



CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	(1)
ABOUT TRAFFICKING IN INDIA	(2)
METHODOLOGY	(4)
HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN INDIA	(5)
SIX INDICATORS OF AHTU FUNCTIONALITY	(6)
RTI RESPONSIVENESS	(7)
PRIMARY FINDING	(8)
STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES	(10)
ASYMMETRICAL FUNCTIONALITY OF AHTUS	(11)
POSITIVE SYSTEMIC SHIFTS	(12)
SURVIVOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES	(13)
CONCLUSION	(14)

OVERVIEW

AHTU Watch is a national accountability initiative examining the functionality of **Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs)** in India.

The initiative brings together:

- RTI-based institutional data
- Field observations
- Key Informant Interviews
- Survivor testimonies

to assess whether AHTUs are functioning as envisioned under government policy.

This study represents a 15-year longitudinal evidence base examining institutional performance across three research phases.

ABOUT TRAFFICKING IN INDIA

Human trafficking in India remains a complex and evolving challenge that requires coordinated institutional responses across investigation, prosecution, rehabilitation, and survivor support systems.



Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) were conceptualised by the Ministry of Home Affairs as specialised, multi-disciplinary units designed to: **prevent trafficking, conduct rescues, investigate offences, prosecute traffickers, and coordinate survivor rehabilitation.**

Their intended composition includes trained law enforcement personnel and coordination with:

- Child Welfare Committees (CWCs)
- District Child Protection Units (DCPUs)
- shelters
- legal aid authorities
- prosecution services.

In the national anti-trafficking framework, AHTUs are the backbone of trafficking investigations and survivor justice. However, institutional functionality varies significantly across states/UTs and over time.

However, institutional functionality varies significantly across states and Union Territories. These variations create systemic bottlenecks affecting:



FIR REGISTRATION



INVESTIGATION QUALITY



ACCESS TO COMPENSATION



SURVIVOR REHABILITATION PATHWAYS

M E T H O D O L O G Y

The AHTU Watch initiative demonstrates methodological evolution across three phases of research.

PHASE 1 (FY 2010–2020)

RTI-led documentation along with lawyer, NGO and survivor narratives.

PHASE 2 (FY 2020–21 TO 2022–23)

Expanded RTI study and comparative institutional review.

PHASE 3 (FY 2020–21 TO 2022–23)

RTI data combined with KIIs, field observations and survivor testimonies.

The evolving approach significantly enhances the veracity, accountability value, and advocacy relevance of the findings.

The research integrates the voices of survivor leaders and civil society stakeholders, including collaboration with survivor collectives and advocacy partners such as ILFAT for survivor-centred accountability and policy advocacy.

