

Unaware of rights and benefits, brick kiln workers continue toiling

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HYDERABAD: Over 300 minors were rescued from several brick kiln units across Rachakonda commissionerate in the last three days but at a six and-a-half acre brick kiln site located around 50 km from the city, it was just another bright and sunny day.

While the men were busy mixing the mud collected from Ibrahimpatnam lake bed with water, the women were layering the finished bricks ready to be placed in the bhatti. Engrossed in their work, oblivious to everything that has happened in the last three days, all that they care about is finishing the task at hand.

They are unaware that their children, playing on the worksite and occasionally lifting bricks, should be in a school and that it is against the law to let them wander in these work sites.



A migrant labourer, from Odisha holds her child while taking a break from work at a brick kiln at Ibrahimpatnam in Hyderabad on Thursday | Vinay Madapu

In the last three days, close to 400 children were identified to be spending time in hazardous working conditions and were rescued to be integrated back into schools shortly as part of Operation Smile.

“Where can we leave them?” said a 25-year-old, pointing to the suckling toddler, covered in dust and soot.

“We have to take them along, wherever we go,” she added. Like the 70 others working on the site, she too arrived from Odisha three months ago. Is there a school for the children? “No, nothing,” she shrugged.

Further away, in another corner, a mother of two shared that when they arrived, the ‘seth’ told them that there will be a school in place for the children. “Nothing has been done yet,” she said.

While visible damage to their health is the dust and soot that has now seeped deep into layers of their skin, spending months in spaces such as these can cause more damage.

“There is no clean drinking water. Neither is there fresh water to bathe and get rid of the dirt. Nutritious food is a far-fetched idea. Pregnant and lactating women also come in big numbers to work here and they are also deprived. This is no place for a child to grow up,” pointed Umi Daniel,

who has been working with migrant labour for over 20 years now. He added that the government hadn’t intervened to create safe spaces for children that also help in their learning.

Learning centre promised

The owner of the site, Madhav explained, “We are just returning from a meeting with officials from the education department and owners of other brick kilns. They have asked us to provide them the list of

children along with their age groups after which a learning centre will be set up for all the

children.”Madhav also has a site supervisor whose wife is a teacher.

“We wanted to employ her for the job. The problem is these workers trickle in till the end of January and we are still in the process of getting the names of workers and their children. We were told in the meeting that schools or learning centres will be set up by the end of January,” he added.

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