

IndiaSouthEast AsiaEMEA

ET

HRWorld

From The Economic Times

ET

HRWorld

India · Southeast Asia · The Middle East

C

Get App

News

Exclusives

Leaders Speak

Events

Awards

Webinars

Brand Solutions

More

HR Movements

Interviews

Expert Speak

Beyond Office

HRTech

Editor's Pick

HR TV

Research

More

The Talent Mindset

Leading with a talent mindset is embracing the...


LinkedIn Talent Solutions PRESENTS

The Talent Mindset

by ET HRWorld

CHRO Club

#ChangeMaker: Dr. Raju Mistry, Cipla | S2 E4



Nextech India

This year's th

Work in the /

ET HR 5 Min Read

# PoSH Act at 11: Reflecting on a decade of progress & the road ahead

As the PoSH Act completes 11 years, let's explore its impact on workplace safety and inclusivity in India. From compliance-focused beginnings to fostering open conversations on harassment, the Act has driven cultural change.



S

Shireen Khan

Published On Dec 10, 2024 at 10:00 AM IST





As the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, marks 11 years, it is a moment to reflect on its origins, achievements, and the gaps that remain. This landmark legislation, better known as the PoSH Act, was a long-overdue response to the Supreme Court's Vishaka guidelines of 1997. It was formally enacted to address workplace harassment and provide women with a legal framework to ensure safety, dignity, and equality at work. Over the years, the PoSH Act has driven significant change in workplace culture, but challenges persist, especially in unorganized and digital sectors.



---

## The birth of the PoSH Act

It all started with the historic Vishaka vs State of Rajasthan judgment in 1997, where the Supreme Court laid down guidelines to combat sexual harassment at the workplace. However, these guidelines lacked the enforceability of a formal law. It wasn't until 2013, following heightened awareness and public demand, that the PoSH Act was introduced to fill this gap. This legislation codified workplace safety standards and made it mandatory for organizations to establish mechanisms like Internal Committees (ICs) to address complaints.

"In the early years, the PoSH Act was seen as merely a compliance requirement," recalls Pallavi Pareek, founder of UNGENDER and a leading expert in workplace harassment prevention.

"Organizations were focused on ticking boxes—having policies, forming ICs, and submitting reports. But over time, the focus has shifted toward creating genuinely safer and more inclusive workplaces."

## A decade of achievements



One of the most significant outcomes of the PoSH Act has been its success in normalizing conversations about workplace harassment. Previously considered a taboo topic, harassment is now widely acknowledged as a critical issue, with structured mechanisms in place to address complaints.

"The PoSH Act has opened up conversations that were often brushed under the carpet," says Pareek. "The formalization of ICs has provided employees with a structured, legal mechanism to report and resolve issues. Additionally, judicial clarifications have strengthened the Act's scope and application over time."

---

Advt

---

Smita Shetty Kapoor, CEO & Co-founder of Kelp, highlights the broader cultural shift the Act has driven:

"Over the past 11 years, the PoSH Act has evolved significantly, signaling India's growing dedication to workplace inclusivity and safety. Recent findings, like the 29% increase in reported sexual harassment cases (as highlighted by the Udaiti Foundation in August 2024), reflect a positive shift—employees are trusting the system, and organizations are stepping up to ensure fairness."



The Act has also played a pivotal role in advancing inclusivity. Beyond its primary aim of protecting women, its influence has extended to fostering safer environments for all employees, encouraging workplaces to adopt cultures of respect and accountability.

### **Persistent challenges**

Despite its successes, the PoSH Act has not fully addressed the needs of the unorganized sector and rural areas, where many women still lack access to formal redressal mechanisms. Reports as recent as 2020 revealed that many districts were yet to establish Local Complaints Committees (LCCs), leaving women in small towns and villages without a recourse to justice.

"Many employees, particularly in smaller organizations or the unorganized sector, are unaware of their rights," Pareek explains. "This lack of awareness, combined with insufficient government support, makes enforcement uneven."

Pareek has filed a PIL in the Supreme Court and has been pushing for systemic changes, such as appointing District Officers and forming LCCs in the unorganized sector as well as rural areas, to close these gaps. Her petition focuses on addressing these systemic gaps and urging stronger accountability mechanisms.