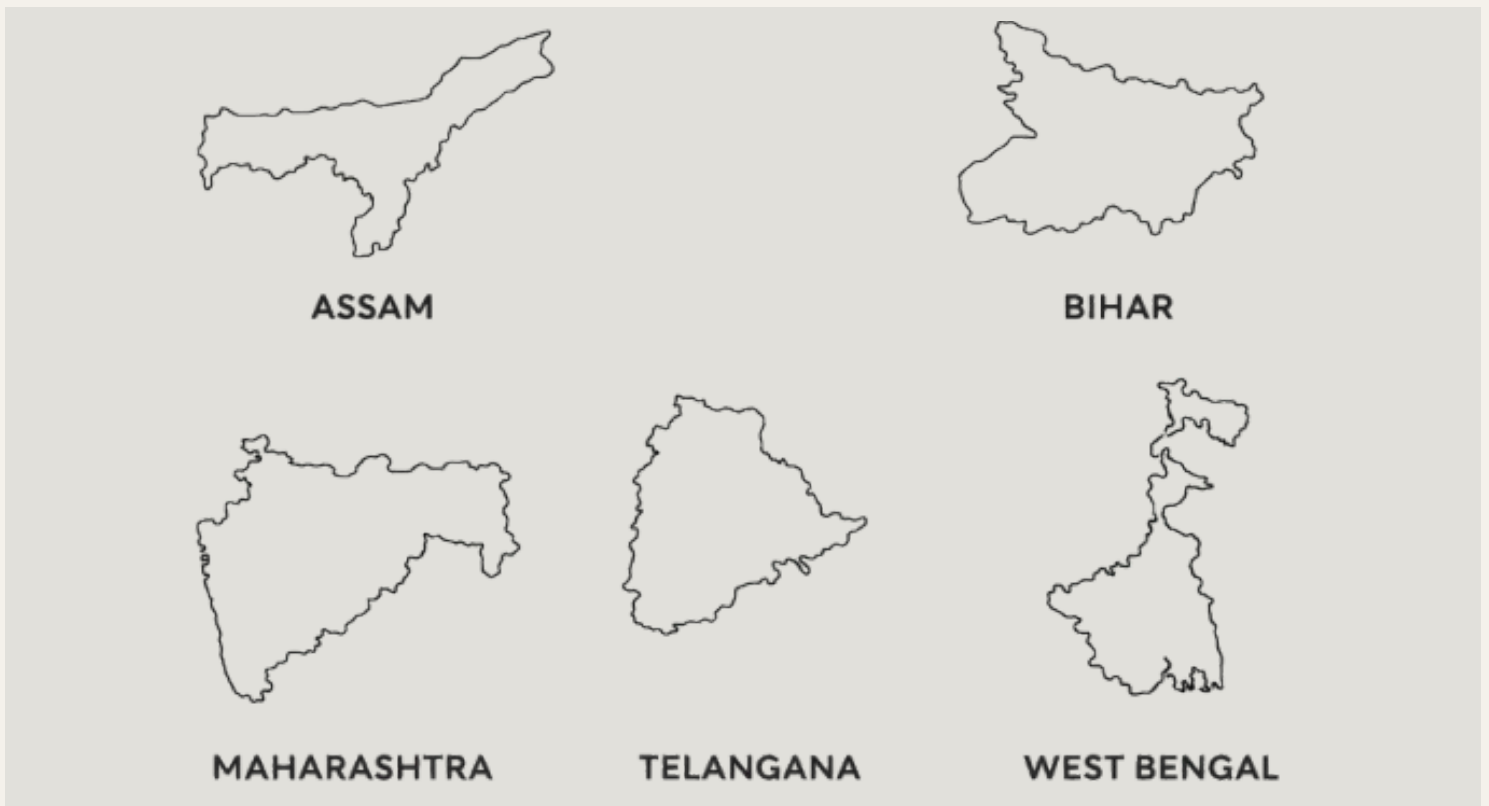
HUMAN TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN INDIA

Several high-incidence states demonstrate limited RTI responsiveness, raising questions about institutional documentation and monitoring.

NCRB data shows:

- trafficking cases increased until **2016**
- declined until **2020**
- remained relatively stable thereafter.

HIGH-INCIDENCE STATES INCLUDE:



A significant concern emerges when trafficking incidence is viewed alongside institutional transparency.

6

INDICATORS OF AHTU FUNCTIONALITY

(1)

NOTIFICATION STATUS:

Non-notification leads to no FIR powers.

(2)

STAFFING AND STABILITY:

Additional charge of AHTU officers compromises continuity of investigations.

(3)

BUDGET AND INFRASTRUCTURE:

Opaque and erratic budgeting seriously affects operational

(4)

FIR AUTONOMY:

AHTUs are unable to undertake independent investigations.

(5)

COORDINATION MECHANISMS:

Poor coordination results in delayed or absent victim compensation and rehabilitation.

(6)

CASE PROGRESSION AND OUTCOMES:

Low conviction rates, survivor vulnerability and impunity for traffickers.

THIS FRAMEWORK REFLECTS BOTH SYSTEMIC DATA AND SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES.

RTI RESPONSIVENESS

RTI responsiveness trends across phases show:

States that responded in all phases:

- Arunachal Pradesh
- Himachal Pradesh
- Nagaland

States that did not respond in any phase:

- Assam
- Gujarat
- Maharashtra
- Manipur
- Odisha
- Puducherry
- Punjab
- Sikkim

Lack of response from high-incident states indicates lack of accountability and/or standardised monitoring protocols.

