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# MEASURING JUSTICE AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

## Excerpts From IJR-2025

As we turn a leaf over, at the dawn of another year, we cannot look away from the wars waging around us. Thousands of innocent people have died in avoidable conflicts this year in and around Palestine, Sudan and parts of Africa, Ukraine, Myanmar, Latin America and the Thai-Cambodia border. Closer to home, many lives were lost in terror attacks and cross-border skirmishes.

Another worrisome trend in 2025 was the rise of authoritarianism. Global freedom declined for the 19th consecutive year, according to the Freedom in the World Report 2025. The report, which measures freedom in 195 countries, noted that 34 countries showed improvements, while 60 countries experienced deterioration in their political rights and civil liberties. India's score declined further as it continues to be rated as a "partly free" country due to rising challenges in religious freedom and the right to expression.

Worldwide, the democratic backslide has, predictably, led to a shrinking of human rights, civic spaces, and a weakening of judicial independence. In 2025, a stark 68% countries declined in their rule of law, as compared to 57% in the previous year, according to the World Justice Project. WJP's Rule of Law Index is the world's leading source of data about the rule of law in 143 countries and jurisdictions.

The Rule of Law Index 2025 has warned that more countries are declining and fewer are improving in our world today. What is also on the wane, worryingly, is the independent and legislative oversight of, and the judicial limits on, government powers. We are also learning that it takes a fraction of the time to dismantle institutions that take decades to build.

And that is why independent auditing of state powers—and capacities of the criminal justice system—is crucial to know where we are headed. We must remember that judicial independence and capacity are the citizens' last defence against autocracy and arbitrary use of power. They are also connected with a nation's development and the ease of living, and doing business.

It is in this context that the India Justice Report 2025 must be read. The IJR is an independent, collaborative, and non-partisan initiative to study the rule of law across Indian states. Common Cause is one of the six specialist partners that come together to rank the capacities of the police, judiciary, prisons and legal aid across the states and Union Territories.

The IJR series positions justice as an essential public service. Launched in 2018-19, the report has emerged as an important marker of India's justice system, based on a meaningful analysis of the official statistics. The initiative is driven by the belief that accessibility of the justice system is as essential as its efficiency. And it is in this spirit that the IJR measures the justice delivery capacities of the states and ranks them according to performance against common benchmarks like caste and gender diversity, budget utilisation and the use of human resources.

This issue of your journal presents the excerpts from the India Justice Report 2025. It begins with an overview of the report as well as the whole justice project by its Chief Editor, Ms Maja Daruwala, and her recommendations for policymakers. Being the last issue of 2025, it also carries the Annual Report of Common Cause for its members and well-wishers. As always, your views and comments are welcome. Please write to us at [contact@commoncause.in](mailto:contact@commoncause.in)

With best wishes for a bright and peaceful 2026,

**Vipul Mudgal**  
Editor

# COUNTING PROGRESS, CONFRONTING DEFICITS

## Introduction to India Justice Report 2025

Maja Daruwala \*

*“What gets measured gets improved”*

**--Peter Drucker**

The fourth edition of the India Justice Report (IJR) is all about comparisons, trends, and projections as it continues to assess the structural capacity of 18 large and medium-sized states and 7 small states to deliver justice. To its assessment of police, prisons, legal aid, the judiciary, and state human rights commissions, the report draws attention to forensics, mediation, and disabilities. Decadal comparisons and recent changes capture patterns, highlighting areas where states are making headway or falling behind, as well as allowing for future projections. As always, the IJR relies entirely on official data.

The India Justice Report's time-series assessments reveal a landscape of dynamic change across the spectrum. Occupying the top five places, southern states dominate the latest rankings. Karnataka once again takes the top position and Andhra Pradesh climbs to second position from fifth. Telangana, eleventh in 2019, has retained its third position. Historically strong performers like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have experienced minor

fluctuations but remain within the top five.

In the mid-tier, states like Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha have shown steady gradual improvement. Maharashtra though sees a significant decline from its previously held top position, and Gujarat and Punjab exhibit inconsistent performances.

At the bottom tier, states such as Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal have largely maintained their positions with minor shifts. Notably, Uttar Pradesh rising one rung from the bottom has switched places with West Bengal. Overall, these changes underscore the shifting dynamics of state performance, shaped by evolving governance, economic policies, and other influencing factors.

The rankings of small states reveal a mix of trends. Sikkim consistently retains its top position. Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura occupy the middle ground but Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Goa show a dip in their most recent rankings to 5th, 6th, and 7th places, respectively.

The good news is that, overall,

there has been a steady growth in investment in strengthening the structural capacity of the justice delivery system across all key institutions assessed by the India Justice Report. Budget allocations have risen, with judiciary per capita expenditure improving, and gender diversity within the lower judiciary and police has shown an upward trend as it has among legal aid secretaries and paralegal volunteers. Human resource capacity has seen some progress, with judicial vacancies reducing in select states and forensic staffing receiving renewed attention. Infrastructure improvements include reducing the deficits in court halls, and technology being used to fill critical gaps. Despite rising workloads, subordinate courts have improved case clearance rates, urban police stations have increased in number, and targeted interventions in prisons—such as expanded legal aid, video conferencing, and open prisons—are creating more avenues for decongestion and reform.

### Trends and Ranking

Nevertheless, now four years distant from the severe disruptions of COVID-19, the present assessment finds that

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\* Chief Editor, India Justice Report

the gap between policy and implementation remains. The shocks and shortfalls of the pandemic have not led to radical changes in policy, practice, and procedures, but instead to a gradualist approach of business as usual.

Financial constraints fundamentally shape the structure and efficiency of every subsystem, compelling difficult trade-offs between competing priorities. Over the past decade, budget allocations for police, prisons, legal aid, the judiciary, and forensic services have seen only modest increases. In real terms, these allocations diminish further when adjusted for inflation.

Salaries consume the lion's share of all budgets, leaving minimal scope for infrastructure development, modernisation, or capacity-building. This directly impacts training, which requires duty holders to have a thorough grounding in domain knowledge, job-related norms, procedures, and skills attuned to the positions they occupy.

Adequate investment in training is not merely an expense, but a crucial investment in the effective functioning of the entire justice system. Given the persistent pressure to do more with less, it is imperative that training be prioritised, not marginalised.

A cursory analysis of budgets and training facilities reveals a sparse landscape. Illustratively, national

police training budgets do not exceed 1.25 per cent, with only four states allocating more than 2 per cent. Current data does not capture deeper facts about ranks or numbers trained, course durations, or availability of resource staff, and hence cannot inform policy decisions. Elsewhere, more insights are available. In 2023, the Centre for Research and Planning of the Supreme Court of India, in collaboration with the National Judicial Academy, evaluated judicial training. It analysed quality, emphasised the need for standardising substantive knowledge, and recommended skill development.

## Diversity and Disabilities

India, a diverse agglomeration of marginalised communities, presents a complex challenge to inclusion. From caste groups to women, Dalits, minorities, transgender individuals and persons with disabilities,

“Overall, there has been a steady growth in investment in strengthening the structural capacity of the justice delivery system across all key institutions assessed by the India Justice Report.”

demands for representation within the justice system are ever-present. The aspiration behind affirmative action is to address historical and systemic inequalities faced by marginalised groups. The standard is to repair the gulf in representation of consistently underrepresented groups in all spheres—placing the onus on governments and public authorities to lead the way.

The years have seen some progress, particularly for women and caste groups. The share of women in the police force has grown in all states and Union Territories (UTs), with five states showing a positive trajectory toward achieving 33 per cent representation.<sup>1</sup> The proportion of women judges in subordinate courts has improved in nearly all states, while their presence in legal aid structures as panel lawyers and paralegal volunteers continues to expand. Additionally, caste-based representation formalised through quotas has ensured the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and OBCs mark their presence in the justice eco-system. Nevertheless, leadership positions remain elusive.

One group continues to remain largely invisible within the justice system—persons with disabilities. The nearly decade-old Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD) of 2016 mandates a 4 per cent reservation. While India's legal framework acknowledges the

rights of disabled individuals, systemic inaction has led to their continued exclusion. Within the police, judiciary, and prison administration, the representation of persons with disabilities is negligible, often ignored in recruitment policies or implementation. This leaves them both underrepresented as professionals and underserved as users of justice. True diversity in the justice system requires moving beyond token representation. While strides have been made for women and caste-based inclusion, leadership gaps persist, and disability representation remains an afterthought.

## Judiciary

Persisting vacancies, low case clearance rates and mounting arrears continue to dog the formal court system. By 2024, case accumulation had crossed the five-crore mark—an increase of over 30 per cent across all court levels: an increase that reflects the ongoing challenges with judicial vacancies, procedural inefficiencies, and the influx of new cases each year.

Efforts to improve recruitment speed and compliance with timelines for district judges have constantly been in the public eye, but structural issues like funding shortages, complex procedures, and judicial time to attend to these, while being short-handed, have remained major impediments to repair. Toward standardising recruitment

processes, reducing regional disparities, and ensuring timely appointments in future, the need for an All-India Judicial Service (AIJS), and standardised recruitment calendars has been frequently mooted.

Numbers-wise, this has been one of the few periods in which the Supreme Court has managed to reach its full sanctioned strength of 34 judges several times. Efforts to fill vacancies have seen a record 165 high court judges appointed in 2022—the highest annual appointment rate thus far—with 110 appointments being made in 2023.<sup>2</sup> Yet, over two years (2022 to 2024), high

court vacancies have gone up, and in the lower courts, where most cases originate, they continue to hover around 20 per cent.

Too often, specialisations—fast-track courts, human rights courts, juvenile justice, consumer redressal systems, commercial courts—though recognised as aides to efficiency, fall short of desired outcomes for the same reasons that everyday courts fail: under-resourcing and overburden. Similarly, with shortages of trained personnel and lack of standardised procedures, the promise of mediation as a means of

Practical pathways to improvement have emphasised the use of technology. With the objective of processing significantly higher numbers of new cases and streamlining administrative workload<sup>3</sup>, some focussed initiatives included an emphasis on digitisation and e-governance—pushing for e-filing, setting up E-Sewa Kendras and a case management and information system, digitising court records, and paperless courts. The push for broader transparency saw more live-streaming of proceedings, an expansion of the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), and efforts to further enhance the dashboard's technological infrastructure. NALSA's Legal Service Management System platform now allows litigants to apply for legal aid online and track the status of their cases.<sup>4</sup> Additional video-conferencing facilities at district courts and prisons provided access for individuals unable to attend in person and allowed for prioritisation of urgent cases, especially those involving individuals at risk of prolonged detention.

Optimisation of technological interventions was nevertheless hostage to prevailing power supply and bandwidth, hardware availability, and entrenched cultures. The issue now is whether even the halting momentum in some areas achieved over the last two years—whether amazing or unremarkable—will be carried forward at a steady pace.

decluttering courts and speeding dispute resolution remains potential.

## Police

Nationally, the police-population ratio remained stagnant at 155 police personnel per 100,000 population, significantly below the sanctioned strength of 197<sup>5</sup>. This shortfall varies considerably across states—at just 81 police per lakh Bihar exemplifies the situation. These gaps have far-reaching consequences: investigations take longer, crime prevention efforts falter, and public safety is compromised. Overburdened investigating officers must too often juggle with multiple serious cases—murder, fraud, cybercrime, rape—resulting in investigation backlogs, poor case preparation, uncertain outcomes at court and an accumulation of unresolved crimes that then feed a sense of lawlessness.

Concurrently, demographic shifts over five years have seen a 4 per cent increase in urban police stations and a 7 per cent decrease in rural areas. While urban stations typically cover 20 sq km, rural stations, stretched across over 300 sq km, signal the disparity in accessing policing services.

While progressive policies and legislative reforms are frequently enacted, their impact is often blunted by systemic failures in implementation. For instance, the Supreme Court's 2020 detailed mandate for

CCTV installation in police stations, aimed at enhancing accountability, has seen patchy compliance, with some states even showing an actual decline in compliance. As of early 2023, many police stations still lacked even a single CCTV, let alone meeting the stringent specifications set out in the Paramvir judgment of that year.

## Forensics

Forensic science plays a crucial role in the delivery of justice. Across India, the administrative control and capacity of forensic laboratories varies significantly, raising concerns about their efficiency and impartiality. In several states—such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Karnataka—state forensic science laboratories function under the direct control of the police. This arrangement risks compromising the independence of forensic analysis. Elsewhere, forensic services work under the Home Department, ensuring some degree of institutional separation in forensic investigations.

“*Over the past decade, budget allocations for police, prisons, legal aid, the judiciary, and forensic services have seen only modest increases.*”

Despite their importance, forensic labs across the country face significant capacity constraints. Many suffer from chronic underfunding, outdated infrastructure, and an acute shortage of skilled personnel. The increasing demand for forensic analysis, coupled with limited resources, has led to case backlogs that delay both investigations and trials. Budgetary allocations remain insufficient, and slow recruitment processes exacerbate the shortage of trained experts. Additionally, the lack of adequate regional forensic facilities means that crucial evidence often has to be sent to overburdened state-level laboratories, further prolonging forensic examinations and delaying investigation and trials.

