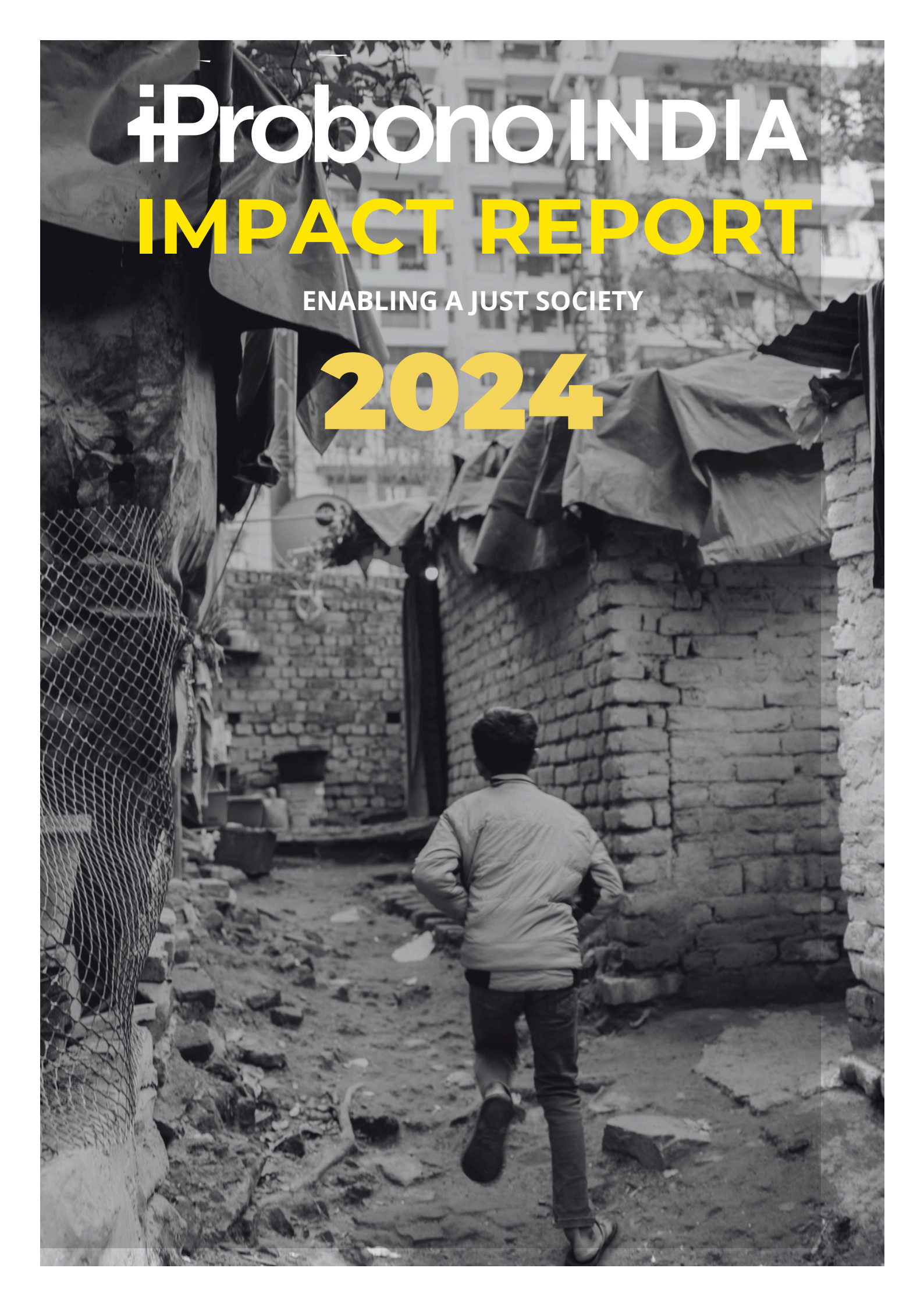




iProbonoINDIA IMPACT REPORT

ENABLING A JUST SOCIETY

2024

Our impact in 2024

1976

people directly
benefitting from quality
legal representation

304

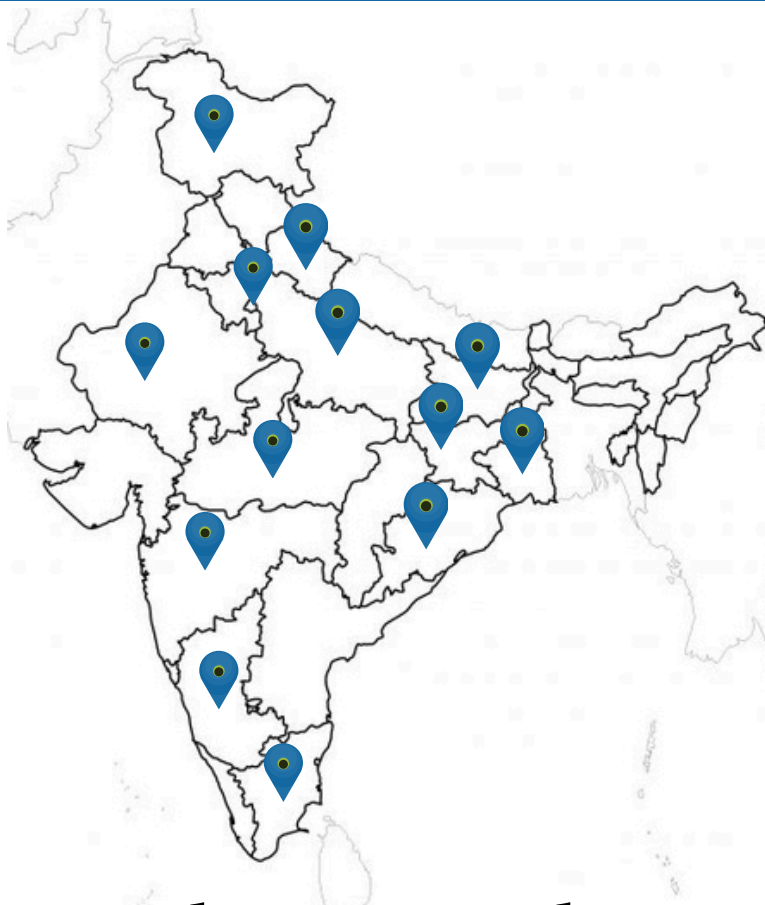
children supported
through psychosocial
interventions

