles.
- Create a national grievance and remediation facility for supply-chain bonded labour cases, offering victims cross-jurisdictional remedy options tied to SDG 8.7. Facilitate victims in initiating legal proceedings against large companies in their home countries for engaging bonded labour in India.
- Integrate bonded-labour risk screening into social protection, health, and education programmes, reducing re-bondage risks, consistent with international norms.
- Annual White Paper before the Parliament on compliance with ILO C029/C105 and the 1956 Supplementary Convention (debt bondage).



## CASE STUDIES

In this chapter, we present 20 case studies of workers and their families who have experienced oppressive and exploitative conditions at work and their experience of rescue and post-rescue under the BLSAA. All the case studies unanimously show that in the absence of efficient post-rescue support, workers returned to similar exploitative work conditions and many a time, rescued repeatedly, underscoring the urgent need for greater accountability, timely intervention, and strict adherence to established protocols in addressing bonded labour including the BLSAA, associated rehabilitation scheme and the SOP.

These case studies reveal how workers endure severe exploitation under bonded labour conditions, where inadequate wages and outright wage theft are routine. Caste based violence lies at the core of this exploitation. Men, women, and even children are subjected to casteist slurs, humiliation, and physical violence as they struggle to survive within these coercive systems. Women face particularly brutal forms of abuse—including during pregnancy—while simultaneously being denied access to basic health facilities. When they attempt to seek help from the police, they receive neither protection from violence nor support in leaving the worksite. Most rescues occur only when organisations such as NCCEBL intervene. Even after FIRs are registered, the majority of families receive no rehabilitation assistance, leaving them vulnerable to further exploitation and, in many cases, forcing them back into re-bondage.

## **CASE STUDY 1:**

### **RESCUE OF 2 BONDED LABOURERS FROM BAGHPAT, UTTAR PRADESH (2025)**

#### **Exploitation**

In January 2025, Joginder (29) and his pregnant wife, Shailaja (29), residents of Sherpur Luhari, Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh, were brought to work in a kiln by Rajesh, a broker, who promised wages of ₹600 for every 1,000 bricks produced. They arrived at the Brick Kiln, where the kiln owner, Veerprakash, confirmed their employment. However, from January to May 2025, a period of four months, Joginder and Shailaja were coerced into bonded labour. They produced a substantial 220,000 bricks but were denied their promised wages. In the month of May, their attempt to leave to return home was forcefully obstructed by Veerprakash and two contractors. During this confrontation, the couple was subjected to caste-based abuse due to their Scheduled Caste status. A subsequent attempt to leave was also met with physical prevention by Veerprakash, who also confiscated Joginder's diary and prohibited them from seeking work elsewhere.

#### **Rescue**

Joginder formally lodged a complaint with the District Magistrate in Baghpat. However, the administration took no immediate action, refusing to acknowledge the couple as bonded labourers. Consequently, NCCEBL intervened, facilitating the couple's rescue. But, despite multiple representations from both the victims and NCCEBL, the Baghpat administration has reportedly failed to provide an inquiry report or a release order.

#### **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation or support was provided to Joginder and Shailaja following their rescue.

#### **Systemic Issues**

- No FIR has been registered under the BLSAA.
- Authorities have failed to issue legally mandated release orders or certificates.
- Despite clear evidence of caste-based abuse, threats, and discrimination, protections under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act have not been invoked.
- Joginder and Shailaja have not received any unpaid wages, leaving them in a precarious financial state.

## **CASE STUDY 2:**

### **RESCUE OF 15 BONDED LABOURERS FROM MUZAFFARNAGAR, UP AND LUDHIANA, PUNJAB (2025)**

#### **Exploitation**

(October 2024 - March 2025 - Ropar): In October, a broker named Hartaaj promised Sunil Kumar and Ranjith, along with their families, with offers of work and advance payments at brick kilns in Punjab (Sunil received ₹30,000. Ranjith received ₹80,000). They were then brought to the Brick Kiln in Gujrabassi, Ropar. From October 2024 to March 2025, both families, including women and children, were forced to work under exploitative conditions. Despite being promised ₹707 per 1,000 bricks, they were paid at a rate of ₹694 during settlement. After five months of arduous labour, they were falsely informed that they still owed debt, a common tactic to perpetuate bonded labour.

(March 2025 - May 2025 - Ludhiana): In early March 2025, Sarvesh, a worker at the Ropar kiln, informed Manmeet Randhawa, owner of a Brick Kiln in Ludhiana, about the alleged debts of the two families. Consequently, in March, 2025, Manmeet "bought" the families from Sitaram, paying ₹1,75,000 for Ranjith's family and ₹34,400 for Sunil's family, a transaction that unequivocally confirmed their rebondage. From March 2025, to May 2025, the families were transported to Ludhiana and forced to work under even stricter conditions at the Brick Kiln. Randhawa coerced them into performing additional tasks like loading and unloading bricks without additional payment. Despite Sunil's family producing 58,000 bricks and Ranjith's family producing 245,000 bricks—effectively repaying their alleged debts—the kiln owner refused to allow them to return home. The owner, Manmeet, tore and discarded the diary containing records of their work.

(May 2025 - Assault and Aftermath): One morning, the labourers requested a driver named Akshay to remove wet soil. In response, Akshay allegedly hurled caste-based abuses at them. Akshay then summoned the owner, who arrived with several "goons" to physically assault the workers. Simultaneously, Akshay reportedly brought a JCB machine, attempting to drive it over the labourers, with the owner explicitly stating, "Akshay is doing the right thing. All of you will die here." Following this, Akshay allegedly struck Aashi, a 22-year-old pregnant woman (six months along), directly in the abdomen with a spade, causing her to cry out in pain.

Sunil immediately called emergency number 100, but no police assistance arrived. He then called 108 for an ambulance. As they attempted to seat Aashi in the ambulance, the owner and his "goons" launched a fresh attack, assaulting the families with bricks and a machete. One of Akshay's associates struck Ranjith on the head with a machete. The ambulance driver attempted to record the incident, but the owner slapped him and forced him to stop recording. However, labourers Sukhpreet and Sarvesh managed to record parts of the incident. The owner's assault was motivated by his belief that the labourers were attempting to flee the brick kiln.

The owner then locked the gate and blocked the path with a tractor, preventing the ambulance from leaving. A 17-year-old named Gagan managed to break the gate's lock, allowing the ambulance to exit. Amit accompanied Ranjith to a hospital in Ludhiana, Punjab. The other labourers fled in various directions to save their lives. Ranjith was admitted for two days, as was Aashi. Preeti (Sunil's wife), Radhika (Ranjith's wife), 12-year-old Sukhpreet (Sunil's son), and 17-year-old Gagan (Ranjith's son) were also struck with bricks but could not reach a hospital due to lack of transport. As of the report date, both labourers and their family members remain displaced, constantly trying to evade further harm. The assault resulted in gashes on Ranjith's head, and injuries to Preeti, Radhika, Sukhpreet, and Gagan, yet the police refused to register a comprehensive FIR.

## **Rescue**

Following the assault and their forced escape, the workers sought administrative intervention. In May 2025, they went to the DC's office in Ludhiana, submitting a formal complaint in Hindi under the BLSAA, but no effective action was taken. The following day, their request to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) at the DC office to record their statements in a secure environment due to safety concerns was met with a directive to return to the brick kiln. Even after repeated attempts, the SDM persistently refused to record their statements, disregarding their pleas for a secure statement recording space, involvement of the Vigilance Committee, and support from the NCCEBL.

## **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation or support was provided to any of the victims following their escape and attempts to seek justice. The families remain displaced and at risk.

## Systemic Issues

The case highlights a disturbing pattern of systemic failures and administrative negligence:

- Authorities failed to recognize the victims as bonded labourers despite clear indicators such as debt bondage, restricted movement, forced work, unpaid wages and physical assault.
- FIRs were only filed in response to medical needs (following injuries), not proactively under the BLSAA.
- The police failed to respond to distress calls during the initial assault in May and did not act proactively even after severe injuries were sustained.
- The police's refusal to intervene effectively against the employer and his "goons" during the ambulance blockade further highlights a severe lapse in duty.
- The SDM's repeated refusal to record the victims' statements in a secure environment, despite their fear for safety, directly obstructed the legal process and due diligence.
- The non-issuance of legally mandated release orders or certificates leaves the victims in a state of official "invisibilization," preventing them from accessing compensation and rehabilitation.
- The administration disregarded requests to involve the Vigilance Committee and support from NCCEBL, indicating a systemic disregard for established protocols for bonded labour cases.

## **CASE STUDY 3:**

# **EXPLOITATION AND FAILED RESCUE OF 8 BONDED LABOURERS FROM MUZAFFARNAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH (2025)**

## **Exploitation**

Approximately four years prior to April 2025, Asif borrowed ₹10,000 from Mukesh for his son Rizwan's treatment after a motorcycle accident. Unable to repay the debt, Mukesh, in the month of August, 2023, coerced Asif and his entire family into working at his jaggery factory to clear the debt, threatening them with immediate repayment. Asif, Shabana, Rizwan (15), and Shubh (14) were forced into hazardous child labour and worked day and night. Mukesh had promised a combined monthly wage of ₹45,000 for the four working members but only provided sporadic amounts (₹2,000 to ₹5,000) for rations, never a full salary. From August 2023 to May 2024, the four family members were engaged in the arduous and dangerous work of loading dried sugarcane leaves and wood into the furnace. When they requested their wages at the end of the season, Mukesh claimed everything was "even," stating they still owed him ₹45,000 and instructed them to continue working. When the family expressed their desire to return home, Mukesh withheld their belongings at the factory, promising their pending wages only upon their return to work. After a month at home, Mukesh appeared at their residence, taking them back to the factory under the pretext of more work and the promise of pending wages, despite their reluctance. From July 2024, the family was assigned to load and unload soil and bricks from trolleys. Subsequently, with the new jaggery season, they were forced back into the dangerous work of feeding dry sugarcane leaves and wood into the furnace. This continued until April 2025, with no wages received.

When Asif demanded his full wages and expressed his desire to stop working, Mukesh physically assaulted him. Asif called the 112 police helpline, and the police arrived, but no concrete action was taken, and the family was sent back to the jaggery factory. Enraged by Asif's complaint, Mukesh brought the village head, Bhoopendar, who, without any discussion, also assaulted Asif and physically harassed his wife, Shabana, by pressing her body parts. Asif was then taken to Sikerha police station where he was coerced into signing a document under duress. He was held without food or water for the entire day and released back to the jaggery factory in the evening. Asif's father, Zakhir, and his wife called the 1076 helpline to report the incident. Since then, the family has been displaced, fearing Mukesh will forcibly take them back to work. Their belongings remain at the factory, and their wages are still unpaid.

