

## Virtual Roundtable Discussion

# Empowering Workplaces: Navigating Safety Policy Compliance in India Inc.

The Udaiti Foundation in collaboration with HerKey (Formerly JobsforHer) organised a virtual panel discussion on February 12th, 2024, featuring experts in safety law compliance, HR, and DEI. The one hour session centered on exploring workplace safety and gender diversity, saw a footfall of 50+ participants and delved into challenges, best practices, and potential solutions in this domain.

### Panellists



**Gayathri Vasudevan**  
Founder and CEO,  
LabourNet Services India



**Richa Singh**  
VP HR - DEI and CSR,  
Max Life Insurance



**Pallavi Pareek**  
Founder and CEO,  
Ungender Advisory



**Shruti Vidyasagar**  
Lawyer & PoSH Law  
Practitioner



**Tina Vinod**  
Founder and CEO,  
Diversity Simplified

"Certifications and awards are becoming popular among companies as they provide a way to flaunt and showcase their intent towards diversity and inclusion. It's not easy for companies to constantly communicate their internal efforts through articles or quotes. These recognitions help companies tell everyone that they are making an effort to create a better workplace culture and focus on safety and inclusion. It's about showing that we are doing something significant in areas that are hard to measure, like a safe culture and gender commitment. Winning these awards and getting these certifications repeatedly tells the talent pool that we are committed to building a great place to work. It reflects their effort more than anything else."

- Pallavi Pareek, Founder & CEO, Ungender Advisory

"Maternity benefits, including leaves or childcare, are often seen through a cost-benefit lens by many companies and treated as mere cost centres. However, when the lens of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is applied with empathetic leaders driving a perspective shift, employee well-being is seen as a crucial organisational value. Leaders need to walk the talk and acknowledge the entire parental journey holistically. It's also important to recognise that these benefits and policies need to be gender neutral, extending inclusivity to adoptive and surrogate parents. This ensures that all caregivers are equally supported, fostering a culture of equity and belonging"

- Tina Vinod, CEO and Founder, DiversitySimplified



## Highlights:

Below are the key insights from the discussion and recommendations synthesised for organisations aiming to create a safe and gender inclusive workplace, that goes beyond mere compliance.

### **Legislative Compliance and Policy Frameworks**

Policies such as the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, Companies Act and Maternity Act mandates organisations to create a safe and inclusive work environment. The discussion highlighted the importance of having robust policies in place that address prevention, prohibition, and redressal of harassment as well as policies that nurture and support women throughout their organisational journeys. It was emphasized that organizations must ensure clarity and simplicity in their policy frameworks, while also promoting transparency and inclusivity.

### **Nuanced Nature of the Law**

Panelists underscored the nuanced nature of laws aimed at protecting women's well-being in the workplace. Beyond addressing sexual harassment, legislation also addresses societal stereotypes and biases, reflecting a broader commitment to gender equality. However, flaws in implementation were highlighted, including the tendency to view benefits as discretionary rather than entitlements and subtle controls over women's reproductive decisions. It underscored the importance of continuous evaluation and adaptation of organisational policies to ensure they align with the underlying principles of the law.



## **Customised Compliance Approaches**

Recognising the diversity of challenges across sectors, panelists advocated for customised compliance approaches tailored to the specific needs of organisations. Compliance stringency and the prevalence of complaints vary significantly across industries, necessitating sector-specific strategies. Moreover, there was a call to make compliance efforts gender-neutral, ensuring equitable protection for all employees. Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) were identified as key mechanisms for bridging compliance gaps and fostering a culture of accountability and inclusivity.

## **Mindset Shift**

A fundamental aspect of ensuring workplace safety and care policy compliance is fostering a mindset shift within organisations. Panelists underscored the significance of challenging discriminatory practices, such as companies selectively hiring young, unmarried individuals to circumvent maternity leave expenses. Leadership involvement was highlighted as crucial in driving cultural change and institutionalising inclusivity at all levels of the organisation.

## **Ecosystem Changes and Policy Advocacy**

The discussion underscored the need for ecosystem level changes to drive policy reforms and foster workplace safety. It highlighted broader safety concerns beyond workplaces, such as housing and transit, crucial for women's employment. These issues require focused policy attention beyond individual companies focusing on the role of the state. By collaborating across sectors, leveraging data insights, and advocating for legislative changes, organisations can create more equitable and supportive workplaces.