1100+

people empowered
through capacity
building initiatives

3500+

gained legal
protections through
strategic litigation



Where we work

Our community in India

500 Community lawyers

66 CSOs

180 Panel advocates

Message from our CEO and India Program Director

The boy on the cover of this report is named Rohit. In one fleeting photo of him running through the basti he calls home, you may not see the struggles that he faces. But his life has burdens that no boy his age should have to shoulder. Rohit isn't alone – we work with children like him every day. Children living in bastis at the brink of eviction, their daily lives filled with uncertainty. Children who, perhaps as a response to these difficult circumstances, find themselves in conflict with the law. Children who face sexual abuse or are trafficked or forced into child labour. Children who struggle with visible or invisible disabilities, or are caregivers to parents with disabilities, or caregivers to their younger siblings because their parents are incarcerated. Children whom our society has decided do not matter enough to protect.

As an organisation whose primary focus was child rights, we are often asked why we expanded our focus areas to the point where, today, we also work on housing and land rights, criminal justice, and disability justice. It is because we saw the intersectional vulnerabilities of the communities we serve, and expanded our work as a natural response.

Sonu, for instance, lived on the streets of Delhi, where she was assaulted late one night. Arjun was accused of killing the boy who sexually harassed his sister. Sunita's education suffered after her family faced eviction from their home. Raghav's parents needed guidance on how to secure his property rights after their death, as he has autism.



Mariam Faruqi
CEO, iProbono and
Director, Justice Leila
Seth Fellowship



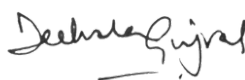
In each of these cases, we saw the complexity of the support that was required, the need to untangle a web of vulnerabilities to identify how to proceed. And we responded by trying to provide what support we could – engaging with the justice system in different ways.

This intersectional engagement seeks to create a more resilient society – one where those who most need support are able to access it, where the justice system serves everyone, where stakeholders are challenged and asked to improve. To this end, we assisted close to 2000 people with quality representation in six states this year. Our comprehensive care work supported 304 children. And finally, by mobilising strategic litigation, we unlocked legal protections for over 3500 people.

On this journey, we are deeply grateful for the invaluable support of our partners. Collaboration remains at the heart of achieving our shared goals, and this year is marked by several impactful partnerships – with NGOs, lawyers, government stakeholders, universities, and many others.

Above all, we continue to prioritise listening to those we aim to support, letting their voices shape and guide our efforts. Whether through consultations, legal aid camps, roundtable conversations or one-to-one interactions, we deeply value the stories and perspectives shared with us.

Every step forward is fuelled by these stories of resilience and courage. We invite you to join us in building a world where Rohit, Sonu, Arjun, Raghav, Sunita, and so many others like them, have the chance to thrive.



Deeksha Gujral
Program Director,
iProbono India



A Snapshot Of Our Programs

LEGAL ACTION

iProbono India provides legal representation and advice to children suffering egregious injustices. Our clients include child victims of sexual abuse, minors seeking termination of unwanted pregnancies, and children who find themselves in conflict with the law. We also support people facing illegal eviction from their homes. In line with our strategy to intervene in situations where legal aid is urgent but scarce, we took the decision to extend our support to persons with disabilities and those facing the criminal justice system.



» Challenging injustices against undertrial juveniles

At the age of 17, Neha was wrongfully detained in Dasna jail after the police misrepresented her age as 19. For six long years, she endured illegal incarceration as her state-appointed legal counsel failed to provide the most basic legal support, depriving her of the chance to assert her juvenility. Under the Juvenile Justice Act 2015, she would have been entitled to a maximum of three years of detention if found guilty.

Neha's case was referred to us in late 2023 by the India Vision Foundation, an NGO dedicated to rehabilitating prisoners. Our team initiated an age verification process to have her case heard before the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB), relying on Neha's age-proof documents, which had previously been overlooked by the court. Although the JJB finally recognised that Neha was a juvenile at the time of the offence, she was not relocated to a 'place of safety', a facility for children accused of committing heinous offences, and was left in prison. Our team managed to secure bail, ending Neha's six-year incarceration. Significantly, this intervention should not have been required - Neha was eligible for unconditional release as her detention had already exceeded the maximum sentence for a juvenile committing a serious offence. Additionally, the monetary conditions and surety requirements imposed by the JJB that further prolonged her period of incarceration underscore the barriers faced by vulnerable individuals in accessing justice.

To address this, iProbono India filed a petition in the Allahabad High Court on Neha's behalf, seeking financial compensation for her unlawful incarceration. Our in-house psychologist continues to provide Neha with mental health care to address her trauma and support her reintegration into society.