## **Rescue Attempts & Continued Risk**

In April, 2025, Asif and his family attempted to present a formal complaint letter to the District Magistrate's office in Muzaffarnagar, but the authorities refused to receive it. Then, Asif and his family approached the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), providing a copy of their complaint, underscoring the hazardous child labour involving Rizwan and Shubh.

Later that month, NCCEBL sent formal letters to both the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police, Muzaffarnagar, detailing Asif's complaint and urging immediate action under the BLSAA. They demanded registration of statements, recovery of belongings and pending wages, and legal action against Mukesh and Bhoopendar. A separate letter was also sent to the Chairperson of the Child Welfare Committee, emphasizing legal action under various child labour and welfare acts. However, as of this report date, the family remains displaced, fearing Mukesh will forcibly take them back to work.

## **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation or support has been provided to Asif and his family. They remain displaced, their belongings withheld, and their wages unpaid, leaving them vulnerable to further re- bondage.

## **Systemic Issues**

- Authorities, including the DM's office and police, consistently failed to recognize the family's situation as bonded labour despite clear indicators like debt bondage, movement restrictions, fraudulent wages, and child involvement in hazardous work.
- Police provided no concrete action after Asif's assault, merely returning the family to their exploitative situation. The police allegedly colluded with Mukesh and Bhoopendar by coercing Asif's signature and detaining him, effectively aiding the perpetrators.
- No direct FIR was filed for physical assault, illegal confinement, or threats, despite clear evidence. Criminal acts, including Asif's physical assault, Shabana's physical harassment/assault, illegal confinement, and threats, remained unpunished, alongside the clear violation of child protection laws through hazardous child labour.
- The DM's office initially refused to accept the complaint, demonstrating a lack of accountability. There was no investigation or issuance of legally mandated release orders/certificates under the BLSAA.

## **CASE STUDY 4:**

# **RESCUE OF 13 BONDED LABOURERS FROM GUNA, MADHYA PRADESH IN BARAN, RAJASTHAN (2024)**

### **Exploitation**

In July 2024, NCCEBL confronted a critical case of bonded labour in Kishanganj, Baran district, Rajasthan. Thirteen individuals—seven men and six women, all from the ST community and originally from Guna, Madhya Pradesh—were found working under exploitative and inhumane conditions in the agricultural sector.

### **Rescue**

The NCCEBL was alerted to the situation by a concerned individual in Delhi. In July, 2024, the committee urgently notified the District Collector, Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of Kishanganj, and Superintendent of Police in Baran, requesting immediate intervention and rescue. Their communication specifically referenced the BLSAA, and the SOP for Rescue and Identification of Bonded Labourer and Prosecution of Offender, 2017, underscoring the legal imperative for swift action.

The initial letter detailed the plight of Bhairu Saharia, a bonded labourer held in bondage for 20 years, who reported that 12 other individuals including families, were also subjected to forced labour, restricted movement, and withheld wages by a local farm owner. The victims were reportedly lured with advance loans and then compelled to work to repay these debts, often incurred by other family members.

The NCCEBL requested the formation of a rescue team, the recording of victim statements in the presence of the vigilance committee, and a thorough investigation as mandated by law and the Supreme Court's judgment in *Neeraja Chaudhary v. State of Madhya Pradesh*<sup>70</sup>, which requires investigations to proceed with the presumption of bonded labour. Copies of the complaint were also sent to the DM and Superintendent of Police of Baran, as well as the NHRC.

### **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation was provided to any of the workers.

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<sup>70</sup> *Neeraja Chaudhary v. State of Madhya Pradesh*, 1984. [Check Link](#).

## **Systemic Issues**

Despite the urgency, there was no immediate response from the district administration. The NCCEBL then sent a follow-up letter to the District Collector of Baran, reiterating the need for a prompt rescue and investigation. Subsequently, the NHRC registered the case and issued an order for action. Later, the NCCEBL forwarded this NHRC order to the District Magistrate of Baran, reinforcing the demand for immediate intervention. Specifically:

- The rescue was not conducted within 24 hours of the initial complaint, in violation of the SOP.
- No release orders or certificates were issued to the rescued individuals, denying them access to government rehabilitation schemes and immediate assistance, as required under the law.
- The rescued labourers were not provided safe repatriation under police protection and were reportedly left in vulnerable conditions, contrary to legal mandates.

## **CASE STUDY 5:**

### **RESCUE OF 10 BONDED LABOURERS FROM SHAMLI, UTTAR PRADESH, IN UNA, HIMACHAL PRADESH (2024)**

In February 2024, six families from Shamli district, Uttar Pradesh, were brought by Vikram, Mahesh, and Mohan to the brick kiln Una District, Himachal Pradesh.

#### **Exploitation**

The recruiters verbally promised a wage of Rs. 650 per 1,000 bricks, but after commencing work in February 2024, the families received no payment. Instead, dry rations were distributed monthly by the foreman. Over 115 other workers, mostly from SC/ST and OBC backgrounds, faced similar exploitative conditions at the kiln. In September 2024, the principal employer forced workers to record videos stating they were working willingly and to sign documents without disclosure of their contents, all under the watch of men posing as police officers. The workers later discovered these were agreements meant to absolve the employer of wrongdoing.

#### **Rescue**

Following these events, the workers attempted to leave the kiln and demanded their unpaid wages. In September 2024, Balwan Pal, a worker, was assaulted by the employer when he requested rations. That night, Balwan Pal escaped and, with legal assistance, filed a complaint with the Una administration. Violence escalated, when the foreman beat another worker, Veerendra Pal, and coerced him to falsely state he was working willingly. In October, purported police officers and Una administration officials visited the kiln, but only Veerendra Pal was interviewed and forced to sign a document; no further investigation was conducted.

The NCCEBL submitted a complaint to the NHRC in October 2024, followed by emails and physical letters to the DC, SSP, SDM Haroli, and SHO Haroli. The NCCEBL insisted that worker statements obtained under duress should be disregarded and requested that statements be recorded in a secure environment, such as the DM/SDM office.

Later in October 2024, a rescue team visited the kiln, but statements were again taken in the presence of the employer and foreman, undermining the workers' ability to speak freely.

The NCCEBL continued to press for proper procedures, urging authorities to act. Further intimidation occurred when two workers, Dheeraj and Suraj, were taken away by police without explanation, and Balwan Pal was abducted after visiting the DC's office. Despite repeated appeals and reminders, authorities failed to provide protection or take meaningful action. The principal employer continued to force workers to sign documents and demanded Rs. 3 lakhs for their release, while physical violence against workers and women persisted.

## **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation was provided to any of the workers.

## **Systemic Issues**

- The rescue was not conducted within 24 hours of the complaint, in violation of the SOP.
- No release orders or certificates were issued, denying the workers access to rehabilitation and legal protections.
- No safe repatriation or police protection was provided and workers were left vulnerable to further exploitation.

## **CASE STUDY 6:**

### **RESCUE OF MS. RANI TUDU: BONDED LABOUR SURVIVOR FROM JHARKHAND IN DELHI (2024)**

#### **Exploitation**

In 2024, Ms. Rani Tudu, a tribal woman from Jharkhand, was brought to Delhi to work as a domestic worker under conditions of bonded labour. For three months, she received no wages, her movement was severely restricted, and she was effectively held captive by her principal employer.

#### **Rescue**

NCCEBL intervened on Ms. Tudu's behalf. On May 6, 2024, the NCCEBL filed a complaint via email with the District Commissioner (DC) Central, DCP Central, SHO, Patel Nagar, and SDM Patel Nagar. Follow-up emails were sent in May, and a physical attempt was made to deliver the complaint, but the relevant official was unavailable.

Despite these efforts, the rescue was delayed. When a team was finally constituted and a rescue conducted at the employer's residence, Ms. Tudu had already been moved. The NCCEBL escalated the matter, contacting multiple authorities across Delhi, and in June 2024, filed a Habeas Corpus petition (No. 1823/2024) in the Delhi High Court. The court ordered legal proceedings, directed that Ms. Tudu be housed in Nari Niketan until her repatriation, and instructed authorities to record her statement and ensure her autonomy.

#### **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation has been provided. Despite the High Court's order, authorities failed to take timely action. Ms. Tudu's statement was eventually recorded at the SDM office in June 2024, after her rescue by Patel Nagar police. However, she received no relief, monetary benefits, or rehabilitation support. The release order that was provided did not clearly specify her status as a bonded labourer (that could have made her eligible for welfare benefits), and no inquiry report was shared. Ms. Tudu returned to Jharkhand, where she continued to struggle for survival.

The NCCEBL repeatedly followed up with the SDM office, both via email and in person, requesting her release certificate, inquiry report, and earned wages. Letters and reminders sent in August, September and October 2024, went unanswered. Authorities continued to delay, citing ongoing review, while Ms. Tudu remained without justice or support.

## **Systemic Issues**

- The rescue was not conducted within 24 hours of the complaint, in violation of the SOP.
- No proper release order or certificate was issued, denying Ms.Tudu access to rehabilitation schemes and immediate financial assistance, as mandated by law.
- No safe repatriation or police protection was provided; Ms. Tudu was left to return home unsupported.

## **CASE STUDY 7:**

### **RESCUE OF 14 BONDED LABOURERS FROM SAHARANPUR, UTTAR PRADESH, IN TARN TARAN, PUNJAB (2024)**

In September 2024, Arjun's family and three other families—a total of 14 individuals, including 6 men, 3 women, and 5 children—were brought from Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, to Tarn Taran, Punjab, under the false promise of decent work at a brick kiln. Each family received an advance of Rs. 10,000 from the principal employer, Mr. Sohan Kumar.

#### **Exploitation**

Upon arrival, the families were forced into exploitative conditions: subjected to verbal abuse, forced labour, child labour, and denial of promised wages. Even young children, including a 5-year-old, were coerced into work. Women were compelled to work while sick or menstruating, and the families' movement was tightly restricted under constant threat.

Despite producing over 1,15,000 bricks, Arjun was owed Rs. 79,925 in unpaid wages. Children from other families, such as Ganesh and Sahil, were also forced to work, violating child labour laws and exposing the families to further trauma and deprivation.