To address these challenges, both the central and state governments have initiated efforts to strengthen forensic capacity. The Union government has proposed setting up regional forensic science laboratories to ease case pendency, while also working to modernise infrastructure and integrate forensic training into law enforcement and judicial processes. Some states have taken independent steps: Tamil Nadu, for one, has expanded its forensic workforce and invested in advanced forensic technology, while Delhi has introduced measures to streamline forensic and autopsy coordination to expedite case resolution. The Centre has also introduced



the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill to establish standardised forensic procedures and enhance the reliability of forensic evidence. Ensuring the long-term effectiveness of these measures will require sustained investment, inter-agency collaboration, and a commitment to keeping forensic science independent, well-resourced, and aligned with the broader goal of justice delivery.

## Prisons

Despite amended legislation, numerous judicial directions, targeted interventions to reduce populations, and the adoption of the Model Prison Manual 2016 by many states, prison conditions remain lamentable. Over the last decade, prison populations have surged by nearly 50 per cent. The proportion of undertrials—people awaiting completion of investigation or trial—has escalated from 66 per cent to 76 per cent.

Nationally, average overcrowding in prisons stands at 131 per cent. But a dozen prisons house four times more inmates than they should. The Amitava Roy Committee points out in its 2023 report to the court (*Re Inhuman Conditions in 1,382 Prisons*) that only 68 per cent of inmates have adequate sleeping space. Though budgets have increased, human resources and infrastructure simply cannot keep pace. All too often a single doctor is available for hundreds of inmates, grossly exceeding

“*The share of women in the police force has grown in all states and Union Territories (UTs), with five states showing a positive trajectory toward achieving 33 per cent representation*”

the stipulated benchmark of 300 inmates per doctor. A lack of trained welfare officers, social workers, and psychologists ensures prisoners often leave in a worse condition than when they entered, increasing recidivism and further burdening the justice system. The Amitava Roy Committee’s ringing exhortations to “act with committed sincerity and resolute responsibility in a mission mode with vision and passion” remain unattainable without the fundamental raw materials of adequate financial, infrastructure, and human resource capacity. Until then prisons must remain holding pens far distant from the centres of reform and rehabilitation envisioned in the Model Prison and Correctional Services Act of 2023.

## Legal Aid

This period has seen legal aid emphasise support for specific mechanisms, such as the Legal Aid Defence Counsel

(LADC) system, jail clinics, and the careful calibration of timelines and funds for National Lok Adalats. This focus on targeted interventions has been accompanied by a significant shrinkage of resources for broader, community-based interventions. Consequently, the number of paralegal volunteers has trimmed down, the broader legal awareness mandate has been deprioritised, and taluka-level legal advice and counselling centres, important points of access for distant communities, are now all but defunct.

This shift in direction, while beneficial in addressing specific concerns like prisoner representation, may inadvertently neglect another foundational pillar of legal services—the widespread need for basic legal information and accessible localised support—potentially worsening existing inequalities in access to justice.

## State Human Rights Commissions

The India Justice Report 2022 (published in 2023) assessed the capacity of State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs) to effectuate their broad mandates for the first time. Two years on, their functioning remains underscored by a recurring theme of gaps between their intended mandate and actual capability on the ground.

Incremental improvements measured through basic metrics



such as enhanced budget utilisation, advancements in gender diversity, and improved case disposal rates, have a significant impact on rankings. For instance, West Bengal's SHRC has risen from the bottom to first place due to these changes. However, this does not in itself signal an ability to deliver quality functionality. For instance, impressively high disposal rates of over 80 per cent across SHRCs are misleading as the figure is mainly made up of complaints that are rejected at the outset rather than any institutional effort at comprehensive and early resolution of grievances.

Finally, SHRCs do little to help their own image or functionality by frequently failing to update websites, publish detailed case and diversity statistics or to publish timely annual reports. A reluctance to respond to RTI queries that require little more than access to public data, as well impedes public accountability, obscures operational deficits and good practice, and leaves much of their functioning beyond public scrutiny.

## Conclusion

India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 includes ambitious targets for gender equality, reduced inequalities, peace, justice, and strong institutions. While some progress is likely in certain areas, particularly improved access to justice that

is driven by digitisation and increased legal awareness, full achievement across all goals will remain a challenge. Women's participation in the justice system may rise, though parity is unlikely given the current pace of change. Assuring justice for all will also remain an aspiration despite targeted programmes, as capacity deficits and implementation gaps will persist. Significant progress is most achievable where policy reforms are combined with technology and increased public awareness. Ultimately, transformative change requires sustained effort, increased investment, and a holistic approach to addressing complex social and economic inequalities.

In the time between 2022 and 2024, post the disruptions of Covid, there has been a national election and a series of state elections. Governments have changed and with this have assumed the responsibility of improving and making the justice delivery systems fit for purpose.

Valuable initiatives aimed at

“**Forensic labs across the country face significant capacity constraints. Many suffer from chronic underfunding, outdated infrastructure, and an acute shortage of skilled personnel**”

strengthening India's justice system are evident in the implementation of mechanisms like the Under-Trial Review Committees (UTRCs), Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) committees, Legal Aid Defense Counsel (LADC) systems, and the new compulsory forensic investigation in serious crime cases mandated in the Bhartiya Nagrik Surakhsha Sanhita. While each addresses distinct facets of justice delivery, they reflect an effort to address long-term challenges. To stand strong they need a solid foundation of structural capacity.

Illustratively, sudden infusions of technology alone cannot be relied upon. Nor is its introduction any guarantee of reductions in workload stress. For example, the introduction of video-conferencing in prisons may have reduced time and cost to administrators who no longer have to expend time and personnel to ferry hundreds of prisoners back and forth from courts in district after district, but given the ever-increasing figures of inmates awaiting trial, there is nothing to show that it has sped up the delivery of justice. Meanwhile, its potential for improving medical attention and expanding education possibilities in prison is yet to be realised.

Out of necessity, constrained finances require duty holders to do more with less. Inevitably, limited financial resources demand that those responsible for service delivery maximise

While a perfectly funded system may remain an aspirational ideal, the guiding principle should be resource allocation that generates equitable benefits across all public goods.

efficiency and achieve more with fewer resources. It is logical then to prioritise increased spending and systemic improvements only in areas yielding the greatest positive impact for the largest number of citizens.

Data can help with this. Disaggregated, consistent, timely and accurate data, accessible and compiled year-on-year in one place in relation to justice delivery, provides the basis for policy makers to frame future directions and identify priorities within a complex set of interdependent operations. Digital initiatives like e-Prisons and digitised court records offer potential for improved data utilisation, but a fragmented ecosystem of data sources makes cross-referencing and correlation difficult, hindering the ability to draw meaningful conclusions to base overall policy or pinpoint pain points that need priority intervention.

Weak institutions breed injustice.

Persistent institutional deficits hinder the fair application of law, creating a system where some individuals or groups are more vulnerable to unfair treatment, while others may enjoy impunity. Over time, when the system is unable to address this pattern of inconsistent application of the law, it erodes public trust and leads to a tacit acceptance that the rule of law is not a priority.

The problems of overall capacity deficits, impossible arrears, overfull jails, and inadequate avenues of legal redress have culminated in creating a ‘wicked problem’—multifaceted, deeply challenging, and inviting no single definite pathway to a complete solution; a problem so big from every angle that the solution is not one but many. Multiple efforts need to move forward at the same time and together before solutions can take shape and build momentum.

Even then, the problem may

not go away but morph into other forms. Yet, endeavour will defeat stasis and accumulation, and we will not be where we began. As India moves forward into a hundred years of being a democratic, rule of law nation, making the justice system ‘better’, envisions a system that is more accessible, equitable, efficient, and responsive to the needs of the people it serves—a system that truly lives up to the ideals of the Constitution and works tirelessly to ensure that justice is not only done but is seen to be done.

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# National Deficits



## Police

**50%**

Vacancy among the 10,000-odd forensic staff across the country



**1.25%**

National average share of training budget in police budget

**0**

States/ UTs that meet their own reserved quotas for women in the police



## Prisons

**176**

Prisons with 200% and above occupancy

**20**

states/UTs

Over 20% undertrials detained for 1-3 years.

**25**

psychologists/ psychiatrists for 5.7 lakh prisoners in the country. 25 states/UTs sanctioned none.



## Judiciary

**Karnataka:** Only state to meet SC, ST and OBC quotas in judiciary and police

**6**

High Courts have had annual case clearance rates above 100% since 2017



## SHRC

Only **4%** of total cases are initiated suo moto.



## Legal Aid

**38%**

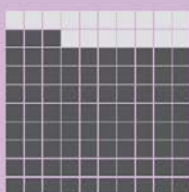
Drop in number of paralegal volunteers since 2019





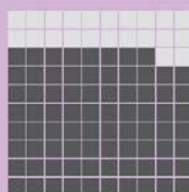
# Good News

## Police



**83%**

of all police stations in the country have at least one CCTV camera



**78%**

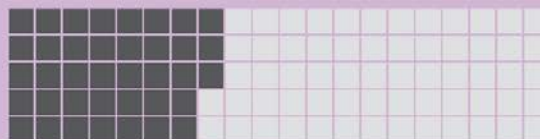
of all police stations have women helpdesks

## Judiciary



**38%**

Share of women judges in district judiciary

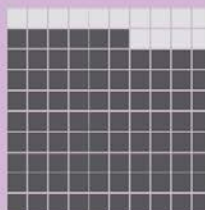


## Prisons



**8**

States meet the **1:300 benchmark** of women inmates per women medical officers



**86%**

Share of prisons equipped with at least one video conferencing facility

# IJR-NATIONAL FINDINGS

## A Timely Call For Action

The India Justice Report 2025 offers a comprehensive national assessment of how effectively states are equipping their justice delivery institutions. Drawing on two years of data from authoritative government sources, this fourth edition of the report evaluates performance across four pillars of the justice system--police, judiciary, prisons, and legal aid. Within these pillars, trends in human resources, diversity, workload, budgets, and infrastructure are analysed. While some incremental improvements are visible, the report underscores that deep structural and capacity gaps continue to constrain access to justice.

### Personnel and Infrastructure Shortages

Across the country, the justice system is constrained by acute

“**Across the country, the justice system is constrained by acute shortages. India has only 15 judges for every 10 lakh people, far below the Law Commission’s recommended 50**”

shortages. India has only 15 judges for every 10 lakh people, far below the Law Commission’s recommended 50. More than 1 in 3 posts remain vacant at the high courts, while district courts report about 1 in 5 posts vacant. These shortages translate into overwhelming caseloads; some high court judges handle as many as 15,000 cases each, while district judges manage an average of 2,200 cases.

The police system faces similar systemic strain. With just 120 police personnel per lakh against a benchmark of 222, officer-level vacancies stand at 28 per cent and constabulary vacancies at 21 per cent.

The prison system remains overcrowded and under-resourced. National occupancy rates exceed 131 per cent, and 1 in every 3 prisons in Uttar Pradesh record occupancy levels above 250 per cent. Shortages within prison staff are severe, including 28 per cent vacancies among officers and cadre staff, 44 per cent among correctional staff, and 43 per cent among medical officers. There needs to be one doctor for every 300 prisoners, but presently there is only one for every 775. Forensic services are also hampered, with nearly half of administrative and scientific posts vacant. These

“**The prison system remains overcrowded and under-resourced. National occupancy rates exceed 131 per cent, and 1 in every 3 prisons in Uttar Pradesh record occupancy levels above 250 per cent.**”

deficits sharply limit the capacity of the justice system to provide timely and effective services.

### Diversity

Representation of women and marginalised communities shows limited progress. Although the overall presence of women in policing has increased slightly to 12 per cent, their numbers remain extremely low in senior positions. Of the 2.42 lakh women in police nationwide, only 960 hold IPS-rank posts, and women constitute just 8 per cent of all officers. Nearly 90 per cent of women police personnel are concentrated in the constabulary. No state or union territory meets the 33 per cent representation benchmark for women in police.

Social diversity also remains uneven. While almost three out

of every five police personnel come from SC, ST, or OBC communities, their presence thins dramatically at senior ranks, falling to about 1 out of 6 officers. In the district judiciary, only 5 per cent of judges belong to ST communities and 14 per cent to SCs, and of the 698 judges appointed to high courts since 2018, only 37 come from SC/ST backgrounds.

## Improvements

Certain infrastructural indicators show gradual improvement. A larger proportion of prisons now have video-conferencing facilities (86%), courts have seen a marginal reduction in courtroom shortages (14.5%), and police stations equipped with CCTVs have increased (83%). Most police stations now have Women Help Desks (78%).