» Enforcing abortion rights of minors

Our team actively supports minors seeking the termination of pregnancies that have surpassed the 24-week legal limit for abortion in India. In such cases, we routinely file petitions before courts to ensure these children can access the medical care they urgently need. In collaboration with our partner organisation, Enfold Proactive Health Trust, we secured favourable court orders as well as sizeable financial compensation for all seven children whom we represented in cases seeking medical termination of pregnancies in Bengaluru in 2024.

» Securing justice for child survivors of abuse

Katha was four years old when her neighbour sexually assaulted her. She had to undergo two major surgeries in under a year. Given her young age, Katha struggled to properly communicate the abuse in her testimony. Our panel advocate Nitin Saluja convinced the court to trust Katha's recollection of the incident and accept her testimony. Not only was the accused sentenced to imprisonment of over 12 years, Katha was also granted a sizable final compensation amount of Rs. 12.5 lakhs to support her rehabilitation.

» Supporting children of incarcerated parents

Tejashwari, a 40-year-old woman, faced murder charges for allegedly killing her husband. She spent over a year in prison. During this time, she struggled with tuberculosis, as did her two young children who continued to live at home without her, with no support from the system. By securing bail for Tejashwari, our team was able to reunite her with her children. This intervention represents our intersectional approach to the criminal justice system, centering the needs of children impacted by legal processes.

» Rehabilitating children in conflict with the law

Unlike the criminal justice system, the juvenile justice system focuses on rehabilitation. It is underpinned by the belief that children are not meant to be punished for their crimes, but reintegrated into society in a manner that prevents recidivism. Unfortunately, neither the child rights system nor the wider legal ecosystem sufficiently focuses on this aspect.

In 2022, 17-year old Karthik was accused of murder and housed in a place of safety for more than two years. Despite his challenging circumstances, he completed his high school education through open schooling. Karthik also wanted to pursue higher studies in the hope of building a brighter future. However, observation homes and places of safety often lack resources to support the educational aspirations of their residents, and Karthik's goals were seemingly out of reach.

Our team filed a special application before the Children's Court to allow Karthik to pursue his Bachelor's degree. The Court granted our request and directed the Superintendent of a Child Care Institution (CCI) to facilitate Karthik's travel to college. This intervention not only opened the door to higher education for Kartik, but upheld the principle that children in conflict with the law be given a fair chance to reform and reintegrate into society.



» Empowering persons with disabilities

iProbono India supports persons with disabilities and their guardians by pursuing interventions that ensure justice and access to equitable rights.

As an aspiring medical student, Anmol faced a number of challenges in his pursuit of a medical degree. With multiple disabilities including the loss of two fingers in both hands and speech difficulties, he was declared ineligible for admission to any medical college by the Disability Assessment Board (DAB) in 2023. Anmol's appeal against this decision before the Rajasthan High Court was dismissed. A year later, he was once again declared ineligible by the DAB, and his appeal was similarly dismissed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

Our team and panel advocates Atif Inam and Rishit Vimadalal moved the Supreme Court to address this discrimination. In response, the Court directed the All India Institute for Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to create an expert committee that would assess whether Anmol's disabilities would hinder his studies. The Court recommended that Dr Satendra Singh, a renowned disability rights activist, join the committee. Although the committee found that Anmol was ineligible for admission into a medical college under the National Medical Commission's guidelines, Dr Singh put forward an opposing view stating that Anmol was fully capable of completing his MBBS degree and practicing as a doctor. Based on Dr Singh's opinion, the Supreme Court issued an order calling for the creation of a special seat for Anmol at a medical college close to his residence. Anmol is now pursuing his dream of becoming a doctor.

उनके वकीलों ने बहुत सहयोग और सहायता प्रदान की। उनके सहयोग से हमने केस जीता और मुझे गवर्नमेंट मेडिकल कॉलेज, सिरोही में दाखिला मिला। धन्यवाद आईप्रोबो नो इंडिया।”

Their lawyers were cooperative and supportive. They helped me, and with their help we won the case and I got admission at the Government Medical College, Sirohi. Thanks iProbono India.

- Anmol

iProbono India also seeks to enforce the legal protections offered by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act before the Chief Commissioner and State Commissioners for Persons with Disabilities.

When Mansi, a visually impaired candidate, was refused a scribe during the Odisha Civil Services exams, we empowered her to file a complaint before the Odisha State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities. We also advocated for the Commissioner to assign her an appropriately qualified scribe of her choice, which resulted in Mansi successfully clearing her exams.

My work on disability justice and inclusive equality was amplified through iProbono India's efforts and landmark court orders —whether supporting the admission of disabled learners in medical and nursing fields, advocating for disability-inclusive policing, or enriching disability jurisprudence with justice-driven action.”

- Dr Satendra Singh, Founder, Doctors with Disabilities: Agents of Change, and Advisor to iProbono India

REHABILITATION AND RESILIENCE

As advocates of a holistic justice model, iProbono India complements legal action with vital psychosocial support and solidarity for children navigating intimidating legal procedures. When cases of child sexual abuse are reported, the relevant Child Welfare Committee (CWC) assigns a support person to the child victim. In 2024, iProbono India provided psychosocial support to 304 children in this capacity. We empower our clients by ensuring that their voices guide our interventions.



» Mona

Mona, an 11 year-old child, suffered physical and emotional abuse by her family and was transferred to a CCI by the CWC. However, the CWC sent her back home soon after, believing it to be in her best interest. As her support person, iProbono India cautioned against this move.