#### **Rescue**

In December 2024, NCCEBL sent urgent complaints by email and physical letter to the Deputy Commissioner, SDM, Patti, SP, Additional Deputy Commissioner, SSP, Chief Secretary of Punjab, and the NHRC. NCCEBL also contacted the SDM office in Patti and submitted an in-person complaint to the NHRC. Despite these efforts, no rescue was conducted and no steps were taken to free the labourers.

With no administrative response, Arjun filed a writ petition and a Habeas Corpus petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The court, in December 2024, ordered a report on the case. Following this, a rescue team visited the kiln. The statements were recorded under the employer's pressure. These families, fearful for their safety, stated they wished to remain at the kiln. When Ritu (Arjun's wife) and her mother-in-law expressed their desire to leave, their statements were not recorded, and they were sent away without police protection or further support.

#### **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation was provided to any of the rescued workers.

## Systemic Issues

- To date, no further action has been taken: no release orders have been issued for Ritu or her mother-in-law, no inquiry report has been submitted, and the families remain at risk of re-bondage and continued exploitation.
- The rescue was not conducted within 24 hours of the complaint, violating the SOP.
- Despite clear evidence of debt and coercion, the SDM declined to recognize the presence of bonded labour, contrary to legal precedent (*Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India*) that mandates a presumption of bonded labour where debt is involved.
- Statements of the children were not recorded, nor was the Child Protection Unit involved, despite clear evidence of child labour.
- Despite children being forced to work, no steps were taken to address or prevent their exploitation.

## **CASE STUDY 8:**

### **RESCUE OF 50 BONDED LABOURERS FROM GWALIOR, MADHYA PRADESH, IN LATUR, MAHARASHTRA (2022)**

In August 2022, NCCEBL received a report from Advocate Asif Khan regarding the exploitation of 50 bonded labourers—including women and children—from Gwalior district, Madhya Pradesh, in Ausa Tehsil in Latur, Maharashtra. Mr. Suresh Gavaria, advanced Rs. 2,000 per worker before transferring all 50 workers to Mr. Amit Gavaria to work in an agricultural farm in Latur.

#### **Exploitation**

Upon arrival in Ausa (Latur), the workers were deployed on sugarcane farms across two villages. For over four months, they were forced to work under exploitative conditions, with the principal employers and agent exercising strict control over their movement and employment. Despite months of hard labour, the workers were denied wages, leaving them and their families struggling for food and healthcare. Several workers fell ill but received no financial support for treatment from the employer or agent. The principal employer, in collusion with the agent, further restricted the labourers by confiscating their mobile phones, effectively cutting off their contact with the outside world. Requests for wages were ignored, and the workers' ability to leave the site or return home was completely curtailed.

#### **Rescue**

Some workers, unable to endure the abuse, managed to escape the agricultural site, but 30 bonded labourers remained trapped and in urgent need of rescue. NCCEBL collected detailed information on the workers and was prepared to share the precise location with authorities to facilitate a rescue. After 3 days of struggle, 21 workers out of 30 received release certificate but were not given any interim relief and police protection. But the administration did not do any follow up of workers who escaped.

#### **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation was given to any of the workers.

#### **Systemic Issues**

- The rescue operation was not conducted within 24 hours of the complaint, violating the SOP for the rescue and identification of bonded labourers.
- Release order not issued by the administration.
- The victims were not repatriated with police protection and were left vulnerable, further exposing them to re-exploitation.

## **CASE STUDY 9:**

### **RESCUE OF 26 LABOURERS FROM A SUGARCANE FARM IN MAHARASHTRA (2022)**

#### **Rescue**

In 2022, a rescue operation freed 26 labourers from exploitative conditions in a sugarcane farm in Maharashtra. However, the immediate post-rescue phase was fraught with challenges. None of the rescued labourers were initially given their release certificates, and this was particularly true for the children, who were simply sent away without formal documentation. After significant argument and persistent efforts, release certificates were only issued to the adult labourers, with children still denied this crucial document. No repatriation or adequate protection was provided as a part of the de-creation process. When the NCCEBL raised concerns about the lack of proper repatriation, the administration cited insufficient funds, and despite constant follow-up by NCCEBL, no further response was received from the administration.

#### **Rehabilitation**

Despite 21 of the 30 rescued labourers eventually receiving their bonded labour release certificates, their journey to rehabilitation faced significant obstacles. After returning to Gwalior (presumably their home district), multiple applications were sent to both the Gwalior and Latur district administrations seeking rehabilitation support. However, no steps were taken for their rehabilitation by either administration. This prolonged inaction led the workers to seek judicial intervention. In February 2025, a case was filed in the Hon'ble High Court for the rehabilitation of all the workers. The court subsequently issued orders for their rehabilitation, but as of now, the workers are yet to receive the benefits. Furthermore, despite a petition filed by NCCEBL which resulted in a court order, no action has been taken on that order.

#### **Systemic Issues**

- The initial refusal to issue release certificates to all rescued labourers, and the specific denial to children with the implication that their labor was not recognized, is a fundamental violation of their rights and a major barrier to accessing rehabilitation.
- The absence of proper repatriation and protection immediately after rescue leaves victims vulnerable and without the necessary support to return to their homes safely and with dignity. The administration's excuse of insufficient funds for repatriation, coupled with their lack of response to follow-ups, points to a severe systemic failure in resource allocation and accountability.

- Despite multiple applications and even court orders, the prolonged inaction and non-compliance by both district administrations in providing rehabilitation demonstrate a severe lack of administrative responsiveness and accountability.
- The necessity for the labourers to approach the High Court, and for NCCEBL to file a separate petition, underscores a profound administrative failure. More critically, the lack of action even after court orders, suggests a systemic issue with enforcing judicial directives in such cases.
- The failure to provide full rehabilitation leaves the rescued labourers, particularly the children, exposed to the risk of re-exploitation, undermining the very purpose of the rescue operation.

## **CASE STUDY 10:**

### **RESCUE OF 15 AGRICULTURAL WORKERS FROM BARAN DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN (2022)**

#### **Exploitation**

Fifteen agricultural workers were subjected to severe exploitative conditions, characterized by forced labour, restriction of movement, and employment under the strict control of the farm and farmhouse owner at Kishanganj, Baran District, Rajasthan. The principal employer lured the victims with false assurances and provided an advance loan to them or their family members, trapping them in debt bondage. They were then forced to work against their will to repay this loan, with many workers compelled to work for many years to settle debts incurred by their family members.

#### **Rescue**

On July 15, 2024, following a complaint filed by the NCCEBL on July 14, 2024, the SDM of Kishanganj, Baran District, Rajasthan, verbally constituted a rescue team to investigate the matter. The rescue team recorded statements at the workplace in the presence of the principal employer. However, concerns were raised as an NCCEBL civil society team member was removed from the workplace, and the rescue team reportedly took thumb impressions on blank papers from the workers. Ultimately, the workers were rescued, but the state administration did not repatriate them to their home districts. The NCCEBL subsequently filed a complaint with the DM Baran, detailing the unfair inquiry/investigation and requesting a reinvestigation, but has not yet received a reply from the administration.

#### **Rehabilitation**

Despite being rescued in 2022, the administration initially took no steps towards the rehabilitation of these 15 agricultural workers, even after repeated applications. After a two- year delay, one of the rescued labourers, Shikhar, filed a case in the Hon'ble High Court. Following the court's notice, the Guna administration provided interim compensation of ₹30,000 to Shikhar. However, Shikhar has still not received the full rehabilitation benefits from the administration. Her case, along with the rehabilitation cases for all 15 bonded labourers, is currently pending review in the Hon'ble High Court, Gwalior.

## Systemic Issues

- The exploitation clearly highlights the common modus operandi of trapping vulnerable individuals through advance loans, forcing them into perpetual debt bondage across generations.
- The significant delay of two years in initiating rehabilitation efforts and the incomplete provision of benefits, even after court intervention, highlight a severe systemic flaw in ensuring timely and comprehensive support for rescued individuals.
- The removal of a civil society team member and the collection of thumb impressions on blank papers during the rescue operation raise serious concerns about the fairness and transparency of the inquiry/investigation process.
- The failure of the state to repatriate the rescued workers immediately after their rescue is a critical oversight, leaving them vulnerable and without support to return home.
- The non-response from the Baran district administration to the NCCEBL's complaint regarding the unfair inquiry indicates a lack of accountability and willingness to address procedural irregularities.
- The fact that all 15 rehabilitation cases are pending in the High Court suggests a systemic failure at the administrative level to proactively provide rehabilitation, thereby burdening the judiciary with cases that should be handled through executive action

## **CASE STUDY 11:**

### **RESCUE OF 14 BONDED LABOURERS FROM BAGPAT, UTTAR PRADESH, IN LUDHIANA, PUNJAB (2021–2024)**

In 2021, Murali, a contractor, brought Ramu's family and others from Bagpat, Uttar Pradesh, to a brick kiln in Ludhiana, Punjab, under the false promise of well-paid employment. The group comprised 14 bonded labourers: 7 men, 3 women, and 4 children. The kiln owner advanced Rs. 70,000 to Ramu, binding the entire family—including his wife Raji, sons (Anil, Karan, Pawan), daughter, and daughters-in-law—to repay the debt through working in the kiln.

#### **Exploitation**

The family worked for months, making 6 lakh bricks, with the promise of Rs. 850 per 1,000 bricks. Even after repaying the advance of Rs 70000, the employer falsely claimed they owed an additional Rs. 40,000 and refused to let them leave. Only Ramu and Raji were allowed to return home; the remaining family members, including minors, were held back at the kiln. Under pressure, Ramu and Raji were later forced to return to the kiln with more relatives, where they received another Rs. 50,000 advance—increasing their debt bondage.

The family endured further hardship when Dilip, Ramu's son, was injured in an accident. Despite repeated requests, the employer refused to provide money for medical treatment. After being denied care at multiple hospitals, Dilip died in February 2024. Even then, the employer did not allow all family members to attend his funeral, and minors were forcibly kept at the kiln and put back to work.

#### **Rescue**

In March 2024, Karthik, a family member, reported the ordeal to the NCCEBL. The next day, NCCEBL emailed the Deputy Commissioner of Tarn Taran, SSP, and SDM Patti, and submitted a hard copy of the complaint in person. Despite these efforts, the SDM initially denied the presence of bonded labour and refused to include civil society representatives in the rescue team, violating Supreme Court guidelines (Neeraja Chaudhary v. State of U.P.)<sup>71</sup>

#### **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation was provided to any of the 14 rescued workers.

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<sup>71</sup> Neeraja Chaudhary v. State of U.P, 2024. [Check Link](#).

