



## REMEMBER YOUR FIRST JOB?

Chances are, it was much different than that of 14-year-old Sunil. For eight to nine hours daily, he toils in extreme heat at a laterite brick mine in India's Ratnagari district, 224 miles south of Mumbai. He earns just two rupees (four cents) for each of the hundred or so bricks he cuts and hauls each day. Some bricks weigh upward of ninety pounds.

One of every seven children aged 5 to 14 worldwide—250 million people in all—are forced to work in physically or psychologically dangerous jobs, according to UNICEF. As an investigator explains in a recent UN report, “children are naturally more docile, easier to discipline than adults, and too frightened to complain.”

They also come from poor families, especially in India, which has the world's highest number of under-14 laborers—about 80 million. Although the Indian government mandates free education to those between 6 and 14 and prohibits anyone under 14 from working in hazardous environments,

child labor underpins almost all segments of the country's economy. Desperate parents, particularly those from lower castes, feel they have no choice but to put their youngsters to work. Some even sell their children to brick-kiln owners, who then enslave rather than employ the kids. Laboring in harsh conditions, children become chronically exhausted, which raises the probability of workplace accidents and injuries. In addition to being prone to malnutrition, diseases, and permanent skeletal damage, their lack of education ensures a lifetime of poverty.

Many organizations are working toward stopping child labor in India and beyond, and each year they rescue thousands of children from brick mines. But that may be the “simple” part. The main challenge is what to do next. Caring for them and, crucially, providing them with an education remains a herculean task. Perhaps when we all take greater action to solve the real problem of absolute poverty, symptoms like child labor will end.

—Vadim Liberman

PHOTOGRAPHY BY REUTERS/DANISH SIDDIQUI