During a home visit, our team noted signs of abuse and neglect. When asked, Mona broke down and said that she wanted to go back to the CCI. We facilitated an interaction with the CWC,

where Mona revealed that she was forced to do all the housework and provide childcare, was not allowed to go to school, and was regularly beaten. Mona once again made it clear that she wanted to return to the CCI, where she had felt safe.

Our team's intervention in highlighting Mona's continued abuse ensured her safe return to the CCI. She is currently doing well at school, receives regular counselling, and enjoys expressing herself through art. Mona has also requested iProbono India to help transfer her younger sister to the same CCI.

» Ansh and Param

Ansh and Param grew up in a CCI after their mother passed away and their father, Sanjay, was unable to take care of them. In 2017, while visiting home, Param was sexually abused by his inebriated father. Sanjay was arrested and legal proceedings began. While in judicial custody, he requested several times to be allowed to see his sons. The court rejected his pleas to prevent Sanjay from influencing Param's testimony. In 2024, he was convicted. Param communicated to the court that he and his brother wanted to see their father.

At this critical juncture, the CWC appointed iProbono India as the support person for Ansh and Param. While there are established protocols to enable meetings between children and their incarcerated parents, no such guidelines exist for situations where the parent is also the perpetrator.

To navigate this complex situation, iProbono India coordinated with multiple stakeholders, including prison officials, the CCI, and the CWC, to create a safe and supportive environment for the meeting. When Ansh and Param entered the room and saw their father, the moment was charged with emotion.

Our approach balanced Ansh and Param's emotional needs with adherence to prison protocols around interactions with convicts. This intervention underscores the importance for stakeholders to centre the unique needs and desires of children and adopt an empathetic and flexible approach.

» Sayli

In 2022, 16 year-old Sayli was sexually assaulted and then forced to ingest an acidic substance, leaving her permanently unable to swallow any food. Over the next two years, she underwent three major surgeries. Up until this point, Sayli had shouldered the full responsibility of her medical and legal needs. In 2024, iProbono India was asked to step in to offer comprehensive support.

Our team accompanied Sayli to the hospital and liaised with the medical staff regarding her future treatment. While Sayli had previously received financial relief under an existing victim compensation scheme for acid attack survivors, this amount was not enough for her to support herself. Since she was unable to pay for medical supplies and other essential provisions like a feeding tube, iProbono India covered these expenses while also seeking additional compensation from the court.

Our team supported her legal case alongside our panel lawyer Sowjhanya Shankaran. As a direct result of this case, the court created a new 10 crore fund, the Avlamban Fund Scheme 2024, to support acid attack survivors in Delhi. This scheme paves the way for a life of dignity for survivors like Sayli, who can now access compensation above what was already available to them under the Delhi Victim Compensation Scheme, 2018. Importantly, the Avlamban Fund Scheme is intended to support all acid attack survivors, regardless of the exact nature of their injury. This is unlike the former Aasra scheme, which was available only to acid attack survivors with external burn injuries.

Sayli can now afford nutritional supplements, has resumed open schooling, and is using art as an emotional outlet. We continue to represent her in court and support her rehabilitation.



Artwork shared with our team by Sayli soon after receiving medical and legal support

FREE TRIAL LOGIN

THE HINDU

SUBSCRIBE

Implement compensation scheme for acid attack survivors: Delhi HC to city govt.

Published - December 19, 2024 01:44 am IST - New Delhi

THE HINDU BUREAU



The Delhi High Court has directed the city government to implement the Avlamban Fund Scheme for rehabilitative and other ancillary expenses of acid attack survivors.

I was referred this brutal and heartbreaking case by the High Court as an amicus curiae. Sayli was like no other child victim I had met. She was resilient and determined to bring her perpetrators to justice but she lacked both the financial means and the counselling support that a case of this magnitude requires. In addition to legal representation, **Sayli required high quality psychosocial care and a team that would be able to guide her through every step of the process.** I had no doubt that the iProbono India team with its vast experience in pursuing such cases would be the only organisation that could achieve this for Sayli. They went above and beyond, not only addressing her medical and financial needs but also in providing crucial emotional support and advocating for Sayli to complete her school education and be provided state sponsored vocational training.

This support meant that Sayli could focus on healing and rebuilding her life while I could devote my full attention to navigating the complexities of her legal case. I received ample and timely support from the iProbono India legal team. They were able to provide in-depth legal research and support during oral arguments in Court. **They were instrumental in helping me draft and fine-tune various aspects of the guidelines that we drafted for the Court, which culminated in the Avlamban Fund Scheme, 2024.**

Their legal team has also taken over Sayli's case at the trial court and has been fervently working across the board on all aspects of her case — from getting additional criminal charges framed against her perpetrators to ensuring that she receives enhanced compensation as provided by Indian law.

Working with the iProbono India team showed me the profound impact of a holistic approach to justice. I am deeply grateful for their partnership.”

- Sowjhanya Shankaran, iProbono India panel advocate

» Momina, Chetna, Anam, Anjum

Siblings Momina, Chetna and Anam were sexually abused by their paternal uncle. Their father and grandmother, who were their caregivers after their mother had passed away, did not support them. Soon after the abuse was reported, the girls were sent to a CCI. During the trial, their father attempted to influence Anam. In a disturbing incident, he tried to physically drag her away from our social worker in the court premises, but our team intervened swiftly and safely escorted her outside.