## Systemic Issues

- The rescue was not conducted within 24 hours of the complaint, breaching the SOP.
- The rescue team was seen socializing with the employer.
- The SDM failed to presume bonded labour despite clear evidence of debt, violating the Supreme Court's Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India<sup>72</sup> precedent.
- Labourers were made to sign documents they could not read or understand, under the employer's supervision. The employer's presence during statement recording
- created an environment of intimidation.
- The statements of children were not recorded, and no Child Protection Unit was involved.
- No explanation was given to the workers about the documents they signed.
- Despite an order from the District Magistrate in March 2024, the rescue lacked
- transparency, and the NCCEBL was not involved in key steps, including statement recording.

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72 Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India & Others, 1983. [Check Link](#).

## **CASE STUDY 12:**

### **RESCUE OF 14 BONDED LABOURERS FROM BAGPAT, UTTAR PRADESH, IN LUDHIANA, PUNJAB (2021–2022)**

In October 2021, Suresh Kumar and his extended family-14 individuals (7 men, 3 women, 4 children)-were brought from Sherpur, Bagpat, Uttar Pradesh, by a contractor named Vinod to a brick kiln in Dehlon, Ludhiana, Punjab. Vinod provided an advance of Rs. 5,000 to Suresh, his brother, and brother-in-law Chandu, recruiting their families on behalf of principal employer Ravi Krishna. Upon arrival, all family members, including children below the age of six, were compelled to work at the kiln under coercive conditions.

#### **Exploitation**

From October 2021, Suresh's family and the two other families endured severe exploitation. They were denied wages, prevented from seeking alternative employment, and subjected to constant surveillance and threats by the principal employer. Physical assaults and verbal harassment were routine, even in front of the children. The promised wage was Rs. 700 per 1,000 bricks, which should have amounted to approximately Rs. 1,750 per day per working family member, but no such payments were made. When Suresh attempted to contact relatives for help, he was assaulted and his SIM card destroyed.

#### **Rescue**

NCCEBL intervened after receiving Suresh's report. In February 2022, NCCEBL filed complaints with the Deputy Commissioner and SP, Ludhiana. The Punjab and Haryana High Court subsequently ordered a rescue operation in March 2022. While the families were removed from the kiln, the rescue operation did not adhere to the BLSAA or the associated SOP.

#### **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation was provided to any of the 14 rescued workers.

## **Systemic Issues**

- The statements of women and children were not recorded, violating both the SOP and the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, which mandates child welfare involvement in such cases.
- Labourers were transported to Darha Railway Station, 30 km from the kiln, and coerced into signing documents as a condition for release.
- No release orders or certificates were issued to the rescued families, denying them both legal recognition as bonded labourers, and access to rehabilitation schemes. No police-protected repatriation was provided, leaving the families vulnerable to further exploitation.
- Despite repeated representations from Suresh and NCCEBL in April and August 2023, and again in January 2024, authorities failed to respond or take further action.

## **CASE STUDY 13:**

### **RESCUE OF FIVE BONDED LABOURER FAMILIES FROM KASGANJ, UTTAR PRADESH, IN PATAN DISTRICT, GUJARAT (2021)**

#### **Exploitation**

In December 2021, NCCEBL received information about five families from Kasganj, Uttar Pradesh, who had been forced to work under bonded labour conditions at the brick kiln in Kalela village, under Kakoshi police station, Patan district, Gujarat. The contractors as Farhan, Shekar, Dev, and Amar-had given advance payment of Rs. 10,000 to each family. Upon arrival, the principal employer and contractors restricted their movement, subjected them to physical abuse, and beatings. One labourer, Shambu, was confined and assaulted.

#### **Rescue**

In December 2021, the NCCEBL formally alerted the District Magistrate (DM), SP, and SHO of Kakoshi, requesting an urgent rescue operation and the recording of statements in the presence of the vigilance committee. A follow-up email was sent the next day. Following the complaint, Kakoshi police reportedly visited the brick kiln and brought the labourers to the police station. However, instead of conducting a proper inquiry under the BLSAA, police allegedly had the labourers sign documents in a language they did not understand and then instructed them to return to the kiln.

After their return, the principal employer, contractors, and their subordinates beat the labourers and their children before forcibly abandoning them on a highway. The families then walked to the DM's office to submit a petition, requesting that their statements be recorded under the BLSAA, recovery of their wages, and safe repatriation under police protection.

Despite the gravity of the situation, proper procedures were not followed:

- A labour inspector spoke to the families and had them sign a document in Gujarati, which they did not understand. The DM was reportedly not present during this interaction.
- The families were then forced to leave the DM's office and were transported and abandoned in Palanpur, a clear violation of the Bonded Labour Act.

The NCCEBL, as the complainant in the case, formally requested the DM of Patan to constitute a team to record the labourers' statements and provide key information, including:

- The brick kiln's registration certificate
- Details and classifications (migrant, SC/ST, etc.) of all workers
- Minimum wage records under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948
- Details of facilities and payment receipts for the labourers
- Registration of workers under the Building and Other Construction Workers Act
- A copy of the final inquiry report and the DM's order

During the attempted rescue, the social activist and petitioner in the case was also brutally attacked, underscoring the risks faced by those advocating for bonded labourers' rights.

## **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation has been provided so far.

## **Systemic Issues**

- The rescue was not conducted within 24 hours of the complaint, violating standard operating procedures.
- No release orders or certificates were issued, denying the families access to rehabilitation and legal protections.
- No safe repatriation or police protection was provided. The families were abandoned on the roadside.

## **CASE STUDY 14:**

### **RESCUE OF THREE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS FROM DISTRICT GUNA, MADHYA PRADESH (2021)**

#### **Exploitation**

A family of four, consisting of Taran Singh (35-year-old male), his wife Durga Bai (30 years old), and their two minor children, Ramesh (12 years old) and Suresh (9 years old), all from Sonthi Village, Guna District, Madhya Pradesh, were held under bonded conditions in a field in Baran District, Rajasthan. They were brought in May 2021 and forced to work as bonded labourers. The employer, Pawan Rathore of Baran, provided an advance of Rs. 30,000/- to Taran Singh through Vignesh Sahariya, trapping the family in debt.

Taran Singh faced constant threats of physical and verbal abuse from Pawan Rathore and was not allowed to leave. Durga Bai and the children, Suresh and Ramesh, were also forced to work on Pawan Rathore's field, performing menial tasks like picking manure, and were deprived of basic amenities. After Taran Singh managed to escape, Pawan Rathore threatened him, demanding Rs. 70,000/- and threatening to kill his family if the amount wasn't paid.

#### **Rescue**

In December 2021, three family members – Taran Singh, Durga Bai, and one of their children were rescued. The younger child, Suresh, was working elsewhere at the time of the initial rescue. Following compelling efforts from the local administration, the child was produced at midnight on the day of the rescue. However, the child was not issued a release certificate, with the justification that he was "a small kid and therefore, did not work," despite evidence that the child was indeed made to work.

#### **Rehabilitation**

Post-rescue, the family faced significant challenges and a severe lack of support, echoing systemic failures seen in other cases. The younger child was not issued a release certificate, despite being forced to work. This critical document is essential for accessing government rehabilitation programs. Furthermore, the family received no repatriation assistance, indicating they were left without support to return to their home district. There has been no conviction of the employer, Pawan Rathore, and the family was provided with no proper rehabilitation, leaving them vulnerable and without the means to rebuild their lives. A petition was filed by NCCEBL in the Hon'ble High Court of Gwalior, which is still pending.

## **Systemic Issues**

This case highlights several critical systemic failures:

- The failure to issue a release certificate, especially to a child, directly obstructs access to crucial rehabilitation programs and legal protections.
- The absence of repatriation services and proper rehabilitation support leaves rescued individuals and families without the necessary means to reintegrate into society and avoid re-trafficking.
- The lack of conviction for the perpetrator, Pawan Rathore, demonstrates a significant gap in the justice system, allowing exploiters to evade accountability and potentially continue their illegal activities.

## **CASE STUDY 15:**

### **RESCUE OF 15 LABOURERS FROM MADHYA PRADESH (2020)**

#### **Exploitation**

The 15 labourers were subjected to extreme exploitation, being forced to perform farming work alongside cleaning latrines. Their bondage was maintained through severe coercion and control by the principal employer and other respondents, who confined them to the farm premises, restricted their movement, and prevented them from working elsewhere or leaving. Despite years of hard labour, their initial debts were never cleared, and they were never paid wages, receiving only occasional dried grains for food. When petitioners attempted to leave or requested time off, they faced physical assault and verbal abuse. Beyond agricultural work, they were compelled to illegally produce alcohol. In a particularly horrific incident in January 2021, some petitioners were brutally punished for attempting to escape by being forced to pick coins from burning oil, resulting in severe burns. An earlier incident also saw a worker's hand severely burned in hot oil for refusing to clean a latrine.

#### **Rescue**

In February 2021, ten of the petitioners managed to escape the farm, leaving behind four other petitioners and children. They approached Brijesh Kumar of Bandhua Mukti Morcha, Guna, a district official, and successfully persuaded them to rescue the remaining petitioners. The initial rescue of 15 labourers took place in 2020.

#### **Rehabilitation**

Following their rescue, these labourers received interim financial compensation from the Guna administration. However, despite this initial relief, no comprehensive rehabilitation was carried out. After a prolonged four-year wait, in 2024, a case was filed in the Hon'ble High Court of Gwalior on behalf of Bolanath and others seeking rehabilitation for all 15 workers. This case is currently still under consideration by the High Court.

## Systemic Issues

- The documented instances of forcing workers to clean latrines and inflicting severe burn injuries for defiance or attempted escape demonstrate a shocking level of inhumane treatment and utter disregard for human dignity for marginalised caste workers.
- The compulsion to produce raw alcohol illegally points to the multi-faceted nature of exploitation faced by bonded labourers, often extending beyond the primary work they were recruited for.
- The provision of only interim financial compensation and the complete absence of comprehensive rehabilitation for four years underscore a significant systemic failure.
- Victims are left to struggle for years to access their rightful support.
- The necessity for victims to approach the High Court after years of waiting for rehabilitation demonstrates a profound administrative failure to implement existing rehabilitation policies proactively and efficiently. This also burdens the judicial system with cases that should ideally be resolved at the executive level.
- The continuous nature of the debt, where years of labour did not clear the initial advance, exposes a core mechanism of bonded labour that perpetuates the cycle of exploitation.