Yet several areas remain cause for concern. India's undertrial population continues to grow, and more than two-thirds of prisoners are undertrials (76%). They are spending longer periods in custody, with the share of those incarcerated for three to five years doubling over the last decade, and those detained

“***The legal aid system shows a complex picture of improvement and decline. Per capita spending on legal aid has increased from Rs. 4.57 in IJR 3 (2022) to Rs. 6.46 per person, but the number of community-based paralegal volunteers has fallen sharply***”

for more than five years have tripled. Rural police stations have declined significantly, while the number of urban stations has increased. The availability of legal aid in rural areas has also weakened as village legal aid clinics have decreased.

The legal aid system shows a complex picture of improvement and decline. Per capita spending on legal aid has increased from Rs. 4.57 in IJR 3 (2022) to Rs. 6.46 per person, but the number of community-based paralegal volunteers has fallen sharply—dropping by 38 per cent in five years. Only one-third of

trained volunteers are actually deployed. Budgetary allocations across justice institutions vary considerably. While police spending has grown by 55 per cent over six years and now stands at nearly Rs. 1,300 per capita, spending on the judiciary and prisons remains far lower. Training budgets continue to be minimal, with police forces dedicating only 1.25 per cent of their expenditure to training.

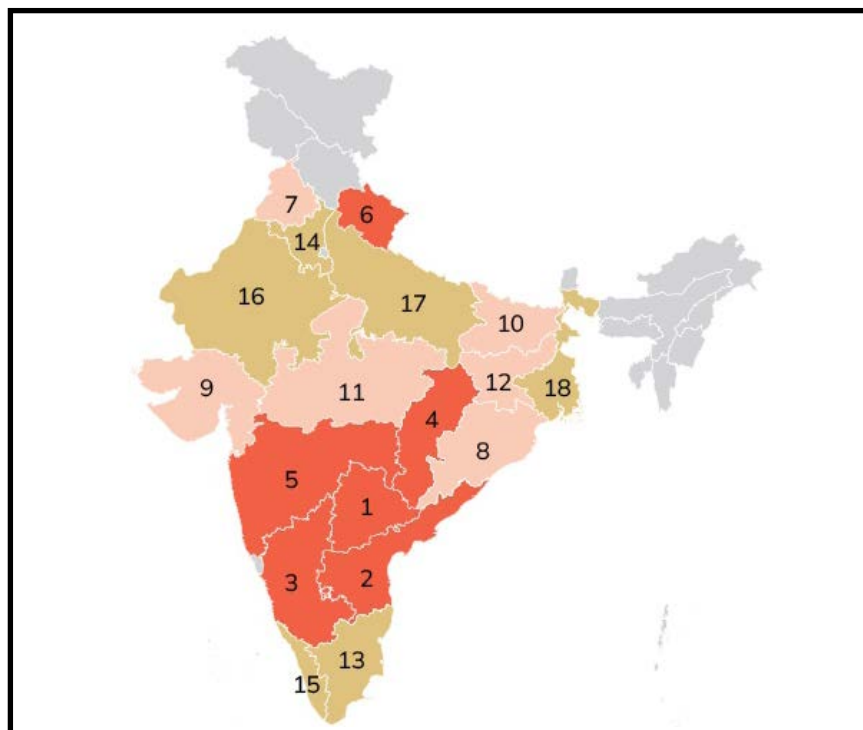
## Conclusion

Overall, the India Justice Report 2025 presents a clear call to action. Incremental improvements in infrastructure and certain performance metrics cannot compensate for deep and persistent gaps in staffing, diversity, and institutional capacity. States need to fill vacancies urgently, improve representation, increase investment in training, strengthen undertrial review mechanisms, and designate justice delivery as an essential public service. Without comprehensive, long-term reform, the constitutional guarantee of equal access to justice will remain beyond reach for large sections of the population.



# WHY CAPACITY FAILS POLICING?

## A State-wise Ranking



*Ranking of States on the basis of police capacity*

### Human Resources

India's police force remains deeply constrained by vacancies and uneven distribution. As of January 2023, the sanctioned strength of civil police across the country stood at 21 lakh, with 16.6 lakh constables and the rest being officers – ranging from Assistant Sub-Inspectors to Director General of Police. Yet the actual strength was just over 16 lakh, leaving a persistent shortfall. Nationally, the vacancy rate has hovered between 21–23 per cent for years, with officer posts facing a sharper deficit of 28 per cent compared to 21 per

cent among constables.

The picture varies widely across states. At the constabulary level, West Bengal reported a staggering 41 per cent shortfall, while Uttarakhand had almost none, at just 0.6 per cent. Only nine states managed to keep vacancies below 10 per cent; elsewhere, gaps ranged from 13 to 39 per cent.

### Population per civil police:

As of January 2023, one police person (civil and district armed combined) served 831 people nationwide, unchanged from 2022. In seven states and UTs, each officer served more than

1,000 people. Punjab fared best among large states, with one police person for every 504 people, while Bihar was worst, with one for every 1,522 people.

### Infrastructure

#### Police Stations and CCTVs:

Infrastructure gaps compound human resource shortages. In 2020, the Supreme Court's Paramvir Singh Saini ruling mandated CCTV installation in all police stations, with strict specifications: night-vision capability, 12–18 months of storage, and coverage of 14 locations including entry points, corridors, lockups, and inspector rooms. By January 2023, 83 per cent of police stations reported at least one CCTV, up 10 percentage points from the previous year. Fourteen states achieved near-universal coverage (90–99 per cent), but others lagged badly. Manipur had just 4 per cent coverage, while Puducherry and Lakshadweep reported none.

**Women's Help Desks:** Women's help desks, intended to provide accessible support for survivors of crime, require at least one woman officer, ideally above head constable rank, supported by external networks of lawyers, psychologists, and NGOs. Their effectiveness is undermined by the low overall representation of women in the police. Still,

progress has been steady: from 59 per cent of police stations in 2021 to 78 per cent in 2023. Urban stations reported higher coverage (91 per cent) than rural ones (87 per cent).

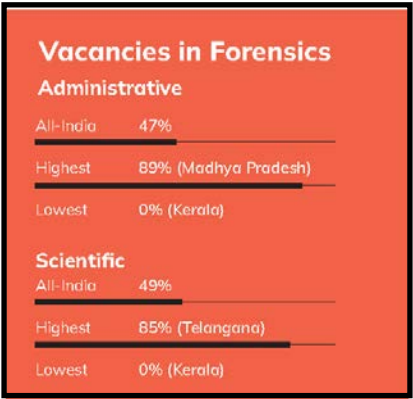
The biggest gains came from Meghalaya, Bihar, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh. Yet five states and UTs—including Jharkhand, Lakshadweep, and Nagaland—still had fewer than 60 per cent of stations equipped.

**Population per police station:**

Police stations are the public’s first point of contact with the justice system. Between 2017 and 2023, both urban and rural stations saw rising workloads. A rural station that served 83,000 people in 2017 now serves nearly 100,000. In cities, the average jumped from 74,000 to over 93,000. The disparities are stark: an urban station in Arunachal serves just 8,500 people, while one in Gujarat covers 2.8 lakh. In Kerala and Maharashtra, averages exceed 2 lakh per station.

**Area per police station:**

Geographic coverage has also worsened. Rural police stations declined by 735 between 2017 and 2023, forcing remaining ones to cover far larger areas. The National Police Commission recommends 150 sq. km per rural station, but Assam averages 821 sq. km—nearly nine times the benchmark. Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan also exceed 600 sq. km. Urban stations, by contrast, cover an average of just 19.6 sq. km.



**Forensics:** Globally, forensic units are required to function independently of police establishments. However, in India, state forensic units are funded as part of police budgets and often supervised by senior police officers. As of 2023, India had 711 forensic facilities, including state and regional labs and district mobile units. Together, they had a sanctioned staff strength of 7,997, but half the posts lay vacant. According to a 2023 report, 3.6 lakh cases were pending in various forensic laboratories across 26 states.

Moreover, scientific staff only comprise one-third of the sanctioned staff, with first responders to a crime scene, responsible for its processing, have the least number of scientific staff sanctioned to them. There are just 341 scientific staff across 582 units with Telangana (91%), Bihar (85%), and Uttarakhand (80%) registering the highest vacancies.

**Budgets**

**Spend on police per person:** Budgetary allocations remain skewed toward salaries and

pensions. In 2015–16, the average spend per police person was Rs. 823; by 2022–23, it had risen to Rs. 1,275. Yet over 90 per cent of police budgets go to recurring expenses, leaving little for modernisation, equipment, or capacity-building.

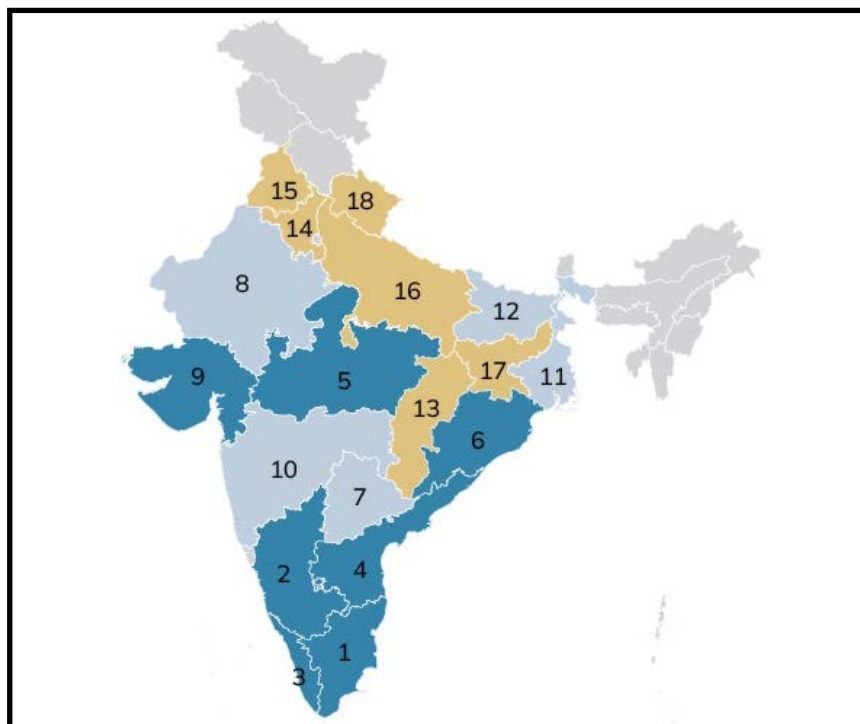
**Diversity**

**Gender:** The national benchmark for women’s representation in the police is 33 per cent. While many states align their quotas with 33 per cent, many set their own quotas, which range from 10 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya to 35 per cent in Bihar. As of December 2023, Goa, Kerala, Ladakh, Manipur, and Mizoram had no reservations at all. Bihar leads among large states with 24 per cent women, ahead of Andhra Pradesh at 22 per cent. Yet 17 states and UTs report women’s representation below 10 per cent.

**Caste:** Caste-based reservations show mixed outcomes. Karnataka stands out as the only state consistently meeting its targets across SC, ST, and OBC categories at both officer and constabulary levels. Gujarat, Manipur, and Himachal Pradesh fulfilled SC quotas across ranks. Bihar, Himachal, and Karnataka performed well on ST representation. For OBCs, nine states and UTs met their quotas. Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, and Kerala have over 40 per cent reservation for OBCs, though Kerala and Sikkim still fell short of their targets.

# Where are Prison Reforms?

## Growing Concerns and Challenges



*Ranking of States on the basis of prison capacity*

The landscape of prison reform in India is marked by a constant stream of directions from the Supreme Court, high courts, and government circulars. These cover issues ranging from overcrowding and poor living conditions to deaths in custody, the treatment of women and children inside prisons, and the need for rehabilitation services. Yet despite this volume of guidance, the absence of clear statutory policy that firmly shifts the philosophy of incarceration from retribution to rehabilitation has meant little substantive change.

The 2016 Model Prison Manual was intended to modernise prison administration, but in practice, everyday functioning continues to be guided by the colonial-era Prisons Act of 1894. This outdated legal framework, combined with entrenched security-first mindsets, dilapidated infrastructure, and chronic financial shortfalls, has prevented prisons from evolving into rehabilitative institutions.

Between 2012 and 2022, prison populations rose sharply from 3.8 lakh to 5.7 lakh. Occupancy rates climbed from 112 per

cent to 131 per cent, and the proportion of undertrials increased from 66 per cent to 76 per cent. These trends highlight the growing strain on prison systems and the failure to address structural weaknesses.

### Infrastructure

**Occupancy rates:** Overcrowding remains the defining feature of Indian prisons. In 2020, 48 per cent of prisons were overcrowded; by 2022, this had risen to 55 per cent. Alarming, 12 prisons recorded occupancy rates above 400 per cent. Since 2021, 16 states and six UTs reported rising occupancy, with Mizoram (79% to 116%), Chandigarh (80% to 107%) and Himachal Pradesh (75% to 101%) showing the steepest increases. The largest decreases were registered by Sikkim (167% to 149%), Jharkhand (121% to 111%), and Odisha (99% to 83%).

Nationally, prison housing capacity grew by 27 per cent over the decade, but this has not kept pace with demand. In 2012, 17 states and UTs had overcrowded prisons; by 2022, the number had risen to 25.

