

# ABHINANDAN

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## FELICITATION FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS **CHILD PROTECTION** ACROSS RAILWAY STATIONS



# INTRODUCTION

Railway Children India, in collaboration with the Government Railway Police, Patna, and District Child Protection Unit, Patna, organized a felicitation ceremony named “ABHINANDAN” to honor the exceptional contributions of railway officials in protecting and safeguarding children at railway stations of the Patna Railway Zone. Additionally, the event comprised a training session to train the personnel of the Government Railway Police (GRP) on child rights and child protection protocols outlined in the Railways’ Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

Held at Hotel Chanakya in Patna on December 20, 2024. The main objective of the felicitation ceremony was to recognize and appreciate the significant role played by the Government Railway Police in ensuring the safety and well-being of children associated with railway stations.

Since 2013, Railway Children India has made remarkable progress by training nearly 45,000 railway officials through 550 training sessions.

These efforts underscore the organization’s dedication to creating a safe and nurturing environment for children in the railway ecosystem.

The event commenced with a full-day program, starting with a concise orientation on Railway Children India’s work pan India and its association with the railways since 2013. This provided insights into the importance of child protection and sensitized the attendees about the challenges and best practices in ensuring the safety of children at railway stations, followed by the felicitation ceremony and the training.

The highlight of the event was the felicitation ceremony, where 40 outstanding railway officials were honored for their remarkable contributions to the protection of 170 children in contact with the railway system. The recognition was a token of appreciation for their dedication and efforts in making railway stations safer for children.



# MR. NAVIN SELLARAJU SUKUMAR

## CEO, Railway Children India

Mr. Navin Sellaraju Sukumar, CEO of Railway Children India extended a warm welcome to the distinguished guests, including railway officials, district child protection functionaries, the Child Welfare Committee Chairperson, members, and the 40 awardees by Mr. Navin Sellaraju Sukumar, CEO of Railway Children India.

He began the session by highlighting RCI's ongoing collaboration with the Child Protection Unit and Government Railway Police Patna, which culminated in Abhinandan.



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# MR. UDAY KUMAR JHA

**Assistant Director, Child Protection Unit, Patna**

Mr. Uday Kumar Jha, the Assistant Director, Child Protection Unit, Patna, drew attention to the fact that both the judiciary and stakeholders play a key role when it comes to child protection. He noted that the JJ Act is the overarching legislation for protecting children; however, gaps persist in the understanding of child protection mechanisms among railway officials and the general public, resulting in confusion when producing children before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and the statutory committee responsible for decisions regarding children in need of care and protection. RCI and Child Helpline play a crucial role in guiding railway officials, ensuring that no child at the railway is left unprotected.

Furthermore, he emphasized the critical need for sensitivity and patience when interacting with children, particularly during the initial stages of engagement. Miscommunication or changing statements from the time the child is protected till produced before CWC can complicate the process, making it essential for officials to handle these cases with care to facilitate the child's safe reintegration.

Raising concerns about the increasing complexity of child-related issues, he addressed the rise in cases where children are leaving home on their own or being influenced by others, adding new layers of difficulty for railway officials and child protection systems. Highlighting the scope for improvement, he emphasized the need to ensure the safe reintegration of these children, requiring nuanced approaches and strengthened collaboration across all stakeholders.



# MS. USHA KUMARI

**Chairperson, Child Welfare Committee, Patna**

Ms. Usha Kumari underscored the critical challenges faced by unaccompanied and unprotected children at railway stations, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances that lead to their presence in these locations. She highlighted that many of these children are separated from their families, necessitating a compassionate and well-informed approach to addressing their needs.

She further stressed the importance of a meticulous assessment by officials to determine whether a child is genuinely in need of protection or is under the supervision of a parent or guardian. Age serves as a significant criterion in this evaluation, as children below the age of 12 rarely travel alone, whereas those above 12 may do so independently without encountering major difficulties. Consequently, Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel must conduct thorough verification in such cases before classifying a child as vulnerable and proceeding with registration.





## MR. AMRITENDU SHEKHAR THAKUR

**IPS (SRP, Patna Zone)**

Mr. Amritendu Shekhar Thakur provided a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, along with other child protection mechanisms relevant to railway officials. Drawing from his extensive experience in child protection, he highlighted the evolving challenges faced by children in vulnerable situations.

He noted a shift in the nature of cases involving children, observing that while incidents of missing or lost children were more prevalent in the past, there is now a growing trend of children from well-resourced families voluntarily leaving home. This shift has increased their exposure to risks of exploitation and abuse. Mr. Thakur attributed this vulnerability, in part, to the rise of individualism within communities, which has weakened traditional safety structures that previously safeguarded children.

Emphasizing the critical role of Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel as the first point of contact for such children at railway stations, he urged officials to handle cases with sensitivity, ensuring appropriate counseling and intervention. He stressed the necessity of coordinated efforts with organizations such as the Child Helpline, the Railway Children India (RCI), and the Child Protection Unit to effectively manage complex cases requiring specialized support. Additionally, he underscored the responsibility of GRP personnel to ensure the safety and proper restoration of children, even after their transfer to Childline or the Child Welfare Committee (CWC).

Mr. Thakur also outlined key legal and procedural guidelines, emphasizing the importance of presenting children before the CWC when required. He reiterated that practices such as detaining children in police lockups or handcuffing them must be strictly avoided. Instead, he advocated for a thorough verification of each child's circumstances, with detailed reports submitted to the CWC or the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB). Furthermore, he called for enhanced support from the District Child Protection Unit to strengthen community awareness and prevent child abuse and exploitation. Acknowledging the limitations of railway officials in reaching children within their communities, he emphasized the need for a collaborative approach to reinforce protective measures and ensure the well-being of vulnerable children.