## **CASE STUDY 16:**

### **RESCUE AND REBONDAGE OF A DALIT MIGRANT WORKER FROM A BRICK KILN IN PUNJAB (2019-24)**

Deepak, a 32-year-old Dalit migrant worker from Banheda Khas village in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, has endured exploitative work conditions, qualifying thrice as a bonded labourer under the BLSAA.

#### **Exploitation and rescue**

First Experience: Brick Kiln in Punjab (2019–2020)

In September 2019, Deepak and five others from his village came to work in a brick kiln near Harike Tarn Taran district in Punjab. They were given a meagre advance of ₹10,000, that Deepak took as debt to address a medical emergency. Once there, they were forced to work 14–18 hours a day under strict surveillance, denied freedom of movement, and not paid any wages. After months of forced labour, the NCCEBL intervened, filing complaints with district authorities in January 2020. Multiple letters were sent urging for their rescue and the recording of their statements. Although the group was eventually rescued, Deepak never received an official release certificate—a crucial document that would have unlocked a series of welfare benefits under the rehabilitation scheme. Without this certificate, he remained at risk of working in exploitative conditions again.

Second Experience: Agricultural Farm in Haryana (2021–2022)

In April 2021, in search for work, Deepak came to work on a farm in Gehlab village, Palwal district, Haryana. He was promised ₹450 per day for eight hours of work. He was given a ₹2,000 advance. Instead, he was forced to work up to 14 hours daily, performing grueling tasks such as cutting grass, washing cattle, and living in unsanitary conditions. He received no wages and was subjected to physical and verbal abuse when he demanded wages. Fearing for his life, Deepak managed to escape and contacted NCCEBL. The NCCEBL promptly notified local authorities, submitting complaints and requests for his rescue and the issuance of a release certificate. However, despite repeated appeals and follow-up letters, no action was taken. NCCEBL eventually filed a writ petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court in January 2023, which remains pending. Once again, the absence of a release certificate and subsequent rehabilitation left Deepak exposed to further exploitation.

### Third Experience: Brick Kiln in Punjab (2024)

In 2024, Deepak and eight other migrant workers in search of work came to work in a brick kiln factory in Punjab. Each family received an advance of ₹10,000, but no promised wages (Rs 903 for every 1000 bricks) were paid. Deepak's family alone produced 90,000 bricks, yet they received only ₹1,500 per month for survival. The employer restricted their movement, subjected them to verbal abuse, and forced even minor children to work.

The NCCEBL submitted complaints to district authorities, requesting rescue, statement recording, and the issuance of release orders. Despite these efforts, Deepak still has not received a release certificate, leaving him at constant risk of working in bonded labour-like conditions.

### **Rehabilitation**

In each of the rounds of rescue, no rehabilitation was provided leading to Deepak's rebondage.

### **Systemic Issues**

- Deepak did not receive the RC the first instance that could have made him eligible for some rehabilitation assistance, which could have prevented his rebondage.
- Despite submitting complaints to various authorities, the district administration did not issue a release certificate for Deepak even after he was rescued for the third time from the brick kiln in Punjab.

Deepak is now working in a sugarcane farm in Palwal district of Haryana, where he works to repay the advance he took and his current wages are way below the minimum wages.

## **CASE STUDY 17:**

### **RESCUE OF 50 BONDED LABOURERS FROM CHHATTISGARH IN DHOLPUR, RAJASTHAN (2018)**

#### **Exploitation**

In February, 2018, NCCEBL received information about 50 individuals brought from Chhattisgarh to a brick kiln in Dholpur, Rajasthan. These workers had been lured with false promises of fair wages and decent work by the kiln owner, Mr. Prithvi Tanwar. Upon arrival, they were forced into bonded labour conditions, denied wages, and prevented from returning home.

#### **Rescue**

After being alerted, the NCCEBL immediately informed key authorities, including the Chairperson of the NHRC, the SP, DM, and SDM of Dholpur. In February, 2018, a rescue operation was conducted at a brick kiln by a team constituted by the SDM. All 50 bonded labourers were freed, and their statements were recorded.

#### **Rehabilitation**

No rehabilitation has been provided to any of the workers.

In response to these shortcomings in rehabilitation, the NCCEBL undertook several measures:

- In February 2018, they formally requested release orders and a rescue report from the Dholpur District Collector, and sent a reminder in April.
- The NCCEBL visited the NHRC office in February and requested the reopening of the case in April, after learning that the NHRC had prematurely closed the case, raising concerns about the lack of investigation and justice.
- In May 2018, the NCCEBL filed a Right to Information (RTI) application with the Public Information Officer of district Una, Himachal Pradesh, seeking documentation related to the rescue, including copies of the labourers' statements, the investigation report, and release certificates.
- Additionally, the NCCEBL raised concerns about the lack of action regarding an attack on a human rights defender associated with the case.

## Systemic Issues

- The rescued workers were dropped at the railway station without formal release orders or certificates, which are crucial for accessing rehabilitation and protection against re-bondage.
- No food, travel expenses, or police protection were provided, leaving the workers extremely vulnerable.
- The administration did not share details of the rescue or subsequent actions with the NCCEBL, highlighting a lack of transparency.
- The absence of release certificates is a critical gap, as these documents are required for survivors to access government rehabilitation schemes, compensation, and even basic travel support. Without them, rescued individuals remain at risk of falling back into bonded labour.

## **CASE STUDY 18:**

### **RESCUE OF 98 BRICK KILN WORKERS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR (2017–18)**

#### **Exploitation**

In 2017–18, a significant rescue operation freed 98 bonded labourers—36 men, 21 women, and 41 children—from exploitative conditions in brick kilns across Jammu and Kashmir. These workers, primarily from Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, had been subjected to harsh labour without basic rights or protections.

#### **Rescue**

Prior to the rescue, multiple letters and complaints had been sent to district and state authorities, as well as the Jammu and Kashmir Human Rights Commission, regarding the exploitation of bonded labourers in the region. Press clippings<sup>73</sup> and official correspondence from September 2017 through January 2018 document the ongoing efforts to secure the release and rehabilitation of these workers.

In December 2017, a coordinated effort by the NCCEBL, Socio Legal Information Center (SLIC), and Action Aid India, with support from the Samba and Reasi district administrations, led to two major rescue operations:

- December 2017: The first rescue targeted a brick kiln in Ghobasna, Ramgarh, Samba District. The team, comprising officials from the Labour Department, local administration, and police, rescued 25 bonded labourers, including children and lactating mothers, mostly from Bilaspur and Janjgir Champa in Chhattisgarh.
- December 2017: The second rescue occurred at another kiln in Laiter, Reasi District, where 73 workers from Jaijaipur, Raigarh, Bilaspur, and Janjgir Champa (Chhattisgarh) were freed. Ten of the rescued were from Gumla District, Jharkhand, while the majority were from Chhattisgarh.

After the rescue, the Samba administration arranged transport to Jammu Railway Station for the workers. However, the Reasi administration left the rescued workers, including children, in Katra at night without support. The survivors reported harassment by authorities repeated demands for statements, and a lack of basic amenities such as food and shelter. Neither district administration followed up on the welfare of the rescued workers or filed comprehensive reports.

## Rehabilitation

No rehabilitation was provided since the Deputy Commissioners of Reasi and Samba did not issue release certificates, which are essential for accessing government rehabilitation programs.

In January 2018, the rescued workers, now in Delhi, submitted a memorandum to the Resident Commissioner of Jammu and Kashmir, demanding the issuance of release certificates. Despite assurances, no certificates were provided. The same day, a press release<sup>74</sup> highlighted the plight of the rescued labourers and their demand for official recognition as bonded labourers. The workers also faced police action during this period and had to rely on donations for survival while staying in a night shelter near Nizamuddin Railway Station.

In January 2018, the workers approached the NHRC for intervention, seeking release certificates, monetary relief, and immediate assistance. Letters were also sent to key officials, including the Chief Secretaries of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, and the Chief Labour Commissioner, informing them about the rescued workers and requesting rehabilitation support. A writ petition was filed in the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, but it remains pending.

## Systemic Issues

- The rescue was not conducted within 24 hours of the complaint, violating SOPs.
- No release orders or certificates were issued, denying the families access to rehabilitation and legal protections.

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<sup>74</sup> PTI. 2018. NHRC takes cognisance of plight of 98 rescued bonded labourers. The New Indian Express. [Check Link](#).

## **CASE STUDY 19:**

### **RESCUE OF 450 LABOURERS FROM GUNA, MADHYA PRADESH (2016)**

#### **Exploitation**

Approximately 465 agricultural workers were held in bonded conditions in Guna, Madhya Pradesh. After a partial intervention by the NHRC, wages were temporarily recovered for some labourers, but these were subsequently repossessed by the employers over time, indicating ongoing vulnerability and the lack of a sustainable solution to their economic exploitation.

#### **Rescue**

In January, 197 bonded labourers were identified and reported to the District Magistrate (DM) Guna, Madhya Pradesh. However, when statements were recorded, only 93 of their statements were recorded. Further exacerbating the issue, later in January, NCCEBL identified an additional 175 bonded labourers at the same location, but again, only some statements were recorded, at the administration's discretion. Despite NCCEBL's subsequent letter to the DM Guna requesting a full rescue, no further operations were conducted. While the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) intervened later, leading the administration to recover some wages for a few labourers, these funds were regrettably reclaimed by the employers over time.

#### **Rehabilitation**

- Despite initial identifications and partial interventions, there is no mention of any comprehensive rehabilitation efforts for any of the 450 identified bonded labourers.
- The recovery of wages was short-lived, with employers taking them back, which demonstrates the lack of secure economic rehabilitation.
- A petition was filed in the Gwalior High Court in March seeking justice for these labourers. However, no order has been implemented, and no fresh inquiry has been conducted since its filing. The case was finally disposed off in March, without any implemented resolution or effective rehabilitation.

## Systemic Issues

- Despite repeated identifications and reports from NCCEBL, the administration's response was inadequate, selective in recording statements, and eventually ceased rescue efforts altogether.
- The incomplete recording of statements for identified bonded labourers fundamentally undermines the identification and liberation process, making it difficult to formally recognize them as bonded labourers and grant them legal protections and rehabilitation.
- The fact that no further rescue operations were conducted even after additional labourers were identified shows a systemic failure in the state's responsibility to
- proactively identify, rescue, and liberate bonded individuals.
- The employers' ability to reclaim wages underscores the absence of a robust system to ensure the long-term economic security and freedom of rescued labourers.
- Temporary measures without sustained support are insufficient.
- The protracted legal battle in the High Court for six years (2016-2022) demonstrates a severe breakdown in the justice delivery system and the lack of accountability in implementing judicial directives in bonded labour cases. The disposal of the case without apparent relief further exacerbates this issue.