### Share of Undertrial Prisoners:

Much of the overcrowding is driven by 'undertrials', i.e., prisoners awaiting investigation or trial. Their proportion had



risen from 66 per cent in 2012 to 76 per cent in 2022. Ninety per cent of prisoners in Delhi are undertrials. Amongst larger states, Bihar reports the highest share among large states at 89 per cent, followed by Odisha at 85 per cent. Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh fare better, with 55 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively.

In 2024, the Supreme Court suggested open prisons as a partial solution. Seventeen states now have 91 open prisons, with Rajasthan alone accounting for 41. Eligible convicts must have served minimum sentences and demonstrated good behaviour.

**Period of detention:** On an average, undertrials are spending more time than ever before in pre-trial detention. By 2022, 11,448 had been detained for more than five years—up from 5,011 in 2019 and 2,028 in 2012. Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for nearly 40 per cent of these long-term undertrials. Nationally, 22 per cent of undertrials spent one to three years incarcerated, a proportion that has risen steadily across most states.

## Human Resources and Workload

Staff shortages remain acute. In 2022, most states/UTs had one in 4 posts vacant. At the officer level, 11 states/UTs recorded over 40 per cent vacancies, with Uttarakhand recording the highest at 69 per cent. Nationally, cadre staff vacancies,



including warders and prison guards have hovered at around 28 per cent for a decade. Jharkhand consistently reported vacancies above 65 per cent. Only Tamil Nadu (7%) and Arunachal Pradesh (2%) kept vacancies in single digits.

**Correctional staff:** Correctional staff comprise of probation officers, social workers and psychologists. Over the last decade their vacancies have remained at around 45 per cent. To meet the benchmark set by the Model Prison Manual (2016)—one correctional staff for every 200 prisoners—there need to be 2,866 correctional officers

across the country; in reality, there are only 820.

**Medical Staff:** Medical staffing is equally inadequate. Between 2012 and 2022, sanctioned posts for doctors rose from 1,052 to 1,290, but actual strength increased only from 618 to 740. Vacancies remained around 41 per cent. The benchmark is one doctor per 300 prisoners, but the reality is one per 775. Only Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Meghalaya were able to meet the benchmark; most states fall short.

## Diversity

The number of women prisoners rose by 40 per cent between 2012 and 2022, but female staff representation remains low. Women comprise just 13 per cent of prison staff, up from 8 per cent a decade earlier. Their staff numbers fell slightly from 8,881 to 8,674, with 90 per cent of women employed at the non-gazetted level.

## Budgets

Sanctioned budgets for prisons rose from Rs. 3,275 crore in 2012 to Rs. 8,725 crore in 2022. Twenty-three states/UTs recorded more than 90 per cent utilisation of their allocated budgets, with Tamil Nadu, Himachal and Arunachal Pradesh achieving full utilisation.

**Spend per inmate:** Nationally, India spends Rs. 121/day per inmate. The three highest spending states were Andhra

Pradesh (Rs. 733), Haryana (Rs. 437), and Delhi (Rs. 407). The lowest spends were Mizoram (Rs. 5), Maharashtra (Rs. 47), and Punjab (Rs. 49).

While the philosophy of incarceration has, on paper, moved from retributive

to rehabilitative, fiscally rehabilitation seems a distant dream. Overall, only 0.13 per cent of total expenditure was used for vocational and educational facilities and only 0.27 per cent was spent on welfare activities. Chandigarh

spent 10.6 per cent on vocational and educational facilities, the highest nationally; and West Bengal spent 3.5 per cent on welfare activities. Thirteen states record no expenditure on either vocational, educational or welfare activities in 2022.

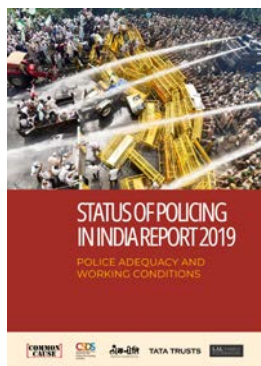
## Download the Status of Policing in India Reports



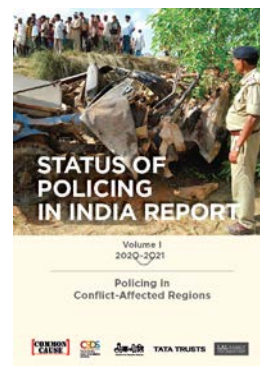
Scan to Download



People's trust and satisfaction with the police and systemic bias against the vulnerable.



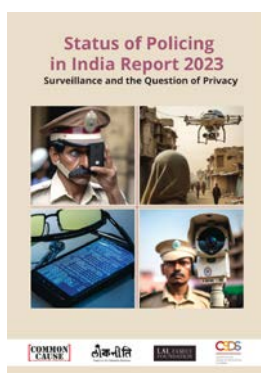
Working conditions, systemic deficits & attitudes towards common people



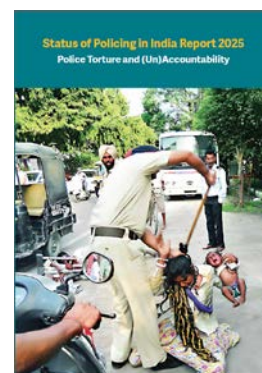
Experiences and perceptions on policing in conflict-affected regions, surveys



Policing during the pandemic and the national lockdown, nationwide surveys



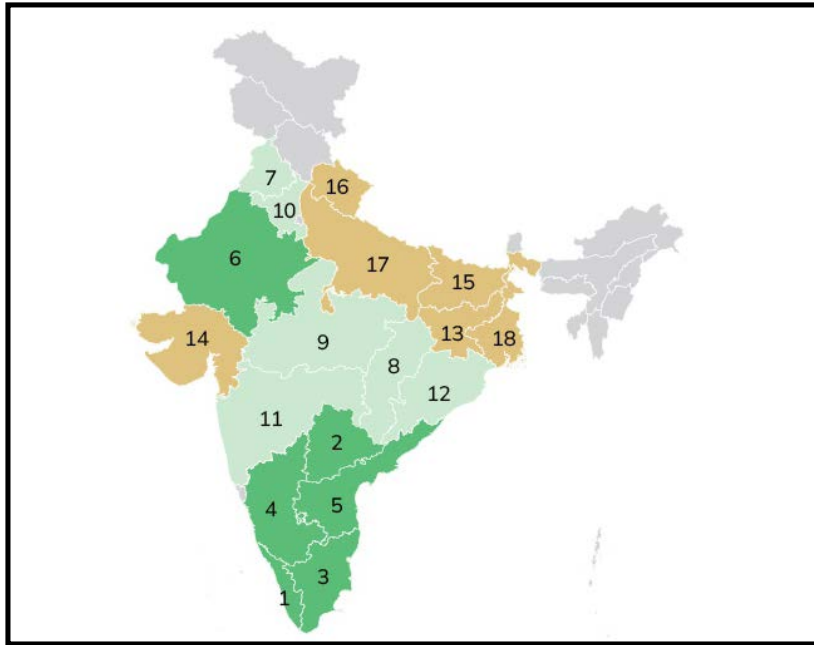
The use of surveillance tech and the right to privacy, surveys



Routinisation of/ justification for custodial torture, deaths & human rights violations

# THE STATE OF JUDICIARY

## Rising Workload & Capacity Conundrums



*Ranking of States on the basis of judiciary capacity*

### Introduction

At the end of 2024, a persistent lack of capacity hindered justice delivery. Court hall shortages stayed around 15 per cent against sanctioned strength of judges. Judicial spending rose slightly. Subordinate courts improved clearance rates, while high courts' clearance rates declined. Gender diversity showed a slow but positive rise.

The number of pending cases at the end of 2024 reached 5 crores, up nearly 20 per cent since 2020. Meanwhile, judge vacancies in high courts and district courts changed little and continue to hover around 33 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively. As of January 2025,

over half of cases in both high and district courts had been pending for more than three years.

Some states recorded significant improvements. Andhra Pradesh rose seven places from eleventh. Rajasthan had the biggest upward jump from seventeenth (2022) to sixth—driven by higher per capita spending, reduced High Court vacancies, better population-per-judge ratios, and stronger clearances.

### Human Resources

In January 2025, India had 21,285 sitting judges across all courts, including the Supreme Court. That's an increase since 2022, but still well below

the officially approved total of 26,927 posts. Based on population projections of March 2025, there are currently 15 judges for every 10 lakh people. Even if the sanctioned strength were met, there would still only be 19 judges per 10 lakh people – well below the 1987 Law Commission recommendation of 50 judges per 10 lakh people.

**High Courts:** Between 2016-17 and 2025, the overall sanctioned strength of high court judges fell from 1,136 to 1,122. Vacancies have fallen over time from about two in five posts to roughly one in three. In 2025, 16 out of 25 high courts had one in four judges missing. Allahabad reported 51 per cent vacancies – the highest amongst all states.

**High Court Staff:** Staff vacancies remain largely unchanged, averaging around 25 per cent. In 2025, 13 high courts recorded staff vacancies between 20 per cent and just under 50 per cent. Only Andhra Pradesh saw a major reduction –from 51 per cent in 2022 to 18 per cent in 2025 – after setting up its new High Court in 2019.

**Subordinate Courts:** The vast majority of cases begin and end at the lower courts. Yet, the sanctioned strength stands at 25,771 – an average of 18 judges per 10 lakh population. Between 2022 and 2025, 17 states/UTs reduced their district judge



vacancies; 12 saw an increase; six remained unchanged.

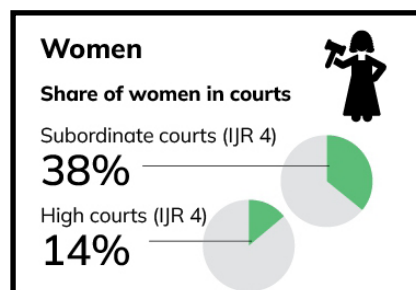
## Infrastructure

Among the large states, Haryana and Chhattisgarh had a deficit of one in every four court halls. Between 2022 and 2025, 19 states/UTs reduced the gap between sanctioned strength and the required court halls, with Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh showing significant improvements. Conversely, 11 states/UTs still face deficits of over 25 per cent, and only three states and one UT have sufficient court halls in 2025.

## Diversity

**Gender Diversity:** Women constitute 37.4 per cent of all judges. Their presence was stronger in the lower courts (38%) than in the high courts (14%). Of the 21,253 judges at the high and district courts, just under 8,000 are women - 106 in the high courts and 7,852 at district courts. The high courts of Meghalaya, Tripura, and Uttarakhand recorded no women on their benches, but register a high share of women in their subordinate courts.

Nagaland improved the most from 20 per cent to 63 per cent, followed by Mizoram (21% to 51%) and Arunachal Pradesh (0% to 33%). Among the large states, Rajasthan (27% to 42%) and Bihar (12% to 27%) show the most improvement. The subordinate courts of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Dadra & Nagar Haveli



and Daman & Diu are the only jurisdictions that record no women judges.

## Caste Diversity:

Data on caste representation in high courts is limited, but parliamentary records show that of nearly 700 judges appointed since 2018, only a small share came from Scheduled Castes (22), Scheduled Tribes (15), Other Backward Classes (87), and minority communities (37). Telangana met its quotas for OBCs and STs, while states like Ladakh (588%), Chandigarh (148%), Andhra Pradesh (111%), Karnataka (110%), and Assam (100%) exceeded their SC quotas.

## Workload

Despite repeated recommendations over decades – from the Law Commission in 1958, 1987, and 2009, and a Supreme Court study in 2016 – case backlogs remain severe. Of the 5.1 crore cases pending across high courts and district courts in January 2025, 12 per cent have been pending for more than 10 years and 22 per cent for five to 10 years. On an average, 61 per cent of high court cases and 46 per cent of district court cases have been

pending for more than three years. An additional 82,000 matters are pending in the Supreme Court.

