

Nothing POSH about it: 90% T cos ignore sexual harassment law

Manvi Vyas / May 30, 2026, 00:51 IST

Select TOI as

Comments

Share

Print

AA



Hyderabad: Nearly 90% of companies in Telangana have refused to set up a mechanism to tackle cases related to sexual harassment of women at the workplace even 13 years after the law was enacted to address the menace.

A recent survey by the Telangana labour department, accessed by TOI, has revealed that only 12.6% of companies across Telangana have internal complaints committees (ICCs) as mandated by the Sexual

Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act.

Hyderabad: Nearly 90% of companies in Telangana have refused to set up a mechanism to tackle cases related to sexual harassment of women at the workplace even 13 years after the law was enacted to address the menace.

A recent survey by the Telangana labour department, accessed by TOI, has revealed that only 12.6% of companies across Telangana have internal complaints committees (ICCs) as mandated by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act.

The result is many women are either forced to leave their jobs or suffer the harassment silently as they are afraid to approach the police with complaints.

Women who push back are labelled "difficult" and put on performance improvement plans shortly after. "We have also received complaints where women were pushed out or forced to resign by being given excessive work or unrealistic targets," said Vinod Kumar, president of the Forum for IT Employees, Telangana.

The Telangana Police's women's safety wing, which set up a dedicated POSH helpdesk last month, received seven complaints in its first month, with victims citing either the absence of an ICC or its failure to function when it mattered.

But officials say the number could be much higher.

"Many women come to us saying their company either lacks an ICC to deal with workplace harassment or that committee members are not equipped to understand the nuances of such situations," women's safety wing DGP Charu Sinha told TOI.

The law mandates that any organisation with ten or more employees must constitute an ICC. Failure to do so can attract a fine of up to Rs 50,000, with repeat violations leading to cancellation of business registration.

Centre's SheBox ignored

Data obtained from the district welfare office under the Union Ministry of Women and Child Welfare painted a similar picture. Only 539 companies in Hyderabad district and 450 in Rangareddy, home to the state's IT corridor, are registered on the national SheBox monitoring portal.

Against 21.1 lakh active companies across India, only 1.74 lakh are registered on SheBox, the national platform that enables women to lodge external complaints if an ICC is non-existent or dysfunctional.

The absence of ICCs has made life extremely difficult for women like Sakshi (name changed), among the first woman in her family to move to a metro city for work after leaving her home in the interiors of Telangana. She discovered her company's ICC existed only on paper after trying to report repeated harassment by a colleague during a work trip.

The law remains largely ignored. "Most companies only scramble to comply after an incident blows up publicly or ends up in court.

The law has teeth. The problem is that those teeth are rarely used," said Shivangi Prasad, a POSH compliance expert.

Asiya Sherwani, counsellor heading the POSH helpdesk of the Women's Safety Wing, said the harassment complaints the wing receives range from manipulation to coercion. "A few women reported being helped by a male colleague who initially acted as a confidant but later began making sexual advances. Some send random WhatsApp messages, make unsolicited compliments, which are often dismissed as workplace banter, but are corrosive," she said.

When such victims turned to their ICC, they were often told they had brought it on themselves by confiding in a colleague in the first place.

No trust in ICCs

Even when ICCs exist, women often do not trust them enough to walk in. "The biggest reason employees don't come forward is fear, fear of not being believed, fear of retaliation, fear that the person on the committee is their boss's friend. When your HR head decides your appraisal and also sits on the ICC, how safe does it really feel to walk in and file a complaint?" said Shivangi.

A POSH audit circular released by the Maharashtra govt on May 14, following the TCS Nashik Posh helpdesk lapse, asks questions beyond the regular ones. "They now ask if the policy actually works. The circular asks whether ICs have been set up across all offices, not just head offices, whether members have been trained, and whether company policies cover remote work situations," Shivangi said.

Enforcement only on paper

In Telangana, legal experts say enforcement remains limited to receiving complaints.

"Labour authorities and the Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs are responsible for ensuring compliance, but inspections happen only after complaints are lodged," said Telangana high court advocate Yashasri Vasudeva Tadiboina.

The state women and child welfare department, which serves as the nodal body for POSH implementation in Telangana, admitted it does not have a complete count of private organisations in the state.

"Catching private organisations is a tough task. We don't know how many private organisations there are in total. ICs have been formed by well-established companies, but the gap we are observing is that they are not getting registered on SheBox. It will take a little more time," a senior official at the department told TOI.

"We have been doing surveys of all the companies that have women employees and a workforce of 10 or more people, and submitting the reports to the women's commission," said Chandrashekhar, joint commissioner, Telangana labour department.

Corporate associations, meanwhile, maintain that established companies take compliance seriously. "All reputed companies have ICs and are obligated to submit internal audit reports. Most major companies in Hyderabad take such complaints seriously," said Bipin Pendayala, president of the Hyderabad Software Enterprises Association.

The gap between intent and action is not new. In 2023, the Supreme Court called the implementation of the POSH Act across India "lamentable" and ordered all states to conduct district-wise surveys verifying whether ICCs had even been constituted. Over two years on, Telangana's nodal department still does not know how many private companies fall under its watch.