## **CASE STUDY 20:**

### **RESCUE OF A CLEANING WORKER IN DELHI (2015)**

#### **Exploitation and rescue**

A Muslim woman with her family had been residing in a makeshift hut in a park for cleaning public toilets and was not paid wages for months. After asking for wages, the employer even threatened the family to vacate their home. When they resisted, he returned with hired men, destroyed their belongings, and assaulted the man. Following legal intervention, the family was rescued.

#### **Rehabilitation**

A bonded labour case with the DM office and a criminal case against the employer for threats and assault. After multiple directions from the High Court and three changes in DM personnel, the summary trial finally declared the woman as a bonded labourer and ordered the employer's arrest in 2019. Despite the declaration, compensation and rehabilitation measures were not initiated promptly. The employer secured immediate bail, and the administrative staff failed to provide guidance on next steps. NCCEBL then filed a public interest litigation in the High Court to compel the DM office to follow legal procedures. In 2019, the woman was given Rs 2,00,000 under the scheme however other benefits such as healthcare, ration card, housing and education for children are still not given.

#### **Systemic Issues**

- After the rescue, the family was left without a stable shelter, income, or basic services for an extended period.
- The woman gave formal statements post-rescue, which should have been sufficient under the law to trigger compensation and protection. It took four years to recognise her as a bonded labourer. The case, which legally should have been concluded within six months, took nearly four years. Despite the employer's threats and violence, timely legal action and protection were not ensured.
- Administrative staff admitted ignorance of bonded labour procedures, including how to fill required forms or implement rehabilitation policy.
- Even after the summary trial, staff provided no clear instructions for accessing compensation. The employer was bailed immediately, while the survivor remained in limbo.
- Multiple departments—health, food, housing—were each addressed through separate communications, placing the burden on the woman and NCCEBL rather than the state facilitating coordinated rehabilitation.

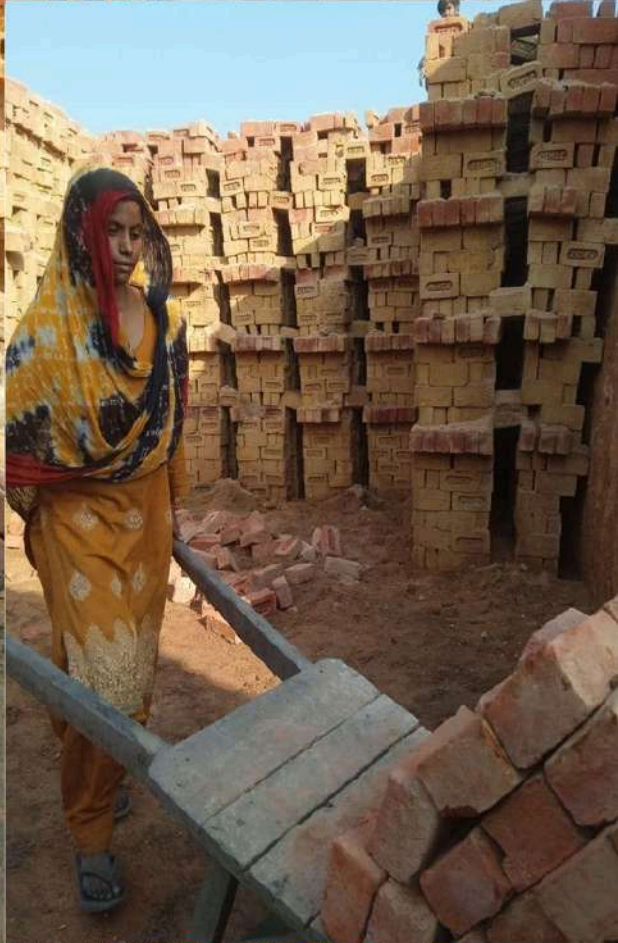
# FACT FINDING AND RESCUE OPERATION



# RESCUE OPERATION IN JAMMU & KASHMIR AND RAJASTHAN



# FACT FINDING AND RESCUE OPERATION



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# BONDED LABOURERS & THEIR FAMILIES AT WORKING SITE IN DIFFERENT PART OF INDIA



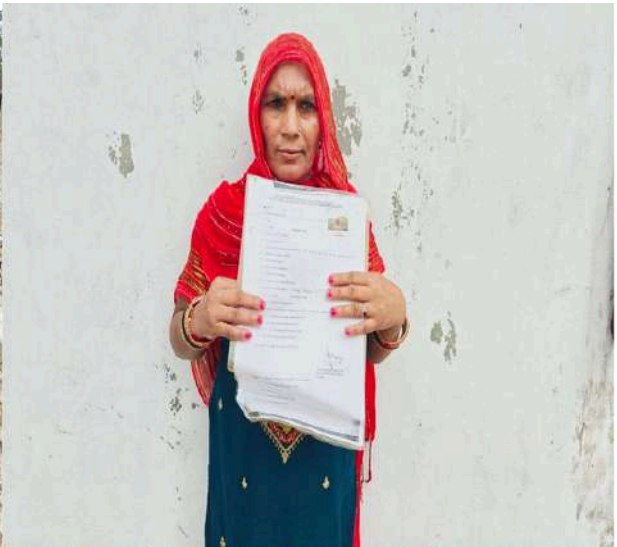
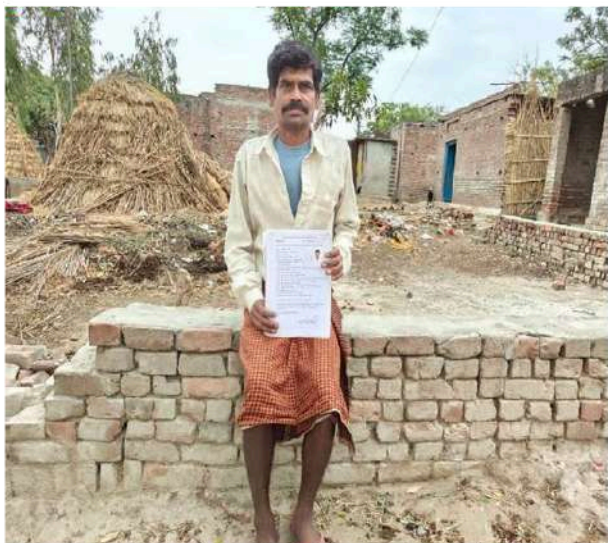
# BONDED LABOURERS & THEIR FAMILIES AT WORKING SITE IN DIFFERENT PART OF INDIA



# VIOLENCE AGAINST BONDED LABOURERS BY PRINCIPAL EMPLOYERS & CONTRACTORS AT WORKPLACE



# BONDED LABOURERS SEEKING LAND AND HOUSING FOR REHABILITATION



# MEDIA COVERAGE OF RESCUE & REHABILITATION OF BONDED LABOURERS

## Just another brick in the wall? From 'bondage' to living on the street in this unforgivable heat

Ambika Pandit  
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Aman (names of all children have been changed) is all of six, but has no toys as children of his age do. He has only seen kids of his age and older turn bricks at kilns. He offers a blank look at the mention of school. Born in an Uttar Pradesh brick kiln where his parents worked at the time, the boy has lived a life on the move as his family migrated from Nariyara village in Chhattisgarh to one city or the other to find work as labourers, exploited by contractors who see through their poverty and trap them in a vicious cycle of debt and denial of wages in the name of recovery of loans.

Aman was among the 33 men, women and children from different villages in Chhattisgarh who escaped the clutches of an exploitative contractor in a brick kiln in Faridabad on April 27 only to find themselves on Delhi streets, living under a tree at a night shelter in Sarai Kale Khan. While the heatwave is taking a toll on them, they struggled to working in the heat in the brick kiln was any way a never-ending summer.



**NO RESPIRE?** Fifty-three men, women and children who escaped a brick kiln in Faridabad have now found themselves on Delhi streets

They neither have the resources to linger on nor the money to leave for their villages, where it will be a life of poverty. Most of them have since begun working at construction sites in Delhi-NCR as they wait for the authorities to take note of their demand for justice.

Their pleas and a formal complaint led to the National Human Rights Commission to issue a notice on April 29 and follow-up directions to the state authorities in Haryana, but a solution is awaited as the panel and the state engage in a to-and-fro. Besides Haryana govt, NHRC had al-

so sought the intervention of Delhi govt to provide support to these families struggling for basic needs like food and shelter in the heat.

Thus, Aman and other children battle the summer heat while their parents and grandparents work at construction sites. The six-year-old and his brother Ritesh, 7, tell you how they turned over bricks at the kiln while their parents made bricks. Their sister Meeta, who is 15, too, now knows the kilns as home. For the migrant children, education is a distant dream.

Their mother, Sushila, reveals how there is no work in



Nariyara to sustain them through the year, so they keep returning to the cities and work for nearly eight months every year. As for the brick kiln in Faridabad, Sushila and husband Kulbheera Mahesh disclosed that they had taken a loan of Rs 35,000 to meet emergency expenses from the contractor, who then asked them to work at the kiln to pay off the debt.

Amarbai and her husband Chandraveer Mahesh also arrived to repay a loan of Rs 15,000. "We woke up at 4am to get down to work and were at it till 1pm," said Amarbai. "After lunch, we again worked

till 1pm. We did this without getting wages, surviving on a stipend of around Rs 5,000 in two instalments, always hoping to repay the loan. But the debt just didn't end. This is the story of every family."

Complainant Nirmal Gorara, convener, National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labour, who was part of the rescue operation with the local administration, has requested NHRC in his complaint to record the statements of the labourers while carrying out a fair investigation.

April 29, asking the state to take immediate action to address the concerns of the stranded workers. In May, the authorities in Ballabgarh in a report to NHRC claimed that an enquiry had been conducted and that the labourers said they had no grievances against the brick kiln owner, that they were being provided basic facilities and that their movement was not restricted. Tellingly, the labourers declined to sign their statements and left without availing the use of a tractor granted to them.

NHRC responded, "The report appears to be contrary to the submission of the complainant. The report suggests that there was no bondage at the brick kiln and the labourers left the brick kiln without signing their statement. The complainant, however, has stated that the labourers were being forced to sign the false statement prepared by the rescue team."