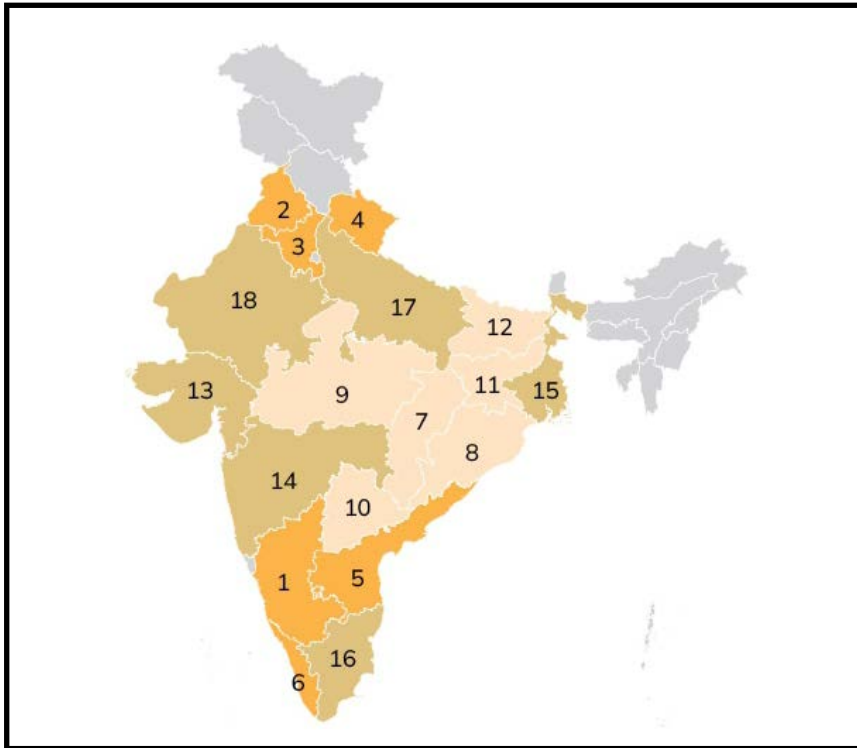
Uttar Pradesh records 4.5 lakh cases pending for more than 10 years, followed by Maharashtra (1.7 lakh) and Madhya Pradesh (1.4 lakh). In all high courts, with the exception of Karnataka, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, and Tripura, one in two matters has been pending for more than three years; in the Allahabad High Court, this applies to 71 per cent of all matters.

In district courts of 26 states/UTs, one in three cases has been pending for more than three years, with Bihar recording the highest proportion at 71 per cent. Seven states and UTs have more than 10 per cent matters pending for more than 10 years. Bihar (22%) and West Bengal (20%) also had the largest share of cases pending for over 10 years.

**Case Clearance Rates:** A case clearance rate (CCR) of more than 100 per cent reduces backlog. Nationally high courts averaged a CCR of 94 per cent in 2024. Ten high courts cleared more cases than they received, with Jharkhand, Tripura, Punjab & Haryana, Madras, Telangana, Odisha and West Bengal, achieving this feat for three years in a row. Between 2020 and 2024, 15 high courts steadily improved their CCRs, especially Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. However, CCRs declined in 11 high courts, with Manipur and Sikkim showing the sharpest falls.

# IS FREE LEGAL AID WORKING?

For the Poor or The Poor Legal Aid?



*Ranking of States on the basis of legal aid capacity*

Legal aid – free legal services for those unable to afford representation – remains a cornerstone of meaningful access to justice. In recent years, there has been a progress: campaign-style outreach has raised awareness and overall system reach has expanded. Between April 2023 and March 2024, the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) reported providing legal aid to 15.5 lakh people, up from 12 lakh in 2019. State and central budgets have expanded, Lok Adalat disposals remain steady, and

targeted interventions, especially mediation, have widened access. Jail-based legal clinics have increased, the Legal Aid Defence Counsel (LADC) system has rolled out nationally, and gender diversity among legal aid personnel has improved.

Yet, several structural concerns persist. Funds are not always optimally used, human resources remain unevenly deployed, and quality control continues to be challenging. While new modes of access, such as a national toll-free helpline and single-window online applications represent

important shifts, the decline of village-level legal aid clinics and the shrinking cadre of paralegal volunteers raises serious concerns about accessibility for the most marginalised communities.

## Human Resources

India's legal aid system is vast but unevenly staffed. As of December 2024, there are 709 District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) and 2,376 Taluka Committees. Although the 25 ranked states comprise 586 judicial districts, NALSA records 615 DLSAs due to administrative variations. For example, Arunachal Pradesh has 25 DLSAs for 7 districts, and Sikkim has 6 for 4 districts. Yet only 582 sanctioned posts exist for full-time secretaries, leaving many authorities without mandated leadership. Uttar Pradesh (71 posts for 74 DLSAs), Kerala (13 for 14), Sikkim (2 for 6), Arunachal Pradesh (5 for 25), and Mizoram (none for 8) highlight this mismatch.

## Lawyers

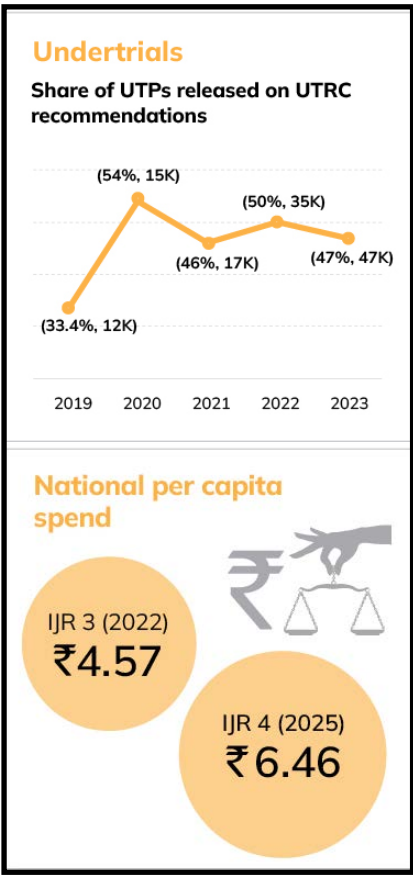
Empanelled lawyers have declined sharply. In September 2024, 41,553 lawyers were on panels – a 17 per cent drop since 2022 and 35 per cent since 2019, likely reflecting the shift toward the public-defender-style LADC model. Distribution remains uneven: Tamil Nadu

(32 districts) had 4,247 panel lawyers, and Maharashtra (34 districts) had 3,401. In contrast, Madhya Pradesh (50 districts) had 1,593, and Uttar Pradesh (74 districts) only 1,871. Although 6,715 serve as remand lawyers, their geographic deployment is undocumented.

### Paralegal Volunteers (PLVs)

The steepest human resource decline concerns PLVs. Regulations require at least 50 PLVs per district, amounting to 35,450 for 709 DLSAs. In 2019, there were 69,290 PLVs; by September 2024, only 43,050 remained. Seven states recorded declines exceeding 60 per cent, including Himachal Pradesh (97 per cent fall), Goa (81 per cent), and Tamil Nadu (73 per cent). The PLV-to-population ratio has halved from six per lakh population to three.

Only 14,691 PLVs are “deployed” in police stations, prisons, front offices, and child protection institutions, with Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra accounting for 43 per cent of them. Karnataka, despite reporting 5,000 PLVs, recorded only 11 deployed. Attrition is driven by low recognition, inadequate training, resource constraints, heavy caseloads, and the absence of remuneration or career pathways. Many PLVs, particularly in remote areas, work in isolation with limited institutional support.



### Diversity

The legal aid system displays much greater gender diversity than the police, prisons, or judiciary. As of March 2024, women constituted 31 per cent of DLSA member-secretaries, with seven states recording 60 per cent. Only Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Rajasthan had no women in the post. Among PLVs, women’s representation rose from 36 in 2019 to 42 per cent in 2024.

Transgender representation, however, has sharply declined. From 587 transgender PLVs in 2022, only 139 remained by

2024 – a reduction of more than 76 per cent. Maharashtra dropped from 183 to just seven. Karnataka (33) and Uttar Pradesh (31) had the highest numbers, while 17 states and UTs reported none.

### Infrastructure

#### Village Legal Clinics

Village legal services clinics – intended as grassroots legal care centres – are facing near-systemic collapse. Numbers fell from 14,161 clinics in 2017-18 to 3,659 in March 2024. Each clinic now serves an average of 163 villages, compared to 42 earlier. Several states saw dramatic reductions: Chhattisgarh declined from 281 clinics to one, Jharkhand from 375 to 27, and Telangana from 260 to 23. Coverage is especially poor in larger states: Maharashtra has one clinic per 214 villages; Rajasthan, one per 333; Telangana, one per 440. Karnataka and Jharkhand fare even worse at 856 and 1,092 villages per clinic, respectively. Chhattisgarh’s one clinic for nearly 20,000 villages effectively eliminates grassroots access.

**Prison Legal Aid Clinics:** In contrast, legal aid within prisons has improved. NALSA’s 2022 regulations require clinics in every prison, staffed by jail-visiting lawyers and PLVs. By March 2024, 1,215 clinics existed across 1,330 prisons, although 20 states/UTs still lacked full coverage.

## Workload

### Lok Adalats

Between April 2023 and March 2024, 9,865 Lok Adalats handled 22.5 lakh cases. Only 20 per cent were pre-litigation matters; the rest were pending court cases. Five states – Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana – conducted nearly 80 per cent of all Adalats, while 12 states/UTs held none.

Clearance rates were highly uneven. Nationally, 54 per cent of cases were settled. Telangana and Delhi resolved more than 90 per cent. Uttar Pradesh cleared 40 per cent of its 10 lakh cases, Kerala 24 per cent of just over a lakh, and Tamil Nadu 18 per cent of 1.9 lakh. Gujarat cleared only 2 per cent of 11,000 cases, Rajasthan 3 per cent of 40,000, and Maharashtra 9 per cent of 6,000.

“*Both NALSA and state governments fund legal aid, but proportions have shifted: central contributions have decreased as state contributions increased*”

### Budgets and Spending

Both NALSA and state governments fund legal aid, but proportions have shifted: central contributions have decreased as state contributions increased. Five years ago, several states contributed little to nothing; by 2022–23, all states participated in funding. Still, the system remains severely underfunded. National per-capita spending

averages only Rs 6. Sikkim spends Rs 109 per capita, followed by Tripura (Rs 59), Mizoram (Rs 36), and Goa (Rs 32). Sixteen states, including most large ones, spend under Rs 10 per capita.

### Victim Compensation

Although Delhi, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh together awarded 46 per cent of total compensation nationwide, states with high crime rates – such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra – awarded comparatively little. Uttar Pradesh, despite over 4 lakh registered applications, awarded Rs 1.85 crore. Compensation determined by LSIs is often delayed due to inconsistent procedures, funding shortages, and variation in compensation amounts across states.



**Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom.**

**Nelson Mandela**





# Recommendations

1	Ensure <b>24*7 legal guidance and representation</b> is available at all police stations and courts at first instance. <b>Increase presence of paralegal volunteers</b> in the community	7	Ensure compliance with <b>UTRC's guidelines of the categories of prisoners</b> to be considered for release and <b>review the performance</b> of the committees
2	Fully implement the Supreme Court's Paramvir Singh Saini judgement, mandating every police station to be <b>equipped with stipulated CCTV cameras</b> to check abuse	8	SHRCs must be <b>fully resourced and reach out to the community</b> proactively
3	Fill <b>vacancies</b> on an urgent footing	9	<b>Promote mediation</b> as an effective tool for dispute resolution and <b>strengthen the infrastructure and human resources</b> needed for the same
4	Prioritise increased <b>resources at the level of first responders</b>	10	<b>Release timely, validated and comprehensive data</b> on different aspects of the justice system, including on persons with disabilities, to ensure targeted policy recommendations
5	Increase <b>diversity of caste, gender and the specially abled</b> across subsystems	11	<b>Designate the justice delivery system as an essential service</b> and enhance, enlarge and equip it as a first responder able to provide effective justice delivery at all times
6	Give training pride of place and prioritise human and financial <b>resources in all training facilities</b>		

# COMMON CAUSE ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

The past year has been both eventful and impactful for Common Cause. The organisation continued to uphold its commitment to public causes, deepening its engagement with advocacy, research, and public policy interventions. Through sustained efforts in strategic public interest litigation and civic dialogue, the society sought to strengthen democratic accountability and promote transparency in governance. It collaborated with a wide spectrum of institutions, universities, and civil society organisations on issues ranging from the right to information and digital data protection to domestic workers' rights, technology governance, and judicial reform.

Our participation in the India Justice Report 2025 and the Justice Definitions Project contributed to national conversations on justice delivery and institutional reform.

The organisation's outreach expanded through lectures, seminars, and dialogues at forums such as the National Human Rights Commission, Ashoka University, and others, where key issues, including media and human rights, judicial activism, and the role of PILs as tools for social change, were deliberated.

Parallelly, Common Cause invested in strengthening internal

capacities through data analysis workshops, research training, and collaborative sessions on emerging themes such as the impact of plastics, cybersecurity, digital governance and people-centric policing. These initiatives reinforced our evidence-based approach to policy advocacy and public engagement.

The Common Cause Journal, our bridge to members and well-wishers, continued to focus on policy-oriented themes of national importance, fostering debate and reflection on the pressing issues of our time. Guided by our enduring motto—A Romance with Public Causes—Common Cause remains dedicated to nurturing informed public discourse and promoting probity, fairness, and justice in India's democratic life.

## RESEARCH-LED ADVOCACY:

### Police Reforms

#### Status of Policing in India Report 2025: Police Torture & (Un)Accountability

On March 26th, 2025, Common Cause, in collaboration with Lokniti, CSDS, launched the Status of Policing in India Report 2025: Police Torture & (Un)Accountability. The report was released by a distinguished panel of experts, including Justice S. Muralidhar, former Chief Justice

of the Odisha High Court, Ms Vrinda Grover, lawyer and activist, Dr Amar Jesani, public health expert and the Editor of the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, and Mr Prakash Singh, IPS (Retd) and a former DGP of UP, Assam and BSF.