# MR. RAKESH KUMAR

**Consultant, UNICEF**

Mr. Rakesh Kumar, Consultant at UNICEF, Patna, provided a detailed overview of child protection laws and recent procedural updates, with a particular focus on the revised Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act Model Rules (2024) for Bihar. He encouraged railway officials to actively contribute their inputs to enhance the effectiveness of these regulations.

A key aspect of his session addressed the age verification process, emphasizing the importance of utilizing official documents such as birth certificates, school records, or ossification tests to establish a child's age accurately. He also elaborated on the application of specific provisions of the JJ Act, including Section 75 (Cruelty to Children) and Section 79 (Child Labor), particularly in the context of child rescue operations. Furthermore, he underscored that children categorized as Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) must not be handed over to any party without being formally presented before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), as mandated by the JJ Act.

In addition, Mr. Kumar provided critical insights into the implementation of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, highlighting the responsibilities of law enforcement in conducting child-friendly investigations. He stressed the importance of safeguarding victims' identities and ensuring the mandatory filing of First Information Reports (FIRs), including zero FIRs in railway-related cases. The session also underscored the significance of trauma-informed care, emphasizing effective psychological counseling and trauma management as integral components of the judicial process.



He further highlighted the necessity of thorough medical examinations and seamless coordination among CWCs, District Child Protection Units (DCPUs), and Child Care Institutions (CCIs).

Addressing the existing challenges in child protection, Mr. Kumar pointed to the weak coordination between police and CWCs as a key issue. He also advocated for preventive measures, recommending enhanced community outreach initiatives and school-based programs to raise awareness and strengthen safeguards for vulnerable children.



# MR. SUNIL KUMAR JHA

## Sr. Consultant, RCI

Mr. Sunil Kumar Jha, Consultant at Railway Children India (RCI), underscored the critical importance of tracing a child's parents and understanding the underlying reasons for their separation from home. He highlighted the role of Child Help Groups (CHGs) in facilitating effective communication and coordination, particularly through digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, to streamline support mechanisms.

Mr. Jha emphasized the necessity of identifying the root causes behind a child's departure from home to ensure their safe reintegration and prevent future instances of separation. Addressing the Deputy Superintendent of Police (Railways), he highlighted the significance of the master register maintained by the Station Master at three key railway stations—Patna, Rajendranagar, and Danapur. This register, managed with the active involvement of the Government Railway Police (GRP), serves as a crucial documentation tool for recording children's details. It plays a pivotal role in assisting the Child Helpline and RCI in tracking, restoring, and ensuring the safe reintegration of vulnerable children.

Furthermore, Mr. Jha provided guidance to GRP personnel on the proper usage of this register, explaining its format and ensuring that officials understand the importance of maintaining accurate and comprehensive records to support child protection efforts effectively.



# CASE STUDIES AND DATA INSIGHTS

The session led by **Ms. Diya Kundu**, a team member from Railway Children India (RCI), provided key data insights on child protection efforts between April and November 2024, during which 431 children were safeguarded through collaborative efforts between RCI, railway officials, and Childline.

Ms. Kundu presented a detailed gender-based analysis, reporting that 154 of the 431 children were girls. The primary reasons for their separation from home included family discord, teenage-related issues, and accidental separation during travel. In contrast, among the 277 boys, the predominant reasons for leaving home were employment-related factors—either seeking their first job or already engaged in work—followed by family disputes. She emphasized that these differing motivations necessitate a tailored, sensitive, and patient approach from railway officials, who serve as the first point of contact, to facilitate appropriate rehabilitation and ensure safe restoration.

Additionally, Ms. Kundu highlighted the protection of children at key destinations such as Delhi and Ghaziabad, where RCI has direct interventions. She reported that of the 982 children safeguarded at these locations, 125 were from Bihar (29 girls and 96 boys). She stressed RCI's critical role in ensuring these children were safely returned home.

Following this, **Ms. Nida Zamani Siddique** elaborated on the concept of '**Family Reintegration**', emphasizing RCI's continued support to children who, despite being restored to their families, remain exposed to vulnerabilities and risks. She underscored the necessity of focused intervention and intensive family engagement to prevent repeated separations and protect children from exploitative conditions.

The session concluded with **Mr. Afsar Ahmad Khan**, Programme Manager at RCI, who emphasized the importance of protecting children at transit points, such as railway stations, to reduce the likelihood of children from Bihar reaching destinations like Delhi or Ghaziabad. He shared live case studies and real-world examples to illustrate best practices and challenges in safeguarding children at railway stations. Data from RCI's interventions reinforced the critical impact of direct engagement in child protection efforts.



## WAY AHEAD

Railway Children India (RCI), in collaboration with the Child Helpline, has played a pivotal role in providing essential guidance to railway officials in safeguarding vulnerable children. During the **2024-2025 program cycle**, the initiative successfully protected **563 children**, demonstrating the team's unwavering commitment and perseverance in addressing complex and sensitive cases. Each child's situation requires a tailored intervention strategy, whether through family reunification or referral to a Child Care Institution (CCI) for further support.

Furthermore, continuous engagement with the Government Railway Police (GRP) of the Patna Zone has been instrumental in strengthening child protection mechanisms. These discussions, aligned with the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for railways, ensure that children in contact with railway systems receive the necessary care and protection. This sustained collaboration remains crucial in enhancing intervention strategies, coordination efforts, and preventive measures, thereby reinforcing the collective responsibility of safeguarding children's rights and well-being within railway environments.



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