In this backdrop on May 28, NHRC asked the deputy commissioner of Faridabad to initiate proceedings in accordance with the standard operating procedure and submit an action-taken report to it by June 21.

Times Special

## How bonded labour fight gets caught in red tape, govt apathy

Thousands Of Bonded Labourers Continue To Wallow In Misery And Desperation, Hounded By Thekedars And Trapped By Their Own Poverty & Voicelessness

Maddur, near Srirangapatna  
Sachin Sharma / TNN

**AGRA/MADRAS:** In a quiet village in Madhya Pradesh, Muhammad, Danish, 35-year-old daily wage worker, sits with his wife and two children, his thoughts weighed down by memories of a year that almost killed him. In 2012, Danish, his 26-year-old wife Shama, and their two young children were trapped in a brick kiln in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, with 41 other families. They would breathe in the coughing of grinding labour, muggy smells, and constant threats. "We were given just enough food to survive and forced to work for 12 hours with heavy and broken tools," Danish recalled. His wife lost her mind with unending work, "We got no wages. It was not of the question. Any protest would be met with threats to us or to our children."

The family's ordeal ended well after a year in 2013 when an NGO got word of their plight and somehow managed to secure their release. Mr. Thekedar brought with a lettering request, "I can't pay or treat any contractor now," Danish said bitterly. His story, while deeply personal, is emblematic of a larger crisis gripping the vulnerable and marginalised across India — a crisis that has forced the Supreme Court to intervene and seek answers and solutions from govt.

The 2013 report directed authorities the urgency of addressing this humanitarian crisis, "From Tamil Nadu to Madhya Pradesh, and from Jharkhand to Uttar Pradesh, bonded labourers, many with their families, are being held in brick kilns and other places of work, in the name of India's poor and often in violation of the provisions of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1947, which prohibits bonded labour."

**Travelling In An Orphan:** In the 1970s, K.V. Venkateshwar and his wife had a family of 10. In 1978, 5,000 labourers were rescued in the state. In 1980, 10,000 were rescued. In 1981, 15,000 were rescued. In 1982, 20,000 were rescued. In 1983, 25,000 were rescued. In 1984, 30,000 were rescued. In 1985, 35,000 were rescued. In 1986, 40,000 were rescued. In 1987, 45,000 were rescued. In 1988, 50,000 were rescued. In 1989, 55,000 were rescued. In 1990, 60,000 were rescued. In 1991, 65,000 were rescued. In 1992, 70,000 were rescued. In 1993, 75,000 were rescued. In 1994, 80,000 were rescued. In 1995, 85,000 were rescued. In 1996, 90,000 were rescued. In 1997, 95,000 were rescued. In 1998, 1,00,000 were rescued. In 1999, 1,05,000 were rescued. In 2000, 1,10,000 were rescued. In 2001, 1,15,000 were rescued. In 2002, 1,20,000 were rescued. In 2003, 1,25,000 were rescued. In 2004, 1,30,000 were rescued. In 2005, 1,35,000 were rescued. In 2006, 1,40,000 were rescued. In 2007, 1,45,000 were rescued. In 2008, 1,50,000 were rescued. In 2009, 1,55,000 were rescued. In 2010, 1,60,000 were rescued. In 2011, 1,65,000 were rescued. In 2012, 1,70,000 were rescued. In 2013, 1,75,000 were rescued. In 2014, 1,80,000 were rescued. In 2015, 1,85,000 were rescued. In 2016, 1,90,000 were rescued. In 2017, 1,95,000 were rescued. In 2018, 2,00,000 were rescued. In 2019, 2,05,000 were rescued. In 2020, 2,10,000 were rescued. In 2021, 2,15,000 were rescued. In 2022, 2,20,000 were rescued. In 2023, 2,25,000 were rescued. In 2024, 2,30,000 were rescued. In 2025, 2,35,000 were rescued. In 2026, 2,40,000 were rescued. In 2027, 2,45,000 were rescued. In 2028, 2,50,000 were rescued. In 2029, 2,55,000 were rescued. In 2030, 2,60,000 were rescued. In 2031, 2,65,000 were rescued. In 2032, 2,70,000 were rescued. In 2033, 2,75,000 were rescued. In 2034, 2,80,000 were rescued. In 2035, 2,85,000 were rescued. In 2036, 2,90,000 were rescued. In 2037, 2,95,000 were rescued. In 2038, 3,00,000 were rescued. In 2039, 3,05,000 were rescued. In 2040, 3,10,000 were rescued. In 2041, 3,15,000 were rescued. In 2042, 3,20,000 were rescued. In 2043, 3,25,000 were rescued. In 2044, 3,30,000 were rescued. In 2045, 3,35,000 were rescued. In 2046, 3,40,000 were rescued. In 2047, 3,45,000 were rescued. In 2048, 3,50,000 were rescued. In 2049, 3,55,000 were rescued. In 2050, 3,60,000 were rescued. In 2051, 3,65,000 were rescued. In 2052, 3,70,000 were rescued. In 2053, 3,75,000 were rescued. In 2054, 3,80,000 were rescued. In 2055, 3,85,000 were rescued. In 2056, 3,90,000 were rescued. In 2057, 3,95,000 were rescued. In 2058, 4,00,000 were rescued. In 2059, 4,05,000 were rescued. In 2060, 4,10,000 were rescued. In 2061, 4,15,000 were rescued. In 2062, 4,20,000 were rescued. In 2063, 4,25,000 were rescued. In 2064, 4,30,000 were rescued. In 2065, 4,35,000 were rescued. In 2066, 4,40,000 were rescued. In 2067, 4,45,000 were rescued. In 2068, 4,50,000 were rescued. In 2069, 4,55,000 were rescued. In 2070, 4,60,000 were rescued. In 2071, 4,65,000 were rescued. In 2072, 4,70,000 were rescued. In 2073, 4,75,000 were rescued. In 2074, 4,80,000 were rescued. In 2075, 4,85,000 were rescued. In 2076, 4,90,000 were rescued. In 2077, 4,95,000 were rescued. In 2078, 5,00,000 were rescued. In 2079, 5,05,000 were rescued. In 2080, 5,10,000 were rescued. In 2081, 5,15,000 were rescued. In 2082, 5,20,000 were rescued. In 2083, 5,25,000 were rescued. In 2084, 5,30,000 were rescued. In 2085, 5,35,000 were rescued. In 2086, 5,40,000 were rescued. In 2087, 5,45,000 were rescued. In 2088, 5,50,000 were rescued. In 2089, 5,55,000 were rescued. In 2090, 5,60,000 were rescued. In 2091, 5,65,000 were rescued. In 2092, 5,70,000 were rescued. In 2093, 5,75,000 were rescued. In 2094, 5,80,000 were rescued. In 2095, 5,85,000 were rescued. In 2096, 5,90,000 were rescued. In 2097, 5,95,000 were rescued. In 2098, 6,00,000 were rescued. In 2099, 6,05,000 were rescued. 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# भट्टे से बंधुआ श्रमिकों को मुक्त कराया

**जागरण संवाददाता, मुजफ्फरनगर :** नई मंडी थाना क्षेत्र के गांव बड़ौड़ी में छह माह से बंधक बनाकर रखे गए श्रमिकों को मुक्त कराया गया। दिल्ली से आई मानवाधिकार संस्था एवं प्रशासन ने संयुक्त रूप से रेस्क्यू ऑपरेशन किया। यहाँ पंद्रह श्रमिकों और स्वजन को छुड़ाकर उनके घर भिजवाया गया। श्रमिकों को बंधक बनाने के मामले में ईट-भट्टा संचालक के खिलाफ प्रशासनिक स्तर पर कार्रवाई की तैयारी की गई है।

सदर तहसील के बड़ौड़ी गांव में ईट-भट्टे पर सिकरेंडा, शाहपुर क्षेत्र के 15 श्रमिकों को बंधक बनाकर काम लिया जा रहा था। इसकी सूचना



कानगुरु करण श्रमिकों के साथ दिल्ली की मानवाधिकार संस्था के पत्राधिकारी • सी तस्था दिल्ली की मानवाधिकार संस्था को मिली तो गोपनीय रूप से छानबीन की गई। इसी बीच लाकडाउन लगने से स्थिति अधिक विकट हो गई। बुधवार को संस्था की टीम ने एसडीएम सदर दीपक कुमार, अम

श्रमिकों को हालत यहाँ दबनीच बनी हुई है। संस्था के कार्यकर्ता कमर हतोखाब ने बताया कि श्रमिक दानिश को पिछले छह महीने से उनके काम का मेहनताना नहीं दिया गया है। इन्होंने अपने पैसों की मांग की तो इन्हें डराया एवं धमकाया गया। ईट-भट्टा पर श्रमिकों के लिए शौचालय तक की व्यवस्था नहीं मिली है। श्रम अधिकारी ने सभी श्रमिकों के बयान दर्ज किए। टीम की कार्रवाई से भट्टा संचालकों में अफरातफरी मच गई। बयान दर्ज होने के बाद सभी श्रमिकों को संस्था की निगरानी में उनके घर पहुंचाया गया है। उधर, पुलिस और प्रशासन ईट-भट्टा संचालक के खिलाफ कार्रवाई करने में लगा है।

## अत्याचार...

# बंधुआ बनाई गई बच्ची के साथ की थी हैवानियत

**बंधुआ बनाने वाली महिला गिरफ्तार, फरार बेटे पर रेप का केस दर्ज**

पत्रिका न्यूज़ नेटवर्क

patrika.com

राजगढ़. तीन हजार रुपए कर्ज के बदले बंधुआ बनाई गई बच्ची के साथ ज्यादती भी की गई है। पुलिस ने इस मामले में महिला के बेटे के खिलाफ मामला दर्ज किया है। महिला का बेटा और बहू फरार हो गए हैं। बच्ची को बंधुआ बनाने वाली महिला को गिरफ्तार कर लिया गया है। कोर्ट ने उसे जेल भेज दिया है।

कर्ज में दबे पिता ने 11 वर्षीय बेटी को बंधुआ मजदूर के रूप में जीरापुर निवासी कृष्णा शर्मा के घर भेजा था। इसके बाद कृष्णा बच्ची को छोड़ नहीं रही थी। शेष @ पेज 3

पत्रिका

लगातार

तीन हजार कर्ज के बदले तीन साल से बंधुआ थी 11 साल की बच्ची

शुरुआती दौर में बच्ची को कुष्णा शर्मा पर बालकों के हित की धारा के तहत प्रकरण दर्ज किया गया था। बाद में जांच के बाद धारा 376 और श्रम अधिनियम की धारा 14 के तहत भी प्रकरण दर्ज किया गया।

आरके गुप्ता, धाना प्रभारी जीरापुर

03 VILLUPURAM

TUESDAY 05

## Irulars allege SC employer forced them into bondage

Atta

EXPRESS NEWS

An assault on Chidambaram tensions between police and police. Official meeting on vanagiri. The situation is according to police. Ajay (26), S Vignesh (24) from Mani brooding at Udaiyur night. V Sa K Kavi Var (25), K Kati Kumar (20), from P U drinking

KRITHIKA SRINIVASAN @Villupuram

A group of 11 members of the Irular tribe have demanded action from the district administration against the alleged use of bonded labourers and mistreatment by a Scheduled Caste employer at Thoravi village in Villupuram on Monday.