The report launch was followed by a panel discussion on 'Police Torture and Accountability: Where are the Safeguards?', with noted experts examining the role of legal frameworks, oversight institutions, and systemic reforms in addressing police torture and unlawful use of violence. The panel discussion was introduced by the panel's moderator, Professor Suhas Palshikar, noted public intellectual, an advisor of SPIR, columnist and the Chief Editor, Studies in India Politics.

### The Upcoming SPIR on "Cybercrimes and preparedness of the police": Consultations & Discussions

Common Cause began preparations for the next edition of the Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR), which will focus on cybercrime and digital security. An online consultation session was held on June 24, 2025, featuring experts such as Mr Nandkumar Saravade, IPS (Retd.), Mr Sanjay Sahay, IPS (Retd.), Mr Ramanjit Singh (Access Now), Ms Namrata Maheshwari, and Ms Anushka Jain (Digital

Futures Lab). On June 25, Mr Apar Gupta from the Internet Freedom Foundation guided the team on data sources and legal frameworks. Subsequent sessions on July 3 and 4 featured Ms Merrin Muhammad Ashraf (IT for Change) and Mr Mukul Singh (Jist), who discussed technology-enabled crimes and policing challenges. The sessions were led by Dr Vipul Mudgal and Ms Radhika Jha, with research support from Mr Mohd. Aasif and Mr. Vinson Prakash. The discussions brought out important insights on the types of cybercrimes prevalent in the country, the vulnerability of certain sections of society, steps that can be taken to prevent and control the proliferation of cybercrime, preparedness of the police force in tackling cybercrimes, and streamlining of the grievance redressal mechanisms.

The subsequent rounds of research will include a survey with the general public on their experiences with cybercrimes, the complaint mechanisms and the preparedness of the police. The research team has drafted the survey questionnaire after several rounds of brainstorming, and the translation of the questionnaires is underway. Data collection is expected to take place in November 2025. A purposive sample of victims of cybercrimes is also being prepared for in-depth interviews using the snowballing method. The interviews will be conducted in October and November 2025.

## **India Justice Report 2025**

### **India Justice Report Launch**

On April 15, 2025, Common Cause participated in the launch of the India Justice Report 2025 at the India International Centre, New Delhi. The event brought together legal experts, researchers, and civil society leaders to unveil the fourth edition of India's only comprehensive assessment of state-level justice delivery. Justice (Retd.) Madan B. Lokur underscored the need to strengthen frontline justice institutions, while Ms Maja Daruwala, Chief Editor of the report, called for urgent reforms. The programme also featured an imaginative panel discussion on the portrayal of justice in Bollywood cinema led by the leading film reviewer and a former member of the film censor board of India, Ms Shubhra Gupta, and NLU Law Professor, Anup Surendranath. Common Cause Director Dr Vipul Mudgal, a steering committee member of the IJR, joined the discussions on the 'police pillar' of the justice system. Ms Radhika Jha, Project Lead (Rule of Law) at Common Cause, was one of the report's key authors and contributed extensively to its research and advocacy.

The report brought out important findings on the state of the Indian justice system, such as that India's 20.3 lakh-strong police force has less

than 1000 women officers in senior ranks like Superintendents and Director-Generals. In terms of the overall ranking, Karnataka ranked at the top, followed by Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Kerala.

Work on the next issue of the report is ongoing, and the Common Cause team is making its contribution in the process.

## **KEY ENGAGEMENTS, COLLABORATIONS:**

### **Edit-a-Thon at the National Law School of India University, Bangalore**

On January 5, 2025, the Justice Definitions Project of Daksh hosted an Edit-a-Thon at the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore. Ms Radhika Jha from Common Cause was among the resource persons for the event. Fifty-four law students participated in teams to draft precise and accessible legal definitions for fifteen key terms across diverse thematic areas, contributing to the Justice Definitions Wiki platform.

### **Campaign for the Right to Information Act**

On February 20, 2025, Common Cause convened a meeting at its office in Vasant Kunj to discuss the Right to Information Act and the implications of the newly enacted Digital Personal Data Protection Act, which significantly undermines the RTI framework. The meeting brought together representatives

from around twenty civil society organisations and some of India's leading RTI activists to deliberate on strategies to safeguard citizens' right to information and raise public awareness about the issue.

### **Lecture at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)**

During the NHRC's short-term internship programme held between January 27 and February 7, 2025, in New Delhi, Dr Vipul Mudgal, Director and Chief Executive of Common Cause, delivered a lecture on "Media and Human Rights." His address examined the relationship between press freedom, accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights.

### **Second Surjit Kishore Das Memorial Lecture at Doon Public Library and Research Centre, Dehradun**

On February 8, 2025, the Doon Public Library and Research Centre organised the Second Surjit Kishore Das Memorial Lecture in memory of the former Chief Secretary of Uttarakhand and long-time mentor of the institution. Dr Vipul Mudgal delivered the memorial lecture on "Public Interest Litigation as a Tool of Social Change: The Civil Society Experience." The lecture examined the transformative impact of PILs on shaping public life, highlighting landmark interventions such as the revocation of the Electoral Bonds Scheme, the 2G and Coal Block allocation verdicts,

and the Living Will case on the right to die with dignity. Dr Mudgal emphasised that civil society efforts have been crucial in advancing transparency in governance and underlined the need to defend democratic institutions from erosion. The event, which also featured the release of a poetry collection by the late Surjit Das, included tributes from the leading citizens of Dehradun, including Prof. B.K. Joshi, Mr Nicholas Hofland, Ms Vibha Puri Das, IAS (Retd) and Ms Geeta Sehgal.

### **Lecture at Ashoka University**

On March 28, 2025, the Ashoka Public Policy Society and Ashoka Law Society jointly hosted a dialogue with Dr Vipul Mudgal on public interest litigation, judicial activism, and the challenges of legal advocacy. Engaging with students across disciplines, Dr Mudgal discussed recent cases such as the Electoral Bonds Case (2024) and Misuse of Section 124A (Sedition, 2016), alongside insights from the Status of Policing in India Reports (SPIR), followed by a lively interactive session.

### **Strategic Dialogue on Judicial Data Collaborative**

On April 25, 2025, the Judicial Data Collaborative project of the Bangalore-based civil society organisation, Daksh, hosted a strategy meeting to chart the initiative's next phase. Ms Radhika Jha represented Common Cause in the deliberations, which focused on expanding access to the judicial

data wiki platform and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

### **Contributions to Justice Definitions Project**

During May and June 2025, Common Cause interns Mr Abdul Samad and Mr Siddharth Gupta contributed to Daksh's Justice Definitions Project. Mr Gupta developed the entry on "Statelessness," examining its legal dimensions in India, while Mr Samad prepared the draft for "E-Sewa Kendra," highlighting its role in expanding digital access to judicial services. Their work strengthened the project's mission of creating a public repository of accessible legal knowledge.

### **Collaborative Legal Action for Domestic Workers' Rights**

On May 26, 2025, Common Cause met with the National Convenors of the National Platform of Domestic Workers (NPDW) to plan a joint petition seeking fair working conditions and protections for domestic workers. Common Cause is drafting the petition, which will soon be filed in the Supreme Court with NPDW and social activist Ms Aruna Roy as co-petitioners. An earlier PIL by the same petitioners had been disposed of recently, mainly because the court had failed to issue notices after the petition, allowing the petitioners to file another petition detailing all subsequent developments.

Another meeting was held on



August 3, 2025. Ms. Radhika Jha, Mr. Rishikesh Kumar, Ms. Divya Chauhan, and Mr. Vinson Prakash from Common Cause met with Sr. Christin Mary, National Convenor of the National Platform for Domestic Workers (NPDW); National Coordinators of NPDW, including Fr. Varghese and Mr. Subash Bhatnagar; Ms. Nalini Nayak, Secretary of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Kerala; and about 25 delegates from the NPDW and various SEWA chapters, including domestic workers, to discuss an upcoming Public Interest Litigation (PIL) aimed at addressing the plight of domestic workers in India. The discussion focused on key issues such as the lack of a comprehensive legal framework, the absence of fixed working hours, denial of paid leave, unregulated placement agencies, unfair working conditions, and inadequate protection of domestic workers' fundamental rights.

### **Steering Committee Meeting on Global Tech Accountability**

On May 28, 2025, the Global Coalition for Tech Justice convened a steering committee meeting to discuss global trends in technology accountability. Ms Radhika Jha represented Common Cause and participated in framing the coalition's future course of action.

Another Steering Committee meeting of the Coalition was organised on 22nd October

2025, in which Radhika Jha from Common Cause participated and weighed in on the issues that the Coalition can focus on in the coming two years, such as mass surveillance, cyber security, social media's influence on elections and digital threats to free and fair elections, impact of generative AI, etc.

### **Event on International Domestic Workers' Day**

On June 16, 2025, Common Cause collaborated with the National Platform for Domestic Workers (NPDW), Nari Shakti Manch, and Seva Bharat to mark International Domestic Workers' Day with a large convention at Rajendra Bhawan, New Delhi. The event drew over 200 domestic workers from across the NCR and featured two lively panel discussions where workers shared their experiences and challenges. Dr Vipul Mudgal delivered the keynote address, emphasising the urgent need for legislation to guarantee fair wages, decent working conditions, and social security. The gathering concluded with folk-dance performances celebrating the resilience of domestic workers.

### **Consultation on DPDP and RTI Act**

On July 29, 2025, members of the Common Cause team attended a day-long consultation at the Deputy Speaker Hall Annexe, Constitution Club, New Delhi, on the implications of the amendment to the RTI Act through the Digital Personal

Data Protection Act (DPDPA). Organised by the Roll Back RTI Amendments Campaign, the Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms (CJAR), and the Press Club of India, the consultation brought together journalists, researchers, activists, and civil society representatives to discuss the Act's potential to weaken the RTI framework and its impact on transparency, accountability, and democratic governance.

Edit-a-Thon on Election Law The Kautilya Society, National University of Study and Research in Law (NUSRL), Ranchi, in collaboration with the Judicial Data Collaborative (JDC) and the Justice Definitions Project of DAKSH, organised an Edit-a-thon for students on "Election Law", from 11th to 16th October 2025. The event was organised amongst students to encourage researching and drafting wiki pages on topics related to election laws for the Justice Definitions Project. About 30 students, grouped in 10 teams, participated in the event. Radhika Jha from Common Cause joined the event as a Mentor.

### **SEMINARS, WEBINARS AND CONFERENCES:**

#### **Seminar Against Torture**

On June 23, 2025, Ms Radhika Jha attended a seminar titled "Challenging Torture in India," organised during the Global Week Against Torture. The discussion brought together survivors, legal experts, and

members of the judiciary to examine the prevalence of custodial torture and the lack of effective accountability mechanisms in India.

### **Seminar on Cybersecurity Challenges in Governance and Industry**

On July 5, 2025, Ms Radhika Jha attended a seminar on “Emerging Cybersecurity Challenges for India’s Governance, Trade and Industry,” organised by the Indian Police Foundation and Jain International Trade Organisation (JITO). The discussion addressed the increasing risks of cybercrime, data breaches, and financial fraud in India’s rapidly digitalising ecosystem.

### **Seminar on Organisational Maturity in the Development Sector**

On July 12, 2025, Ms Radhika Jha participated in a dramatised seminar with Prof. Vijay Padaki titled “Exploring Maturity in Human Organisations.” Organised by Development Alternatives, the session used behavioural science insights to explore pathways for achieving organisational maturity in the development sector.

## **PUBLICATIONS AND FEATURES:**

### **Book Review of Pratap: A Defiant Newspaper**

On April 29, 2025, Dr Vipul Mudgal reviewed Pratap: A Defiant Newspaper for Business

Standard. The book documents the story of the Urdu daily Pratap and its founder-journalist, Virendra Mohan, against the backdrop of India’s freedom movement and the evolving struggle for press independence. Dr Mudgal underscored the book’s significance as both a historical record and a reminder of the enduring relationship between journalism, democracy, and the constitutional promise of free expression.

### **Interview on Violence in Police Custody**

On 16th April 2025, BBC News Marathi hosted a programme on the issue of “What the statistics say about violence and harassment in police custody”. The programme presented findings from SPIR 2025- Police Torture & (Un) Accountability and included an interview with Radhika Jha from Common Cause, lead researcher and author of the report, where she discussed some of the main findings. The full video can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRLUPvEhzzc>.

### **Article Review Contribution to the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics**

On May 2, 2025, Ms Radhika Jha reviewed an article by Mr Vernon Gonsalves and Mr Arun Ferreira for publication in the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics. The paper, titled “Where Constitutional Protections Need Protection: Much-Needed Light on First Production of Accused

in Magistrates’ Courts,” analysed Project 39A’s 2024 study on first production and remand practices in Delhi courts.