A week later, he appeared before the CWC alongside the defence counsel demanding custody over the girls,

presumably to influence their upcoming testimonies. Shortly after, the defence counsel moved an application before the court alleging that the CWC had abducted the girls. In response, we prepared a detailed case brief, convincing the judge to pass an order that prevented the girls from being restored to their family. Our efforts prompted Anjum, the eldest sibling, to report the sexual abuse that she also suffered but had been too fearful to reveal. Our team supported her with filing a First Information Report (FIR) despite hostility from the investigating officer. We also accompanied her while providing medical evidence and made sure she received counselling to cope with the trauma of prolonged abuse. Today, all four sisters no longer fear for their safety and have found strength and healing together.

POLICY AND LEGAL REFORM

We advocate for the communities we serve through evidence-based advocacy, catalysing lasting change in the justice ecosystem.

» Protecting children from incarceration

According to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, a child in conflict with the law is to be placed in an observation home, a place of safety, or a special home. Under no circumstances are they meant to be held in a police lockup or jail. An empirical research study undertaken by iProbono India exposed an entirely different reality; one where these safeguards are routinely violated. Using the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, we conducted a study which revealed that 9,681 children had been unlawfully detained in adult prisons over a six year period from 2016 to 2021. Our report also makes several recommendations to address this issue, such as demanding the state pay

compensation where there have been breaches in law, and establishing more observation homes and places of safety across the country.

Neha, whose story is described above, addressed the gathering.

इन छह सालों में मैंने कभी नहीं सोचा था कि मैं कभी बाहरी दुनिया देख पाऊंगा। मैंने सारी आशा खो दी; ऐसा महसूस हुआ कि यहीं मुझे मरना था, कि और कुछ नहीं था, यही अंत था। छह साल बीत गए, मेरा बचपन चला गया। फिर आईप्रोबोनो इंडिया टीम आई और मेरी मदद की।”

In these six years, I never thought I would ever see the outside world. I lost all hope; it felt like this was where I was meant to die, that there was nothing else, this was the end. Six years passed, my childhood was gone. Then the iProbono India team came and helped me.



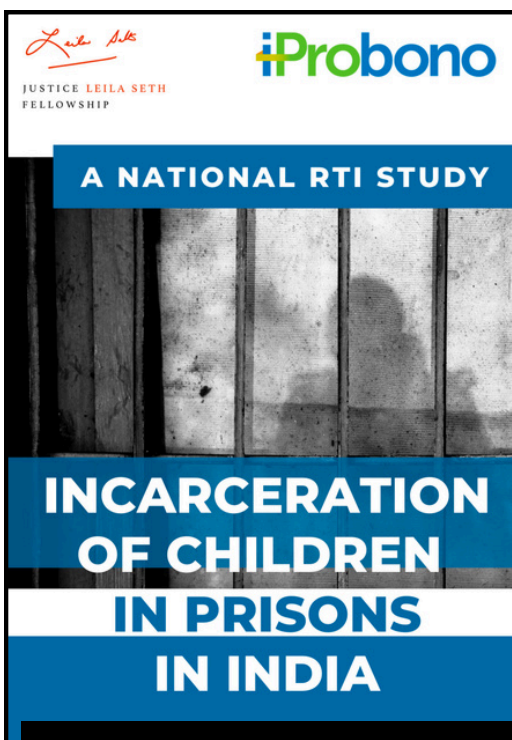
Incarceration of Children in Prisons: A National RTI Study Launch, Delhi, 11 May 2024
Left to Right: Sunil Gupta, Former Legal Advisor Delhi Jails; Arul Varma, Secretary, Delhi High Court Legal Services Committee; Amod K. Kanth, Founder Secretary, Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre, Society and Former DGP; Anant Kumar Asthana, Advisor to Delhi State Legal Services Authority; Deeksha Gujral, Program Director, iProbono India; and Justice Ravindra Bhat, former Supreme Court Judge and former Chairperson of the Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee

It is the state's responsibility to ensure that children are not sent to jail. If a child is wrongfully incarcerated there has to be monetary accountability. The government needs to pay compensation as penalty and damages. So in that sense, pressing for this kind of accountability by presenting this information gathered through the powerful use of the RTI, is really pioneering. I commend iProbono India for its efforts."

- Justice Ravindra Bhat, former Supreme Court judge and former chairperson of the Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Committee

» Catalysing improvements in Maharashtra's victim compensation scheme

The Manodhairya Scheme, 2017 aims to provide financial relief to victims of rape, child sexual abuse and acid attacks in Maharashtra. The scheme's implementation is hindered by a number of factors including poor awareness among the police regarding correct procedure to process victim compensation applications, delays in disbursement of compensation by the District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs), and the absence of bank accounts for victims to receive compensation. iProbono India led a consultation with select civil society representatives, including those who had been directly involved in the creation of the Manodhairya Scheme guidelines, to strategise a more victim-centric framework. We also initiated action to present this coalition's concerns to the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), Government of Maharashtra.



Gitanjali Prasad, former iProbono India team member and advisor, authored this report in a voluntary capacity, alongside Krishna Sharma, former Justice Leila Seth Fellow, and Yamina Rizvi, iProbono India, as assistant researchers and authors



» Facilitating resettlement of basti residents

iProbono India has consistently been advocating for the rehabilitation of residents from two bastis in Delhi—East Kidwai Nagar and Rajiv Camp—at risk of eviction. Due to a number of reasons including COVID-19, conflicts between the central and state governments, and general state apathy towards the plight of these communities, these flats were never handed over to the residents even though they had already paid the required financial deposits to secure ownership.