K Vinayagamorthy (24), an Irular resident of Thoravi village, filed the complaint against one Raja (63), an SC man who works as a mason and contractor for sugarcane field labourers in the village. Raja has been 'coordinating' members of the Irular community in the village to work as agricultural labourers without wages, to harvest sugarcane across Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, for the last four years, sources said. Furthermore, Raja lends money to the workers' families at an uninformal interest rate, and considers them as 'wages', said Vinayagamorthy.

In his complaint, Vinayagamorthy said, "Me and 11 others from my village had been employed by Raja to work as sugarcane labourers at agricultural farms in and outside TN. They take us in a bus to the specified farm and make us work there for six to nine months without any leave." He added that rice and shelter would be provided by the farm owner and a meagre ₹30 daily for buying vegetables. Any extra money we use up will be put down by Raja in our credit accounts for which an interest will be charged.

"I asked for a leave on Deepavali on October 28 but I was not allowed to go. So I came to Thoravi from Andhra Pradesh the next day without informing

Raja. Once he spotted me in the village, he asked me to repay the money we have borrowed from him so far and relieve myself. When I requested for some time, he came to my home drunk on October 30 and took me to a place near his house and physically assaulted me," Vinayagamorthy said.

Following the attack, Vinayagamorthy filed a complaint at the Villupuram police station on November 1. However, a case was not filed, instead police held a 'compromise talk' in the station, he added.

"We refused to compromise, which is why I have resorted to seeking the help of the district collector and DSP to save mine and 11 other families from this slavery," said Anitha, Vinayagamorthy's wife.

Collector C Palani stated that the issue will be investigated and action will be taken.



They take us in a bus to various farms in and outside TN and make us work there for six to nine months without any leave. Irulars' complaint

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EXPRESS NEWS

@Poduchery

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Free civil exam

# MEDIA COVERAGE OF MEETING AND RESCUE OF BONDED LABOUR



## Regional Meeting in Northern India: A Charter for Justice Against Forced & Bonded Labor



NK NEWS

**SRINAGAR:** A one day regional meeting in Northern India on Forced and Bonded labour has been successfully organized at TK College of Education, Lawayapora, Srinagar. The event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from NGOs, trade unions, and worker organizations.

The meeting delved into the harsh realities faced by these vulnerable workers. Participants engaged in a focused discussion on the prevalent conditions of forced and bonded labor in the region. A consensus was reached on a charter of demands, which will be presented to the Labor Minister tomorrow through a delegation.

Nirmal Corana, the Convener of NCEBL, disclosed the alarming figure of 18 million migrant bonded labourers in India, with a significant portion originating from Jammu and Kashmir.

In fact, NCEBL has rescued over 20,000 bonded labourers across the country, out of which about 5,000 rescued bonded

labourers are from the Jammu and Kashmir region. He also raised serious concerns regarding the effectiveness of existing laws and schemes designed to combat forced and bonded labor.

Mahajabeen Bhat urged the Jammu and Kashmir government to prioritize the effective implementation of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979. She emphasized the urgent need to operationalize the Supreme Court's judgment guaranteeing food security for migrant workers. While Advocate Yasmeena provided a comprehensive overview of the Migrant Workers Policy in Jammu and Kashmir.

Abdul Rasheed, President of Jammu and Kashmir Construction Workers Union, drew attention to the deplorable working conditions of construction and brick kiln workers, often akin to those of bonded labor.

Hilal Ahmad, Director of WHIPRO TB Care and Control Organization,

highlighted the hazardous working conditions and increasing accidents among workers in the sector. He stressed the paramount importance of health and safety measures,

including maternity benefits for working women.

Rahi Riyaz, Director of Ahsan Foundation, introduced the Working Peoples' Charter (WPC) of Jammu and Kashmir and its role in addressing the concerns of women workers.

Followed by which, Hakim Gulam Ahmad, Kashmir Federation of Artisans, underlined the challenges faced by artisans, a significant segment of the Kashmir workforce. Kashmir has about 3.5 lakh artisans. He expressed deep concern over the deteriorating working conditions and wages of artisans, calling for the effective implementation of relevant provisions.

However, we have planned to consolidate the demands of all these workers and arrange a meeting with the concerned ministry.

The meeting concluded with a strong call for collective action. Participants pledged to unite the demands of all affected workers and advocate for their rights through sustained engagement with the government. The charter of demands will serve as a roadmap for future efforts to eradicate forced and bonded labor in the region.

# रायपुर फ्रंट पेज

dainikbhaskar.com

**कार्रवाई •** खरोसा की मोजो मशरूम कंपनी में महिला-बाल विकास टीम का छापा, छुड़ाए गए लोग घर भेजे गए घरेलू काम के बहाने एमपी-यूपी से मजदूर बुला फैक्ट्री में बंधक रखा, 1 टाइम खाना-24 घंटे काम; 97 छुड़ाए गए

काइम रिपोर्टर | रायपुर

खिले के खरोसा स्थित मोजो मशरूम कंपनी से बड़ी संख्या में महिला-पुरुष व बच्चों को महिला बाल विकास विभाग ने रेस्क्यू किया है। कंपनी के संचालकों ने इन मजदूरों को 4-5 माह से बंधक बनाकर रखा था। उन्हें मजदूरी भी नहीं दे रहे थे, ना ही उन्हें घर जाने दे रहे थे। सोते दिनों कुछ मजदूर यहाँ से किसी तरह बाहर निकले और शिकायत की। शिकायत पर महिला बाल विकास विभाग ने कुल 97 लोगों को कंपनी से रेस्क्यू किया। सभी को बूढ़ापारा के इंडोर स्टेडियम में लाकर रखा गया। इसके बाद मजदूरों के पैमे दिलवाकर उन्हें वापस घर रखना किया गया। फिलहाल इस मामले में कंपनी संचालक के खिलाफ आगे की कार्रवाई जारी है। महिला बाल विकास विभाग रायपुर डीपीओ शैल ठाकुर ने बताया कि खरोसा स्थित मोजो मशरूम फिक्ट्री के अंदर मोजो मशरूम फैक्ट्री संचालित है। हमें सूचना मिली थी कि यहाँ यूपी और एमपी के कुछ मजदूरों को बंधक बनाकर रखा गया है। टीम ने पुलिस को मदद से यहाँ छापा मारा। देखा कि वहाँ सैकड़ों मजदूर अपने बच्चों के साथ दयनीय स्थिति में रह रहे थे। सभी को रेस्क्यू कर इंडोर स्टेडियम में लाया गया। कंपनी के संचालकों को भी यहाँ सुकककर उनसे मजदूरों के पैमे दिलाए गए। सभी मजदूरों को उनके घर भेज दिया जाएगा।

**छुड़ाए गए मजदूरों की आपबीती... 4-5 माह से बंधक रहे, मारपीट करते थे, मोबाइल भी छीन लिया था**



इंडोर स्टेडियम में लाए गए मजदूर।

**काम न करो तो मारते थे**

जीनपुर से आई सीता ने बताया कि, कर 4-5 माह पहले जीनपुर से काम करने आई थी। लेकिन यहाँ 24 घंटे सिर्फे उनसे काम करवाया जाता था। थककर कुछ देर थैट जाओ तो संचालक आकर मारपीट करते थे। पैमे मांग तो गाली गलौच देकर भाग देते थे।

**खाना भी नसीब नहीं**

जीनपुर के सोनू ने बताया कि हमें बताया कुछ और गया था, लम्कर यहाँ कुछ और ही काम करवा रहे थे। 1 बार खाना देते थे। समय निकल गया तो वो भी नसीब नहीं होता था। हमसे जानबूरी जेठ करतब किया जाता था। पैमे मांग लेते तो मारपीट और गाली गलौच करते थे।

**बेल्ट-डंडे से भी मारते थे**

काजल ने बताया कि एक टाइम खाना देते थे और सभी से किसी भी समय उठाकर काम करवाते थे। काम ना करो तो कंपनी के मालिक डंडों और बेल्ट से मारते थे। मेरे साथ मेरी मां, भाई और बच्चे भी हैं, उनके खमने मारपीट करते थे।

**एसएसपी से कर चुके हैं शिकायत**

कंपनी में ही काम करने वाले जीनपुर के रवि ने रायपुर एसएसपी से शिकायत की थी। बताया था कि यह करीब 1 माह से उस फैक्ट्री में काम कर रहा है। जीनपुर निवासी विपिन तिवारी, विकास तिवारी और नितेश तिवारी जो खुद को मशरूम कंपनी का संचालक कहते थे। गाँव, उसकी बहन समेत 8 लोगों को यह कैलेंकर लाए थे कि ज्यादा मेहनत नहीं है। सिर्फ खाना बनाना है, परंतु काम करना है। जब वे फैक्ट्री पहुँचे तो उनसे कभी भी किसी भी समय मशरूम लगाने, काटने, सामान उठाने, परीन चलवाने आदि बेहद कठिन काम करवाता था। रात को नहीं उठते तो मारपीट करते थे। सभी का मोबाइल, पहचान पत्र आदि भी छीन लिया था। काम के बाद पैमे को मांग को जाती थी तो मारपीट करने लगते थे। 2 जुलाई को किसी तरह बचकर भागे और पुलिस के पास पहुँचे। रवि ने बताया, उसकी बहन रश्मीना, रिन्का, सीमा, बबलू, सुनील और दो अयोग्य बच्चों समेत अन्य कई लोगों को वहाँ बंधक बनाकर रखा गया है।

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# Struggle for Dignity, Respect, & Justice



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