### **Interview on the India Justice Report**

In July 2025, the Lex Consilium Foundation invited Dr Vipul Mudgal, Director of Common Cause, to participate in a discussion with Major General Nilendra Kumar on the findings of the India Justice Report. During the conversation, Dr Mudgal explained the current state of police accountability and citizen-centric policing in India based on the findings of the earlier rounds of the Status of Policing in India Reports. The video of the discussion can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ca8h6CX3G04>.

### **Book Review of The Hindi Heartland**

On August 26, 2025, Dr Vipul Mudgal, Director of Common Cause, reviewed The Hindi Heartland: A Study for Business Standard. The book, authored by Ghazala Wahab, presents an expansive account of India’s Hindi-speaking region, tracing its socio-political evolution over the course of a millennium. In his review, Dr Mudgal highlighted the book’s nuanced engagement with historical transitions and contemporary politics, noting how it challenges prevailing populist narratives by grounding them in meticulous research and historical context.

## **Podcast on Custodial Torture & Political Arrests**

In October 2025, the Lex Consolium Foundation invited Radhika Jha from Common Cause to speak on the issue of police torture with the host, Major General Nilendra Kumar, for a series of videos. Four parts of the series have been released, while more videos will be uploaded in the coming weeks. The discussions were on a range of issues concerning police torture, such as the reasons for police torture, what the police have to say about due processes and where India stands in terms of custodial torture. The latest video from the series can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOBa5CWwgWQ&t=4s>.

## **WORKSHOPS, VISITS AND STAFF TRAINING:**

### **Workshop on Quantitative Analysis**

On May 29–30, 2025, Ms Radhika Jha and Mr Vinson Prakash participated in a workshop on “Quantitative Analysis Using STATA,” organised by the Population Council of India. The intensive two-day training strengthened the team’s capacity to analyse and interpret quantitative data for research and advocacy.

### **Lokniti’s 17th Summer School on Survey Method**

Mr Vinson Prakash attended Lokniti’s 17th Summer

School on Survey Method for Understanding Indian Politics, held from June 22–29, 2025, at NITTE Meenakshi Institute of Technology, Bengaluru. The programme enhanced participants’ proficiency in designing and analysing survey-based research using SPSS software.

### **Visit to Alwar for SMC Engagement and Capacity Building**

On 26 July 2025, Dr Vipul Mudgal and Mr Rishikesh Kumar visited Alwar, Rajasthan, to engage with Sapna, a local NGO working in the education sector, along with school teachers and guardians, at the invitation of its Chairman and a former distinguished police officer, Mr Sudhir Pratap Singh. The focus was on strengthening School Management Committees (SMCs) to enhance community participation in school governance. The Common Cause team participated in the well-attended SMC meeting. Discussions highlighted ongoing initiatives, challenges in regular SMC meetings, and the importance of empowering parents and local representatives to contribute to school development. The Common Cause team also distributed its colourful SMC booklets, “Hamara School, Hamaree Rakhwali” for awareness and capacity building. The visit provided valuable insights into grassroots challenges and opportunities, paving the way for potential collaboration to train

and strengthen SMC members.

### **Unpacking Plastics by Sambhaavnaa Institute**

From October 8 - 12, 2025, Mr Vinson Prakash of Common Cause participated in a workshop held by the Sambhaavnaa Institute, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh, in collaboration with the Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA). The five-day residential workshop equipped the participants with an in-depth and intersectional understanding of the petrochemical industry and the impact of plastics throughout its lifespan. The themes cut across various facets of the petrochemical industry, including the state-industry nexus which drives and enables oil extraction, refinement, and the plastics trade; the financial institutions funding the industry; the lifespan of plastics from production to waste management; and the socio-physical toll on communities living near extraction and production sites or engaged in informal recycling/waste-picking.

## **RIGHT TO INFORMATION APPLICATIONS**

### **CAG Reports**

On April 30, 2025, Common Cause met with Mr Govind Bhattacharjee to take his guidance and to explore the possibility of filing a PIL seeking a mandated timeframe for tabling CAG reports in Parliament and State Assemblies. Subsequently,

RTIs were filed with the Governor's Office and Legislative Assemblies of 16 major states seeking information on whether the CAG reports were discussed in the House. Only Odisha, Assam, Rajasthan, and Bihar provided responses; however, most replies did not address the questions raised, to the shock and dismay of the RTI seekers. States either denied information, citing format limitations and lack of available information or failed to respond altogether. Appeals have been filed, and further replies are currently awaited.

### **RTI on the Formation of the Expert Committee for Domestic Workers**

As part of its ongoing labour rights advocacy, Common Cause filed RTIs with the Ministries of Women & Child Development, Labour and Employment, Social Justice and Empowerment, and Law and Justice to ascertain the formation, composition, and progress of the expert committee mandated by the Supreme Court in *Ajay Malik v. State of Uttarakhand & Anr.* The queries sought details of membership, inter-ministerial communication, meeting minutes, and timelines for the committee's report. In response to the RTI Application, the Ministry of Labour and Employment informed that, as per the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, an Expert Committee has been constituted to consider the desirability of recommending a legal framework for the benefit, protection, and regulation of the

rights of domestic workers. The composition of the Committee and its terms of reference were also provided in the response.

## **COMMON CAUSE REPRESENTATIONS**

### **Representation on the Draft Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules**

On February 14, 2025, Common Cause submitted its recommendations for the Draft Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025. The recommendations highlighted the shortcomings in the Rules and sought clarity on them. A general comment on the crippling effect of the DPDP Act 2023, via the amendment made to Section 8(1)(j) of the Right to Information Act, 2005, was also included in the recommendations to voice the overwhelming concern shared by civil society organisations across the country of the Right to Information Act being transformed to the "Right to Denial of Information Act".

### **Representation on Forest Department Alert Order**

On February 28, 2025, Common Cause was a signatory to a letter addressed to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Bhopal, against an alert order issued by the Forest Department regarding the search and surveillance of 'infamous hunting communities' in forest circles. The letter, drafted by the Criminal Justice and Police Accountability

Project, Bhopal, highlighted the unconstitutionality of the alert order, asserting that it discriminates against tribal communities, violates their right to privacy and vitiates the principles of forest governance and criminal justice.

### **Representation Against Discriminatory Recruitment Criteria for Legal Professionals**

On April 21, 2025, Common Cause sent a representation to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) objecting to the recruitment notification dated March 19, 2025, for Young Professionals (Law), which restricted eligibility to graduates from National Law Universities (NLUs). The submission argued that such exclusion is arbitrary, unconstitutional, and contrary to the principle of equal opportunity. It urged the Ministry to extend eligibility to all law graduates from the Bar Council of India and UGC-recognised institutions, and to pause the recruitment process until the criteria are revised. The submission further highlighted the broader social impact of such exclusion, noting that only a small fraction of law graduates come from NLUs, thereby marginalising capable candidates from underprivileged and remote regions.

## **PUBLIC INTEREST LITIGATION (CASE UPDATES)**

### **Petition Challenging the**



## **Electoral Irregularities and to Ensure Free and Fair Elections and the Rule of Law (W.P. (C) 1382/2019)**

Common Cause, along with the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), filed this writ petition in 2019 seeking directions to ensure free and fair elections and to uphold the rule of law under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. The petition highlighted lapses on the part of the Election Commission of India (ECI) in ensuring transparency and accuracy of election results declared through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). The petitioners prayed that the ECI be directed not to announce any provisional or estimated results before accurate reconciliation of data and to establish a transparent, rational, and robust mechanism for data disclosure.

In the context of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Common Cause and ADR filed an interlocutory application (IA No. 115592/2024) on May 10, 2024, seeking directions to the ECI to upload scanned legible copies of Form 17C (Part-I) of all polling stations and to disclose voter turnout data both in absolute numbers and percentages. The matter was heard by the Bench led by the Chief Justice of India on May 17, 2024, when the ECI sought time to respond. On May 24, 2024, the Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma declined to grant immediate relief, noting the similarity of prayers with the

main writ petition. On March 18, 2025, the Court recorded the ECI's statement that the petitioners could submit detailed representations regarding their grievances and that the Commission would grant a hearing to consider them. The matter was directed to be listed in the week commencing July 28, 2025, but hasn't been taken up. It is likely to be listed on November 18, 2025.

## **Petition Seeking Directions to Implement the Recommendations of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan, 2020 (W.P. (C) 228/2019)**

This writ petition was filed jointly by Common Cause, the Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL), and Jindal Naturecure Institute seeking implementation of the recommendations contained in the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan, 2020, promulgated in 2012 by the Ministry of Heavy Industries, and the "Zero Emission Vehicles: Towards a Policy Framework" report released by NITI Aayog in 2019. The petition aims to ensure policy-level action to curb climate change, reduce air pollution, and minimise India's dependency on fossil fuel imports.

On March 5, 2019, the Supreme Court directed the Union of India to apprise it of the progress made under the FAME-India Scheme. Upon hearing on July 22, 2024, the Court granted four weeks to the Union of

India to file a counter affidavit detailing policy measures adopted to promote electric vehicles and directed that the Attorney General assist the Court. On April 22, 2025, the government sought more time to place on record its policy decisions. On May 14, 2025, the Attorney General submitted that inter-ministerial deliberations were ongoing and requested additional time to reach a consensus. The Court directed the petitioners and intervenors to submit suggestions to the Attorney General for transmission to the concerned Ministry. The matter is listed for further hearing on November 13, 2025.

## **Contempt Petition against Lawyers Strike (Contempt. Pet. (C) 550/2015 in W.P.(C) 821/1990)**

This contempt petition was filed by Common Cause against the strike of lawyers in the Delhi High Court and district courts over the issue of pecuniary jurisdiction. Pursuant to directions of the Supreme Court, the Bar Council of India (BCI) submitted draft rules to regulate strikes and boycotts by lawyers. On January 24, 2024, counsel for the BCI submitted that the draft rules could be examined by the Court, and any suggestions made would be accepted unconditionally.

On February 9, 2024, the Court appointed Justice S. Muralidhar as Amicus Curiae to review the draft rules and submit a report in light of existing judgments

and objections. The Amicus held a consultation with the BCI in a hybrid mode on April 29, 2024, and submitted written suggestions. However, as the BCI had not convened a meeting to consider these suggestions, the Court, on August 27, 2024, directed it to hold such a meeting within four weeks and submit its response. The Amicus was to file his final report thereafter. On April 2, 2025, the BCI sought an additional three weeks, informing the Court that a committee had been constituted and its report was awaited. The Court listed the matter for further consideration on May 7, 2025, and it is expected to be taken up next on November 18, 2025.

### **Writ for Supreme Court Directions on Police Reforms (W.P. (C) 310/1996)**

The landmark petition for police reforms, filed in 1996 by Prakash Singh, Common Cause, and N.K. Singh led to the Supreme Court's landmark judgment of 2006 mandating structural changes in police administration to ensure autonomy, accountability, and efficiency. Despite clear directions, implementation across states has remained inconsistent, resulting in recurring contempt and compliance proceedings before the Court.

On March 25, 2025, after hearing counsel for the petitioners, the Bench directed that an advance copy of the contempt petitions be served on the standing counsel for the State of Jharkhand. Mr Prashant

Bhushan, appearing for the petitioners, informed the Court about the filing of interlocutory applications (I.A. Nos. 150155/2023 and 67359/2023) seeking compliance and modification of earlier orders. The Registry was instructed to list these applications along with other pending matters during the week commencing May 5, 2025. On August 18, 2025, the Court declined to entertain one of the contempt petitions, observing that the dispute appeared to arise from inter-personal rivalry between officers rather than a matter of public interest.

### **M.A. 18/2025 Registered on January 3, 2025, in the Writ petition on Illegal Mining in Odisha**

In January 2025, Common Cause filed a Miscellaneous Application in its ongoing writ petition concerning illegal mining in Odisha, seeking directions to expedite recovery and attachment proceedings against defaulting lessees and to ensure compliance with earlier Supreme Court orders. On March 5, 2025, the Court examined the State of Odisha's compliance affidavit, which identified 22 defaulting lessees and stated that recovery measures were being planned. The Court noted the absence of specific details on recovery steps and directed the State to pursue remedies before appropriate appellate forums to reverse stay orders issued by the Orissa High Court. Common Cause was asked to file a short affidavit enumerating such orders.

A fresh writ petition (No. 675 of 2025), filed on July 8, 2025, sought directions to the concerned authorities for the constitution of a committee of independent experts to recommend a limit on the extraction of iron and manganese ore in the State of Odisha, to ensure environmental sustainability and inter-generational equity, and for the imposition of such limits by the Respondents based on the recommendations of the said expert committee. The Court issued notice on July 28, 2025, and expressed displeasure at the State's failure to file a counter affidavit. This writ petition was tagged with the miscellaneous application (M.A. 18/2025). Subsequent hearings on September 2 and September 17, 2025, addressed compliance issues, including extension of mining leases and joint inspection of mines. On October 14, 2025, the Court directed the filing of a status report on recovery proceedings and issued notice on IA Nos 167870/2024, 147147/2018 and 264258/2024 in M.A.No. 18/2025 in W.P. (C) No. 114/2014. The matter is listed on October 29, 2025.

