

## Romero Fund: Pakistan

### Urgent need in Pakistan: Freeing families from bonded labour

#### What is bonded labour?

Bonded labour is a horrific form of slavery, where a person is forced to work in exchange for a loan. Vulnerable and landless families in Pakistan fall into bonded labour by obtaining loans from powerful land and brick factory owners. Due to extortionate interest rates, often their debts increase despite continued labour and are passed from one generation to the next, entrapping entire families into an endless cycle of debt and destitution.

#### Ordinary families are enslaved

A legacy of adult illiteracy is rife amongst the poorest people in Pakistan. Because many of these people cannot read or write the practice of bonded labour is common as people are unaware of their rights and the length of the agreements they enter into. This practice is particularly common in Pakistan's farms and brick factories.

Whilst the pledge of labour is typically made by the head of household the entire family often becomes bonded. Children are also forced to work on farms and in brick factories and denied the right to go to school. This is no place for a child to grow up. The air they breathe in the brick factories is dusty and polluted with chemicals and gases. Heavy bricks are stacked to dry in the blistering heat, with temperatures reaching an average 40 degrees Celsius, before being lifted by hand and placed in kilns. All of this is to reduce their debt by an average of **€2.65 a day**.



"The violence you see in brick kilns... often they [brick kiln owners] rape the girls, especially in District Kasur. You see that they put the workers on the fire and beat them often. They are harassing and sexually harassing the women. They marry the women against their will."

*Syeda Ghulam Fatima, Bonded Labour Liberation Front (Trócaire's partner)*

"It's hard not to become defeated by the sheer scale and inhumanity associated with the practice of bonded labour. There are **more than 2 million people**, equivalent to the population of Leinster, in bonded labour in Pakistan. In meeting people trapped in bonded labour I'm immediately struck by their timid and beaten demeanour. They're oppressed like no other group in Pakistan. But there is hope and we will not give up on these people".

**John O'Brien, Country Director Pakistan, Trócaire**



**What is the Romero Fund?** The Romero Fund aims to raise €2.1 million over three years to tackle urgent human rights abuses and humanitarian needs in DRC, Pakistan, Guatemala and Gaza.

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Trócaire-funded water pump in Dadu, Pakistan.  
Photo: Eoghan Rice/ Trócaire

## What we can do



Syeda Ghulam Fatima says “There is only one solution, that the community should be empowered. They must be united. With the support of Trócaire, we are empowering these workers to fight for their rights. It is the only way. We want justice. We want to punish the culprits and there must be no cruelty with the workers in future. We want to see a future free of bonded labour for Pakistan.”

Photo: Syeda Ghulam with Abbas Ali and his family, who were held in bonded labour in a brick factory in Punjab province. Abbas’s son was shot for standing up for his father.

With your help we can reach even more people in Pakistan through:

- **Legal aid:** Deploying lawyers to file petitions to secure the release of bonded labourers.
- **Healthcare:** Providing preventative health care and raising awareness on hygiene, sanitation practices, immunisation and local health services.
- **Legal documents:** Supporting families to obtain birth certificates, national identity cards and documents so they can access State services and vote in elections.
- **Literacy classes:** Providing functional literacy for adults with teachers drawn from the local community.

€10,000 will provide free legal aid for 100 bonded labourers and their families in Pakistan

### Pakistan Facts

**Population:** 185 million  
**Human Development rank:** 147 out of 187 countries

	Ireland	Pakistan
<b>Life Expectancy</b>	80.9 years	66.2 years
<b>Average Years of Schooling</b>	11.6 years	4.7 years

(Source: UNDP Human Development Index)

**Trócaire in Pakistan since:** 1973

**Impact:** Trócaire’s work in Pakistan directly helped 45,607 people in the last year.

We have helped free 4,566 men and 4,144 women from bonded labour since 2008

**No. of partner organisations:** 16