In response, iProbono India took legal action, urging the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) to fulfill its commitment and provide appropriate housing to the affected residents. After a series of court cases, our efforts culminated in a victory in September 2023, when the Delhi High Court directed that a High-Powered Committee be established to streamline and expedite the handover process.

Over the past year, we continued to engage with the High Powered Committee, sending letters and making submissions in multiple meetings, to ensure that the flats were swiftly handed over to our clients. As a result, the Committee directed DUSIB to begin the rehabilitation of residents from 10 bastis, including 1440 of our clients from East Kidwai Nagar and Rajiv Camp.

In a critical development, it was determined that since the accommodation originally designated for resettlement was uninhabitable, residents would have to be rehabilitated in a new locality, Savda Ghevra. In late 2024, the court directed the Delhi government, Delhi Jal Board, DUSIB and other agencies to immediately operationalise the sewerage, water and electricity connections in Savda Ghevra. This victory represents a major milestone in our ongoing efforts to secure housing rights for marginalised communities and ensure that promises made by the state are delivered.

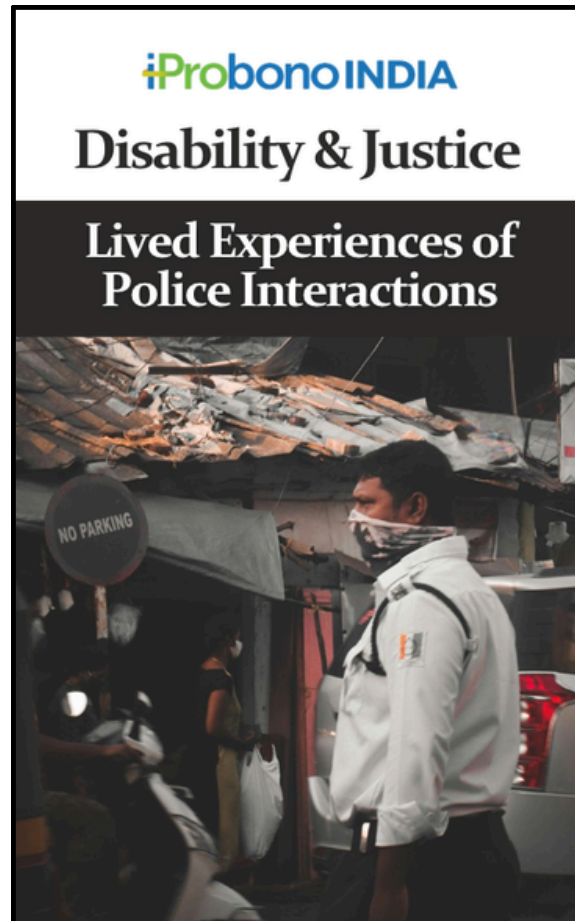


East Kidwai Nagar settlements, South West Delhi, floods every monsoon, creating inhumane living conditions for its residents

» Enabling a culture of inclusive policing

There are over 26.8 million people living in India with disabilities and yet access to justice remains a pressing challenge for this community. Interactions with our clients illuminated how persons with disabilities face various kinds of discrimination within the criminal justice system, especially in their encounters with the police. To spotlight the systemic reforms required to make policing practices more inclusive, iProbono India convened a first of its kind national-level stakeholder consultation, titled 'Inclusive Policing for Persons with Disabilities'. This consultation spurred collaborations with the Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) and various State Commissioners for Persons with Disabilities (SCPDs) who have displayed a particular interest in initiating police reform.

We also produced a compilation of case studies to spotlight the challenges, discrimination and abuse that persons with disabilities face when interacting with law enforcement. These stories expose how current procedures exclude and neglect persons with disabilities despite established legal standards to protect their rights.



Why are the provisions of the disability rights laws kept in hiding? The reason is that we are not able to bring them out in the public.”

- Justice G.S. Sistani, former Delhi High Court Judge

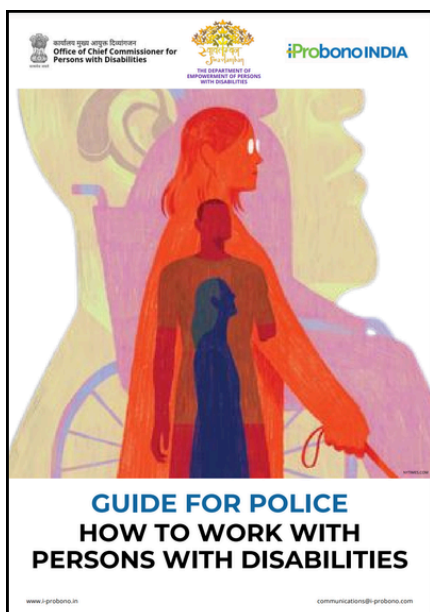


Inclusive Policing for Persons with Disabilities stakeholder consultation, Delhi, 28 September 2024

Left to Right: Dr Satendra Singh, Doctors with Disabilities: Agents of Change; George Abraham, Score Foundation; L. Muruganantham, Advocate, Madras High Court; Smitha Sadasivan, Disability Rights Alliance; and Kiran Nayak, Karnataka Vikalachetanara Sangatane

I was attending a community event where a stampede-like situation occurred. The police responded with a violent lathi charge. While several able-bodied people could run away, as a visually impaired individual, I could not. I was left pleading with the police to stop beating me, but they did not.”