### **Writ against State of Odisha (W.P.(C) No. 675/2025)**

On May 7, 2025, the Supreme Court, in M.A. No. 18 of 2025, the Supreme Court disposed of an earlier interlocutory application, granting liberty to Common Cause to file an independent writ petition for similar reliefs. Pursuant to this liberty, Common Cause filed

the writ petition on July 8, 2025, seeking the following directions: (a) Constitution of a committee of independent experts to recommend a limit to be imposed on the extraction of iron and manganese ore in the State of Odisha to ensure environmental sustainability and Inter-generational equity, and submit its report in a time-bound manner; and (b) Direction to the Respondents to impose a limit on the extraction of iron and manganese ore in Odisha based on the aforesaid expert committee report.

Notice was issued on July 28, 2025, and Common Cause was granted liberty to serve the same through the Standing Counsel for the State. The matter was tagged with the previous miscellaneous application (M.A. 18/2025) filed by Common Cause. On July 29, 2025, during the hearing, the Supreme Court expressed displeasure over the State of Odisha's failure to file a counter affidavit, despite the learned counsel for the State, Mr Shibashish Mishra, being indisposed. The Court noted that the counsel's medical condition did not justify non-compliance with its earlier orders dated May 7, 2025, and March 5, 2025, and directed the State to file the requisite affidavit within two weeks.

The matter was further taken up on September 2, 2025, when the Court directed the counsel for the State of Odisha to obtain instructions and file the counter affidavit within four weeks, while Common Cause

was directed to file a rejoinder within two weeks thereafter. On September 17, 2025, the Supreme Court considered an interim application filed by a lessee, wherein the State's counter affidavit disclosed that the validity of the mining lease in question had been extended up to April 16, 2036, subject to general conditions and statutory clearances.

The Court allowed the lessee to restart mining only after verification of all clearances by the competent officer. Additionally, a joint inspection involving the State's Mining Department was ordered to determine the quantity and quality of iron ore. Following the inspection, the lessee was granted four months to sell the ore under the supervision of State officers, with proceeds adjusted against penalties from prior proceedings and deposited with the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV). The State was further directed to initiate auction proceedings in accordance with the law.

The counter affidavit filed by the State stated that, in relation to certain leases in Raikela, Bhanaba, and Tensa villages of Sundargarh District, the applicant had deposited the compensation amount under Section 21(5) of the MMDR Act, 1957, including interest for delayed payment, pursuant to the Supreme Court's order dated August 2, 2017. Consequently, certificate proceedings before the Collector-cum-Certificate Officer were closed on November 12, 2018.

During the proceedings, Common Cause highlighted a lapse by the State in calculating the four-month period for the sale of ore from the first of three joint inspection dates, which the Court observed as non-compliance with its February 27, 2023, order. The Advocate General requested three weeks to provide improved instructions, which was granted. The Court also directed the State to submit a status report on the recovery process initiated, along with the outcomes of the proceedings, on the next hearing date. On October 14, 2025, the court granted one last opportunity to the State to file a counter-affidavit and the status report by 27th October, 2025. The matter is listed on October 29, 2025, along with M.A. 18/2025.

## **FINANCE AND ACCOUNTS (2024-25)**

The Audited Annual Accounts of Common Cause for the year ending March 31, 2025, have been received. The Governing Council has accorded its approval on 27-09-2025. Briefly, the non-grant expenditure during the year was Rs 124.88 lakh, against Rs 132.66 lakh recorded in the previous year. The non-grant income during the year was Rs 140.72 lakh compared to Rs 120.47 lakh during 2023-24. Thus, there was a surplus of Rs 15.84 lakh during the year as against a shortfall of Rs 12.19 lakh in the previous year.

# NOTICE FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To,

All members of COMMON CAUSE SOCIETY

The Annual General Meeting of COMMON CAUSE Society will be held on Saturday, 21st February, 2025 at 11:00 a.m. at Common Cause House, Third Floor, 5-Institutional Area, Nelson Mandela Road, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110070 with an option of attending virtually, with meeting id and password to be shared closer to the meeting.

The agenda will be as follows:

1. Consideration of Annual Report and adoption of the Annual Accounts along with the Auditor's Report for the year 2024-25
2. Appointment of Auditors for the year 2025-26
3. Presentation of the activities and programmes of the Society
4. Elections
5. Any other item with the permission of the chair

It may kindly be noted that in accordance with Rule 15 of the Rules & Regulations of the society, if within 15 minutes of the beginning of the meeting, the quorum is not present, the meeting would stand adjourned and be held after half an hour of the original scheduled time, and the members present in the adjourned meeting shall form the quorum of that meeting.

Copies of the Balance Sheet and Income & Expenditure statement will be circulated (or screen shared) during the AGM.

We look forward to your participation in the meeting.

A line in confirmation will be highly appreciated.

**Vipul Mudgal**  
**Director**  
**COMMON CAUSE**



# COMMON CAUSE QUARTERLY EVENTS



*Team Common Cause with the Cohort at Shiv Nadar University*

## Teaching the Foundations of Justice and Rule of Law: Common Cause at Shiv Nadar University

For the third consecutive year, Common Cause conducted a specially curated Academic course on the rule of law and the system of justice in India for the Master's Course in Rural Management at the Shiv Nadar University, in November last. Led by Dr Vipul Mudgal, Director, Common Cause, Rishikesh Kumar, Research Executive (Legal), and Sarab Lamba, Researcher with the India Justice Report (IJR), the course covered the foundational concepts of justice, constitutionalism, policing, and institutional reforms.

The course acquainted the students to the Idea of Justice, Ethics, the Constitution, and the Rule of Law, followed by an interactive session on democracy and constitutional conduct. It also had a dedicated session on the Fundamental Rights, Constitutional Rights, and the Basic Structure Doctrine, situating these principles at the core of India's constitutional identity. Presentations were also made on the four pillars of the justice system—the Police, Judiciary, prisons and Legal Aid—along with key insights from the India Justice Report 2020–2025. A special session was held on domestic violence, followed by animated discussions.

Besides interactive sessions, the students were also taken through video presentations, photo

features and case studies of real-life instances involving common people, the police and the justice system.

## Conference on Building Justice Capacity

The India Justice Report (IJR); NALSAR University of Law, and the Access to Justice for Prisoners (AJP) jointly organised a national conference, 'Building Justice Capacity for Tomorrow – Telangana in Dialogue' on 11th October 2025. The conference, designed as a dialogue between academia, senior policymakers, implementation agencies, active citizens, and stakeholders, was attended by Justice P. Sam Koshy, Executive Chairperson of TSLSA, Dr. Soumya Mishra, IPS, Director General of Prisons and Correctional Services, Justice (retd.) S. Muralidhar, Senior Civil Judge, Mudigonda Raju, Prof. Vijay Raghavan of TISS and Dr. Vipul Mudgal, Director, Common Cause.

Maja Daruwala, Convenor and Chief Editor, India Justice Report, opened the conference, introducing the report and its ranking of states. She pointed to Telangana's performance over the years, adding that the state had performed consistently well, jumping from No. 11 in 2019 to No. 3 in 2025, highlighting that this is a



*The event at Bhubaneswar, Police Bhawan, brought together eminent personalities.*

reflection of governance in the state. Delivering the keynote, retired Justice S Muralidhar said prisons are crowded also due to the excessive misuse of laws such as PMLA and UAPA, and also because judicial officers and police officers are burdened with non-essential duties such as protocol duties and VIP security, instead of focusing on deciding cases in courts, and on law and order and investigation.

Dr Vipul Mudgal made a joint presentation on behalf of the Status of Policing in India Reports (SPIR) and the India Justice Report, focusing on policing in Telangana. He said that the state has consistently performed well to come in first place in the police pillar of the India Justice Report. However, the state shows an underutilisation of the police force, with 1 in 3 constables missing and a shortfall of 13% among officers. He added that the 90% vacancies among scientific staff in Telangana's forensic labs implied that the

department was, in essence, non-functional. Introducing the findings of the SPIR 2025: Police Torture and (Un)Accountability, he added that a significant proportion of police personnel justify the use of torture and violence in the course of their duties, and also believe that they should be allowed to use force without any fear of punishment. The presentations were followed by interactive sessions.

### **Report on Seminar: “Police Reforms – The Road Ahead”**

The Bhubaneswar Metropolis Management Association (BMMA) organised a seminar titled “Police Reforms: The Road Ahead” on 17th November 2025 at Police Bhawan, Bhubaneswar. The event brought together eminent personalities from law enforcement, governance, and civil society to deliberate on critical aspects of police reforms in India.

The main speakers of the event included Mr Prakash Singh, the former DGP of Uttar Pradesh and Assam and a former chief of the Border Security Force, Dr Vipul Mudgal, Director of Common Cause, Senior journalist and national security expert, Mr Nitin Gokhle, besides the serving and retired Director Generals of Police from Odisha, several bureaucrats and eminent citizens of Bhubaneswar.

Presenting the findings of the latest Status of Policing in India, and the India Justice Report, Dr Mudgal emphasised that reforms in the criminal justice system were vital to achieving the Viksit Bharat.

Focusing on the findings of the IJR regarding the performance of the Odisha State, Dr Mudgal said that it ranked 8th among 18 large and medium states overall, but has slipped in the police pillar from 4th in 2022 to 8th in 2025. While the state consistently meets OBC quotas, it faces significant challenges, such as the rising (21.9%) vacancies for the constables, a significant shortfall of officers (23.6%), and a very high number of missing scientific staff (50%) at the state's forensic labs. Gender representation at police stations also remained inadequate against the established benchmarks.

He also pointed out that the SPIR 2025 highlighted growing unaccountability of the police concerning custodial violence. It was indeed a matter of concern that about 70% of personnel

favoured the power to arrest without court oversight, and 25% justified mob violence in certain cases. He said that the victims of police torture were mostly from the marginalised communities. While the Lawyers were regularly stopped by the police from even entering the police station to assist an accused, the magistrates rarely interacted with arrested persons. Dr Mudgal said that the lawyers and judges felt that the NHRC was not effective in dealing with cases of torture. The program concluded with a vote of thanks by Syed Maqbool Ali, Working President of BMMA.

The event on Police reforms brought eminent personalities together at Police Bhawan, Bhubaneswar

## Conference on Justice Delivery Mechanism and Institutional Capacity

On Dec 8th, 2025, Hidayatullah National Law University (HNLU), Raipur, through its Centre for Criminal Law and Jurisprudence and Centre for Law and Human Rights, in collaboration with Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and the India Justice Report (IJR) organised a national conference on “Justice Delivery Mechanism and Institutional Capacity”.

The University Vice Chancellor Prof V C Vivekanandan, Registrar, Dr Deepak Kumar Shrivastava, senior faculty members, students and a large number of civil

Photo Credit: RTI Museum Beawar



*An artistic impression of the struggle for the Right to Information Act, exhibited at the RTI Museum, Beawar.*

society activists from different parts of Chhattisgarh participated in the conference. Presentations were made by Mr Valay Singh, Lead of the India Justice Report, Ms Noopur, managing Trustee of the Centre for Social Justice and Common Cause Director, Dr Vipul Mudgal. The sessions included presentations by Dr Upneet Lalli, Deputy Director, the Institute of Correctional Administration, Chandigarh, and Mr Sunil Gupta, Author of the Black Warrant series.

## Common Cause at RTI Mela 2025

The RTI Mela 2025, held on 12th October 2025 at the RTI Museum site in Beawar, Rajasthan, marked the 20th anniversary of the Right to Information Act and celebrated three decades of struggle by the

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) and the people of Beawar. The event served as a vibrant platform for promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment through the effective use of RTI.

The mela witnessed enthusiastic participation from activists, community members, and organisations committed to strengthening democratic processes. Various stalls were set up to showcase initiatives and achievements under the RTI framework by a large number of organisations, including the School for Democracy, Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties, Social SWRC Tilonia Barefoot College, National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information and Common Cause. The gathering included interactive sessions, cultural performances and discussions.



## Status of Policing in India Report 2025

### Police Torture and (Un)Accountability



Jointly prepared by Common Cause and its academic partner, Lokniti-CSDS, the Status of Policing in India Report 2025: Police Torture and (Un)Accountability, explores the nature, causes and factors that contribute to the perpetuation of police violence and torture in India.

SPIR 2025 surveyed 8,276 police personnel at 82 locations such as police stations, police lines, and courts across 17 states and UTs. Responses were gathered from urban and rural areas, state capitals, district headquarters, and other small, medium and big towns. The respondents cover the police personnel of constabulary ranks, upper subordinates, and IPS officers. The study includes in-depth interviews with stakeholders who are supposed to act as safeguards against police torture—judges, lawyers and doctors

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Editor-Vipul Mudgal Tel No. 26131313, 45152796, email: [commoncauseindia@gmail.com](mailto:commoncauseindia@gmail.com), website: [www.commoncause.in](http://www.commoncause.in)