

Anju Kapur
National President,
Anti-Sexual Harassment Council

1.12.2021

Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman
Honorable Minister
Finance and Corporate Affairs
Ministry of Finance
North Block
New Delhi- 110001

Respected Madam,

Greetings from Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WICCI), the first independent National Business Chamber for Women established in India.

The Anti-Sexual Harassment (ASH) Council, WICCI seeks to make a national call for an end to sexual harassment, workplace abuse and to create safer spaces for women both in public and private sphere. It seeks to ensure that women are aware of their rights and the available resources, and to make a real shift towards a culture of respect and accountability.

As the President, Anti-Sexual Harassment (ASH) National Council, WICCI, I write to highlight the need for greater budget allocation for projects earmarked to enhance women safety in public and private domain, to ensure greater participation of women in the workforce.

The pandemic posed severe challenges for everyone, affecting lives and livelihoods. However, it has led to gender-regressive scenario with women having suffered on the personal and professional front. Several studies have established that violence against women increased during the pandemic, which affected their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, severely impacting their ability to earn. Studies reveal that in India, given the wage inequality and the burden of unpaid care, the pandemic has pushed more women out of employment and into poverty. Further, the online interactions in the work from home scenario, witnessed an upsurge in the already existing problem of sexual harassment. According to the National Commission for Women (NCW) Chairperson Rekha Sharma, cases of online harassment increased by five times since the outbreak of the pandemic.

As per the July 2021 UNWomen Report, in India more women than men, have lost jobs during COVID-19. A recent report by the Center for Sustainable Employment at Azim Premji University in India shows that during the first lockdown in 2020, only 7 per cent of men lost their jobs, compared to 47 per cent of women who lost their jobs and did not return to work by the end of the year. In the informal sector, women fared even worse. This year, between March and April

2021, rural Indian women in informal jobs accounted for 80 per cent of job losses.

According to the World Bank estimates, India has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world. According to a government report, female labour participation rate in India fell to 16.1% during the July-September 2020 quarter, the lowest among the major economies said, reflecting the impact of pandemic and a widening job crisis.

The Catalyst reports, that as of 2020, less than one-quarter (20.3%) of women aged 15 and older participate in the labour force (compared to 76.0% of men). India's low labor force participation rate for women is due in part to restrictive cultural norms regarding women's work, the gender wage gap, an increase in time spent for women continuing their education, and a lack of safety policies and flexible work offerings.

It is reported that increasing women's labor force participation by 10 percentage could add \$770 billion to India's GDP by 2025. Thus, it is imperative that greater Budget allocation be made on projects focused on increasing women's safety in private and public domain and on schemes aimed at empowering women.

However, it must be noted that in 2005-06, the Gender Budget constituted 4.8% of the total budget outlay, over the years, it had been stagnating, at around 5%. Alarmingly, in 2021-22 the Gender Budget fell to 4.4%, as compared to 4.72% in 2020-21.

As a Council focused on preventing sexual harassment of women in both the organized and unorganized sector, we appeal to your Ministry to increase the outlay for women's safety with a view to increase women's participation in the workforce. To this end, we request for a substantial increase in the Gender Budget to enable all ministries to:

1. Create policies that promote women in new roles that which challenge and change existing gender norms.
2. Increase investment in training women in new roles such as bus drivers and attract more women in the Transport sector and other such sectors perceived as 'Men Only'
3. Increase allocation and spending on creating awareness and capacity building on sexual harassment/violence against women in the organized and unorganized sector. This should include:
 - a) Mass publicity and information on what constitutes sexual harassment in the real and virtual world.
 - b) Mass training programs on existing laws and the grievance redressal systems for women against violence and sexual harassment, including active advertisement of women helpline numbers.
 - c) Gender sensitization and training of all stakeholders including policy

makers, judges, district magistrates, police, members of the national/state commission for women, other relevant government officials and authorities on how to recognize and deal with sexual harassment.

- d) Create gender sensitization training and sex education curriculum in schools and Universities for Staff and students.
- e) Create gender sensitization and awareness creation mass campaigns for public at large to reverse societal norms that prejudice female participation in workforce, promotes unequal pay
4. Make greater budget allocation for in making public spaces, public transport and travel safer for women. Investing in research and developing policies that promote greater use of public transport by women.
5. Upgrade technology to identify unsafe areas/spots and proactively work towards addressing the factors that contribute to them being unsafe.
6. Upgrade technology to monitor and manage the effective implementation of Prevention of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act and other applicable laws to prevent and redress the sexual harassment of women.
7. Make proper budgetary allocation to empower, financially aid and assist victims and survivors of sexual abuse and violence and also allocate budgetary funds in favor of children who are victims and survivors of sexual abuse and neglect, which can be utilized in favor of their counselling, legal aid and rehabilitation.

We sincerely hope that you will support and promote gender equality to empower not just the Indian women but our society at large, by substantially increasing the Gender Budget in this coming year.

Thanking you

Yours sincerely



Anju Kapur
National President
ASH Council, WICCI