- Dr Sapam Jasowanta, Secretary General of Handicapped Development Foundation in Manipur



We co-produced a guide with the CCPD to drive appropriate police action when interacting with persons with disabilities. The CCPD issued a letter urging all SCPDs to conduct training sessions with their respective police departments, using this guide as a reference.

There are groups working on police reforms but there was a gap in looking at it from the disability lens. iProbono fills this void. I used their presentation during a police academy training in West Bengal and am grateful to them for allowing me to do so.”

- Shampa Sengupta, Director, Sruti Disability Rights Centre

» Driving state accountability towards disability rights

iProbono India participated in the Purple Convention, an inclusive festival that celebrates persons with disabilities, organised by the Government of Goa. We convened a panel discussion titled "Strengthening the functioning of Chief and State Commissioners for Persons with Disabilities." The conversation covered an array of issues from the lack of implementation of the Commissioners' orders to the importance of strengthening the role of Special Courts.

This discussion formed the basis for a petition we filed before the Supreme Court to develop robust guidelines ensuring effective implementation of CCPD and SCPD orders.



Panel discussion, Purple Fest, Goa, 11 January 2024

Left to right: Dr Nonita Gangwani, Assistant Professor, Physiology, Safdarjung Hospital; Diethono Nakhro, State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Nagaland; and Siddharth Nath, iProbono India panel advocate

STRATEGIC LITIGATION

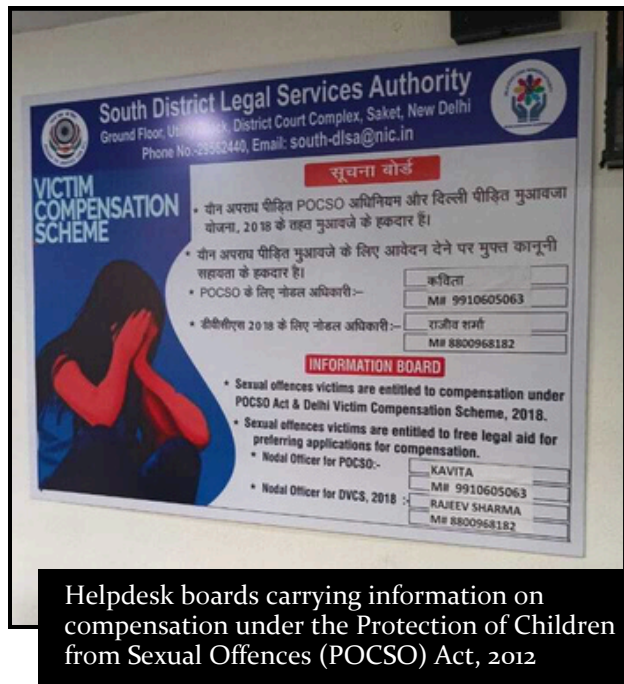
In addition to targeted advocacy interventions, iProbono India also explores the potential of litigation as a tool to strengthen legal and policy safeguards for vulnerable communities.

» Streamlining Delhi's victim compensation process

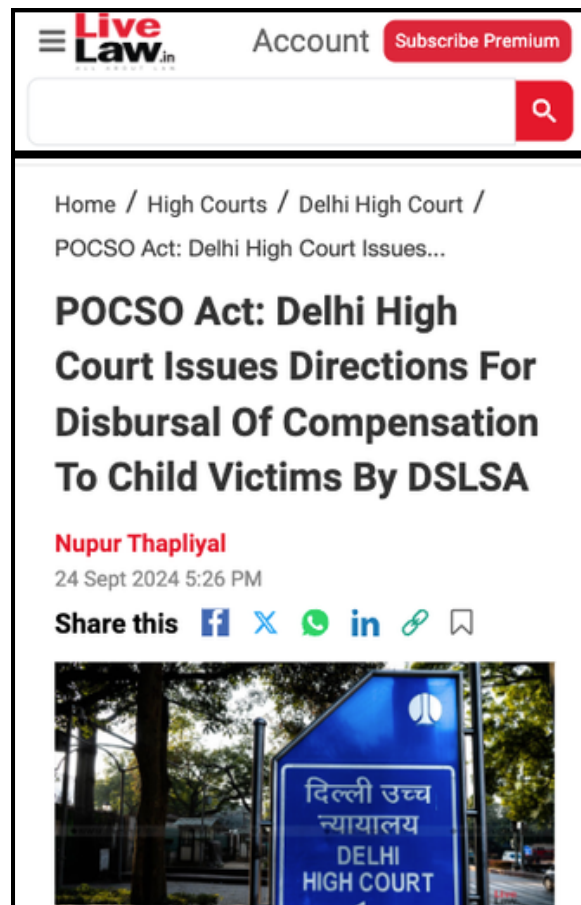
Children often struggle to receive victim compensation on time due to various administrative barriers. Recognising the dire implications of delayed financial relief on the life and recovery of a survivor, iProbono India collaborated with our panel advocate Mansi Sood to file a Public Interest Litigation before the High Court of Delhi. This case, *Abhishek Yadav vs Delhi State Legal Services Authority and Ors*, prompted a landmark judgment calling for a more efficient process of disbursement of compensation for child victims of abuse in Delhi. This outcome unlocked legal protections for nearly 3000 children in Delhi in 2024 alone.

A notable provision of the Court order is establishing a uniform process across all DLSAs, allowing victims who live outside Delhi to receive compensation in their home states. It further directed that compensation orders be sent to the concerned DLSA within three days of issuance and clarified the documentation required for the DLSA to process claims. The Court also directed that information boards and help desks be set up in trial courts to improve awareness about a victim's right to compensation.