Several high-incidence states demonstrate limited RTI responsiveness, raising questions about institutional documentation and monitoring:

whether the observed decline in trafficking cases reflects an actual reduction in trafficking prevalence or a decline in reporting, documentation, and institutional disclosure.

PRIMARY FINDING IN INDIA

A Structural Dissonance Between Policy Intent and Ground Reality

Despite multiple advisories issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (2010, 2013, 2019) emphasising dedicated staffing, inter-agency coordination, infrastructure and specialised training, AHTUs continue to operate with:

- fragmented notification
- limited autonomy
- additional charge burdens
- weak coordination
- inconsistent resource allocation

This structural gap remains a central finding across all phases of AHTU Watch.



KEY NATIONAL FINDINGS

AHTU functionality remains uneven and asymmetrical across states and Union Territories.

Additional charge staffing continues to undermine specialised investigations.

Budget allocation and utilisation lack transparency.

FIR autonomy varies significantly across jurisdictions.

Coordination mechanisms remain largely informal.

There is a significant gap between policy intent and operational reality.

NGOs and survivor collectives remain central to anti-trafficking responses.

Training has increased but remains inconsistent and police-centric.

Misclassification of labour trafficking persists.

Data transparency gaps hinder monitoring and accountability.

Rescue efforts are more visible than prosecution outcomes.

Coordination failures delay compensation and rehabilitation.

Interpretation:

Administrative establishment of AHTUs has increased over time. However, operational strengthening has not progressed proportionately. Functionality remains asymmetrical across jurisdictions.



STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES:

- *Additional Charge Staffing:*

Officers managing both police duties and AHTU responsibilities.

- *Weak Budget Transparency:*

Limited disclosure of allocation and utilisation.

- *Training Gaps:*

Inconsistent and police-centric training models.

- *Limited FIR Autonomy:*

Dependence on local police stations.

- *Coordination Gaps:*

Weak institutional linkages with CWCs, DLSAs, and rehabilitation services.

ASYMMETRICAL FUNCTIONALITY OF AHTUS

AHTU performance varies significantly across India.