The emergence of digital workplaces has also introduced complexities. Virtual harassment—such as inappropriate messages on professional platforms or misconduct during video meetings—has highlighted the need for updated guidelines to address cyber harassment.

"Harassment no longer happens just in physical spaces—it's in emails, video calls, and even WhatsApp messages," Pareek observes. "While



many organizations have adapted their policies to include these scenarios, enforcement remains challenging in digital environments."

Kapoor echoes these concerns, noting the nuanced abuses of power that continue to challenge organizations:

"The Act still faces challenges in addressing nuanced power dynamics and requires enhanced grassroots enforcement. There's scope for refining the PoSH Act to design workplaces that are not just compliant but genuinely safe and inclusive."

### **Evolution through awareness**

A key factor in the Act's evolution has been the role of awareness and training programs. These initiatives have been instrumental in educating employees about their rights, empowering them to report harassment, and ensuring fair handling of complaints. For Internal Committees, training has been critical in maintaining impartiality and sensitivity in investigations.

"Without awareness and training, the PoSH Act would remain a set of rules that people don't fully understand," Pareek emphasizes. "These programs go beyond compliance—they challenge unconscious biases and help create workplaces where respect and safety are the norm."

### **The path ahead**

As workplaces continue to evolve, so must the PoSH Act. Pareek advocates for a broader and more inclusive framework:

"The Act should explicitly include protections for non-binary individuals and male victims, ensuring no one is left behind. Cyber harassment also



needs clearer guidelines to address the complexities of remote work and hybrid environments. Above all, the government must strengthen systemic support—appoint District Officers, establish LCCs, and ensure consistent monitoring."

Kapoor adds, "The Supreme Court's recent recommendation to include political parties under the Act's purview underscores its potential to bring greater accountability across sectors. Organizations that prioritized safety early are already on strong growth paths."

### **A decade of progress, but miles to go**

The PoSH Act has undoubtedly laid a strong foundation for workplace safety and inclusivity in India. Over the past 11 years, it has empowered countless employees and encouraged organizations to adopt cultures of accountability and respect. Yet, as workplaces transform, new challenges emerge. Addressing these requires a collective effort—from organizations, government bodies, and legal frameworks—to ensure that the PoSH Act remains robust and inclusive for years to come.

As Pareek aptly concludes:

"The PoSH Act has been a game-changer, but its potential is far from fully realized. By evolving alongside our workplaces, we can make safety, dignity, and respect a reality for everyone."

Published On Dec 10, 2024 at 10:00 AM IST



Be the first one to comment.

[Comment Now](#)



## Download ETHRWorld App

Get Realtime updates

Save your favourite articles



Scan to download App



posh act

pallavi pareek

ungender

supreme court

posh 2013

Sexual Harassment

harassment

workplace

# ET HRWorld.com

### News →

See whats happening in HR sector right now

### Exclusive →

Read and get insights from specially curated unique stories from editorial

### Leaders Speak →

Business leaders sharing their insights

### Events →

Explore and discuss challenges & trends in India's leading B2B events

### Awards →

Recognise work that not only stood out but was also purposeful

### Webinars →

Join leaders & experts for roundtables, conferences, panels and discussions





## Join the community of 2M+ industry professionals

Subscribe to our Daily Newsletter

Subscribe For Free

By continuing you agree to our [Privacy Policy](#) & [Terms & Conditions](#)

## Advertise With Us

We have various options to advertise with us including Events, Advertorials, Banners, Mailers, etc.

Get in Touch

## Download ETHRWorld App

Save your favourite articles with seamless reading experience



## Get updates on your preferred social platform

Follow us for the latest news, insider access to events and more.





About Us  
Contact Us  
Newsletters

Guest-  
Post  
Guidelin  
es

RSS  
Feed

Sitemap

RSS  
Feed

Sitemap

Guest-  
Post  
Guidelin  
es



The Economic Times Business Verticals

Auto	Retail	Health	Telecom	Energy	CIO
Real Estate	Marketing & Advertising	CFO	IT Security	BFSI	Government
Hospitality	Legal	ET TravelWorld	Infra	B2B	CIOSEA
HRSEA	HREMEA	Education	EnergyWorldMEA	Manufacturing	Pharma