Our team successfully invoked this order to secure compensation for 15 child victims to whom we provide psychosocial support.



Helpdesk boards carrying information on compensation under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012



» Developing guidelines to enhance the functioning of support persons

To amplify the impact of support persons, iProbono India intervened in the Bachpan Bachao Andolan vs Union of India case before the Supreme Court. Drawing on our experience as a support person organisation, as well as the experiences of other such organisations in Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, we highlighted challenges faced on the ground. We highlighted, for instance, that support persons will be unable to capably perform their responsibilities and duties towards survivors if they themselves are not properly compensated or protected from harassment. Shortly after our intervention, the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), acting on the directions of the Supreme Court, developed the “Model Guidelines for Support Persons under Section 39 of the POCSO Act”. iProbono India collaborated with the NCPCR to jointly develop a Terms of Reference, which outlines safeguard mechanisms available to support persons, and which now serves as an annexure to the guidelines. These additions have strengthened the overall impact of the model guidelines and contribute to a more sustainable working model for child protection.

» Advocating for informed decision-making by the Sentence Review Board

As part of our commitment to establish a more accountable criminal justice system, iProbono India led a substantial intervention to reform the decision-making processes of the Sentence Review Board (SRB). Entrusted with assessing the premature release of convicts on a case by case basis, the SRB frequently disregards the principles of reformation and rehabilitation. Instead, it emphasises the gravity of the original offense, which is not meant to be the sole determining factor.

Vijay, our client, spent over 23 years in prison. Despite his track record of good conduct, the SRB denied his release on six separate occasions, focusing solely on the gravity of his original crime. In response, our panel advocate Vrinda Bhandari challenged the SRB’s decision before the Delhi High Court in Vijay Kumar Shukla vs State of NCT of Delhi. Our team developed a detailed procedural checklist to guide the SRB in future reviews. The checklist ensures alignment with established legal provisions, rules, and judicial precedents while incorporating principles of rehabilitation. The Delhi High Court incorporated the checklist in its final judgment and recommended that the SRB apply it in future decision-making.



iProbono India identified the premature release of life convicts as a crucial and overlooked area for intervention in criminal justice reform. As a result of this case, more prisoners in these circumstances are now approaching us for legal representation. The team’s exceptional backend support that includes client coordination and support in shaping legal arguments empowers lawyers like me to sustainably take on more pro bono work. I was also helped immensely by the fantastic iProbono team who helped in coordinating with the petitioner and obtaining and verifying all the relevant documents.”

- Vrinda Bhandari, iProbono India panel advocate

ENHANCING CAPACITIES

iProbono India conducts capacity enhancement sessions for a diverse range of stakeholders in the justice system including police officers, lawyers, civil society organisations, public prosecutors, and state officers. Our collaborations bring nuance and depth to their understanding of the law, and strengthen institutional accountability to vulnerable communities and individuals.

» Bridging knowledge gaps in law enforcement

Low awareness among police officers about their responsibilities towards children in conflict with the law, coupled with a general lack of empathy towards their unique situations, can significantly hinder a child's path to justice. Recognising these critical gaps, iProbono India collaborated with police departments in Karnataka to deliver trainings for around 80 police officers. Sessions focused on their legal obligations under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, and emphasised the importance of sensitivity and adherence to child-friendly procedures. In Maharashtra, we observed low levels of awareness among the police on how to effectively process compensation applications on behalf of child victims of abuse. In collaboration with the DLSA Mumbai, we built awareness among approximately 80 police officers. These trainings clarified protocols for processing victim compensation applications to ensure that victims can access their entitlements promptly.

» Fostering critical thinking in academic legal education

iProbono India works with universities across the country to encourage critical

thinking around issues of justice and child rights. We integrate perspectives that are lacking in formal curricula such as the importance of adopting a victim-centred approach to the law. This year, our team brought their considerable expertise and experience as practitioners into classrooms across Delhi, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh, enhancing the sensitivity and knowledge of 150 future legal practitioners.

» Launching India Pro Bono Week



Pro Bono Weeks are part of a global movement championing public interest lawyering to bridge the access to justice gap. For over a decade, iProbono India has advanced this movement by fostering collaboration between the legal community and NGOs in India. This year, we partnered with TrustLaw to helm India's first ever Pro Bono Week – a series of events and workshops designed to amplify the benefits of pro bono lawyering and expand pro bono services to NGOs.

iProbono India's sessions sparked conversations amongst more than 150 lawyers and civil society representatives nationwide. Highlights included a roundtable with lawyers and NGOs on strategies to improve legal representation of child survivors of sexual abuse in Maharashtra and a virtual session for NGOs on the effective implementation of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) frameworks by Internal Complaints Committee members. As part of our flagship 'Legal A-Z' series, we hosted a clinic to help NGOs translate India's labour laws into progressive policies in the workplace.



जब मेरी बेटी गुम हो गई थी और कोई उसे ढूँढने में मेरी मदद नहीं कर रहा था, तब सबसे ज़्यादा आईप्रोबोनो इंडिया की टीम ने ही मदद की। उन्होंने हर जगह मेरी बात पहुँचाई।”

When no one else was willing to help me find my missing daughter, iProbono India's team stepped in. They raised my voice wherever it needed to be heard.

- Farah, a mother whose daughter was kidnapped



Disclaimer

Consent was taken for all the photographs taken by the iProbono India team

Photos © iProbono India

For privacy reasons, some names in this report have been modified.

To find out more about our work, visit www.i-probono.in

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