Relatively stronger functioning

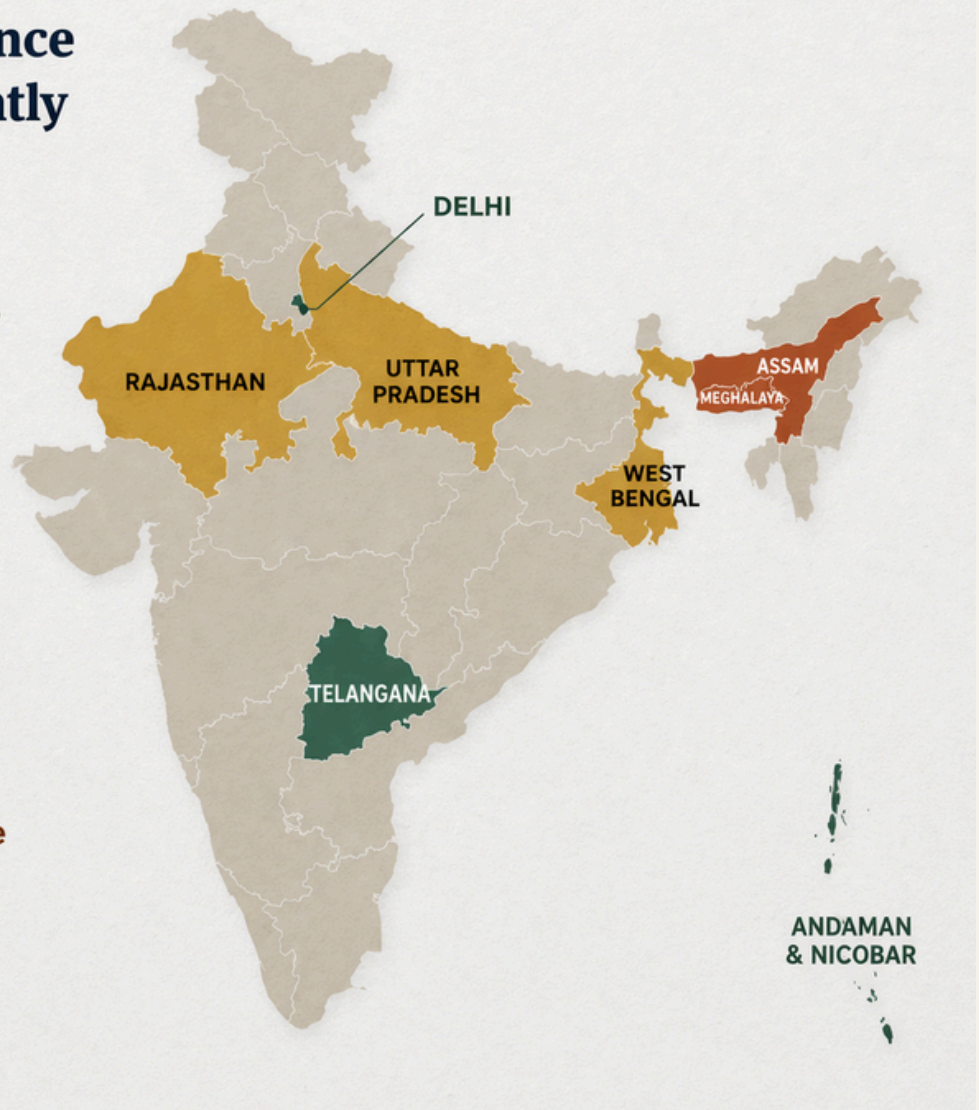
Telangana
Delhi
Andaman & Nicobar

Moderate functionality

Uttar Pradesh
Rajasthan
West Bengal

Structurally fragile systems

Meghalaya
Assam



THE FINDINGS REVEAL UNEVEN AHTU PERFORMANCE ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

SOME STATES DEMONSTRATE:

- stronger FIR autonomy
- more active case handling
- improved training systems

OTHERS REMAIN SYSTEMICALLY FRAGILE DUE TO:

- funding gaps
- staffing shortages
- weak coordination mechanisms

POSITIVE SYSTEMIC SHIFTS



Despite persistent challenges, several improvements were observed:



increased reporting of training initiatives



greater visibility of virtual training formats



active prosecution trends in select states (notably Telangana)



survivor perception that functional AHTUs perform better than local police stations

Potential Impacts of Interventions

- Improved investigation quality and charge-sheeting outcomes
- Faster survivor access to compensation and other justice entitlements
- Sustainable systemic activation across functionality indicators.

SURVIVOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES

Survivor testimonies and NGO inputs reveal:

-  DELAYS IN FIR REGISTRATION
-  CONFUSION REGARDING VICTIM
COMPENSATION PROCESSES
-  WEAK COORDINATION BETWEEN AGENCIES
-  RELIANCE ON CIVIL SOCIETY FOR RESCUE,
DOCUMENTATION AND REHABILITATION

Survivor collectives and civil society organisations continue to play a critical role in sustaining anti-trafficking responses and ensuring survivor access to justice.

“*I have been 62 times to the Barasat court. 62 times I had to say the same thing for just the compensation money... Is this not a form of violence? This is a mental torture. I did not know that I could ever get compensation money in my lifetime. The government does not tell us... In fact, if we turn to officials for help, they blame us!*”

-Tajmira Khatun recounts the physical and mental exhaustion of a process that lasted three years and required dozens of court appearances

CONCLUSION

Fifteen years of AHTU Watch research demonstrates that while Anti-Human Trafficking Units exist administratively across India, their operational functionality remains uneven. The gap between institutional design and implementation continues to affect investigations, prosecutions and survivor access to justice.

Strengthening AHTUs requires:

- dedicated staffing
- clear investigative authority
- transparent budgeting
- specialised training
- institutional coordination
- improved documentation and accountability systems

Targeted institutional reforms can significantly strengthen India's anti-trafficking response and ensure that AHTUs fulfil their intended mandate as specialised, survivor-centred anti-trafficking institutions.