

Anju Kapur
National President,
Anti-Sexual Harassment Council

15.02.2021

Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman
Honorable Minister
Finance and Corporate Affairs Ministry of Finance
Room No. 134 , North
Block New Delhi-
110001

Respected Madam,

Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WICCI), is 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.

To briefly introduce the ASH National and State Council Heads:

- **Anju Kapur**, Founder AKMD Legal and National President ASH Council.
- **Melissa Arulappan**, Head Corporate Communications IQVIA and National Vice-President ASH Council.
- **Shivangi Prasad**, Founder Partner POSH at Work and President Maharashtra ASH Council.
- **Mala Thapar**, CEO & Co-Founder Independent Minds and President Haryana ASH Council.
- **Sanya Talwar**, POSH Synergist & Legal Advisor and President Delhi ASH Council.

As President and Vice president of the Anti Sexual Harassment (ASH) National Council of WICCI, we take the opportunity to express our appreciation for requesting inputs to develop a “budget like never before”.

2020 has, by all accounts, been an extremely challenging year for everyone. Women, in particular, have faced a particularly difficult year on the professional and personal front faced with job insecurity, balancing home and work life and increasing reports of violence. With women being confined to their homes for the most part of the year, various media reports have indicated that there has been an increase in violence against women which this has a large impact on their work,

ability to earn an income and the national economy.

According to the National Commission for Women (NCW), domestic violence complaints increased by 2.5 times during the nationwide lockdown. A 2020 study on “Media reported violence and labour supply” found that in urban areas, an increase in three media reports of local physical and sexual assaults (per lakh people over a three-month period) reduces the probability of a woman employed outside her home by 5.5%. Yet other reports have indicated that the fear of sexual violence increased the mental costs of traveling to work, and thereby reduced the chance of women accepting jobs far from home by almost 3.8 percentage points.

In the organized sector the Human Rights Watch in a recent report said failure to properly enforce the sexual harassment (POSH) law in India leaves millions of women in the workplace exposed to abuse without remedy.

All of these factors mean that many women are being left out of the workforce either due to fear of sexual violence or due to working conditions (night shifts, long hours) that expose them to the risk of sexual violence. We need to retain women in the workforce to have a healthy gender diversity, improve the pool of talent available in the country, and ensure greater economic productivity. According to the latest survey by the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE), the participation of women in the labour market in India continues to be dismal at 10.3 per cent and they add that the Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns impacted the labour market, but had a devastating impact on employment opportunities for women.

Further, we understand that in FY06 when gender budgets were introduced as a separate section of the Union budget, 4.8% of total spending was allocated for women-related schemes. This rose to around 5.5% of total spending in FY09, but has since stagnated which is a cause for concern

As a Council focused on preventing sexual harassment against 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 protecting women against sexual harassment. More specifically:

1. Increase investment in training, awareness and education on sexual harassment against women for both, women in the organized and unorganized sector. This should include:
 - a) Publicity and information on what constitutes sexual harassment (including virtual sexual harassment which has increased during the pandemic), existing laws, redressal systems and the recourse women have. Mass media and campaigns through television, radio, print and social media must be used as effective vehicles to disseminate such information.
 - b) Training of police, committee members, members of the national commission for women, district magistrates, other relevant district officials and authorities on how to recognize and deal with sexual harassment

2. Increase investment in making public spaces and public transport safer for women be it through better lighting, safety measures, prominently placed panic buttons, GPS systems, etc
3. Increase investments in technology to ensure information collation, access and dissemination of information as well as analysis of information collated.
4. Increase investments in manpower/human resources to fast track, monitor and manage the effective implementation of POSH and other applicable laws to prevent sexual harassment against women.

We also request that the Nirbhaya Fund which was an important step in determining an allocation for women's safety in the country be better utilized by states and union territories and states and union territories be accountable to the public for utilization of these funds.

Swami Vivekananda has been quoted to have said "The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women." We look forward to the budget giving the right and much needed impetus to the safety and security of women.

Thanking you

Yours sincerely

Anju Kapur
President
ASH Council, WICCI

Melissa Arulappan
Vice President
ASH Council, WICCI

