

BUILDING TRUST, NOT JUST COMPLIANCE

ISSUE 49 | JUNE 2026

For years, conversations about preventing sexual harassment at work have been dominated by a familiar vocabulary: policies, committees, annual training sessions, statutory obligations. Organizations have learned to speak the language of compliance with increasing fluency. Yet beneath the checklists and certifications lies a more difficult question that cannot be answered by legislation alone.

Do people actually trust the system designed to protect them?

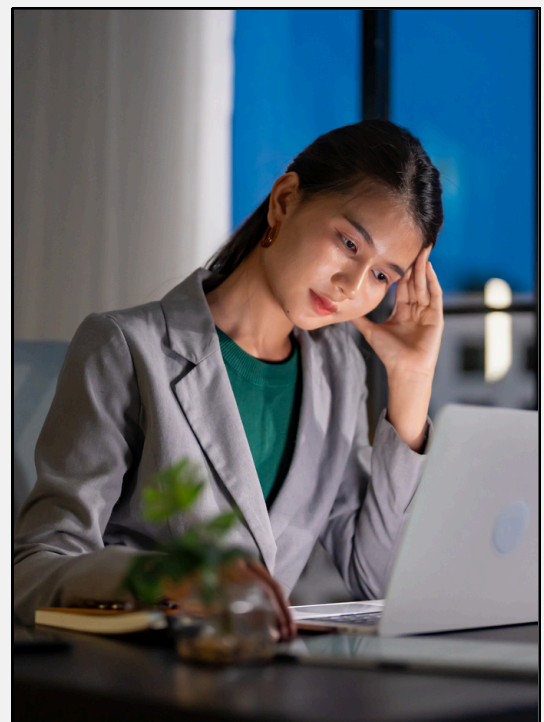
More than a decade after India's Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act came into force, institutions find themselves at an inflection point. The legal architecture is largely in place. Internal Committees have been constituted. Policies have been drafted, circulated, and acknowledged. Mandatory awareness sessions have become routine.

And yet, experience across workplaces suggests that compliance, while necessary, is not synonymous with credibility.

A new report, *Compliance to Credibility: Prevention of Sexual Harassment in India*, argues that the conversation around POSH is shifting from whether organizations have policies in place to whether employees actually trust those policies to work when it matters.

That shift is reflected in recent regulatory developments. Companies are now required to disclose, in their Board of Directors' reports, the number of sexual harassment complaints received, resolved, and those pending for more than 90 days. The requirement places workplace safety firmly within the realm of corporate governance, making the effectiveness of POSH mechanisms a matter of public accountability rather than internal administration.

The data also suggests that workplace safety cannot be measured by complaint counts alone. Sexual harassment complaints among India's largest listed companies increased by 6.2 percent during FY25.



On its own, that statistic might suggest workplaces are becoming less safe. But reporting rates tell only part of the story. An increase in complaints may also indicate that employees are more aware of the reporting mechanisms available to them and are more willing to trust them.



Another figure raises more difficult questions. Pending cases rose by 21 percent, suggesting that while reporting may be improving, the timely resolution of complaints is not keeping pace. Delays can erode confidence in institutional processes, leaving employees uncertain whether their concerns will be addressed fairly and without undue delay.

The document identifies several reasons why formal compliance may fail to translate into employee trust. Many employees remain unaware of who serves on the Internal Committee (IC) or how to approach it. Others may perceive the committee as lacking independence or fear retaliation if they report misconduct.

Repetitive awareness programmes, insufficiently trained committee members, procedural delays, and inconsistent communication further weaken confidence in institutional processes.

Addressing these challenges requires more than updated policies or annual training sessions. It calls for visible leadership, well-trained and independent Internal Committees, experienced external members, and a workplace culture that treats conversations about respect and dignity as ongoing responsibilities rather than annual obligations. Data should serve not only to satisfy regulatory requirements but also to identify recurring patterns, uncover systemic weaknesses, and guide meaningful institutional reform.

Ultimately, the strength of a workplace is not measured by the number of policies it has adopted. It is measured by whether people believe those policies will be upheld when it matters most.

Compliance establishes the framework. Credibility is earned through consistent action, transparent processes, and the confidence that every individual will be heard with fairness and respect.

This article draws on insights from [Compliance to Credibility: Prevention of Sexual Harassment in India](#), published by KPMG India.

The monthly newsletter from the [Committee for Managing Gender Issues \(CMGI\)](#) is an attempt to initiate conversations on sexual harassment. We would love to have the community participate. [Please reach out to Geetika Sharma at geetikas@iima.ac.in for queries, submissions, and/or feedback.](#)

If you feel you have been subjected to sexual harassment or if you would like to make any suggestions regarding curbing sexual harassment on campus, please reach out to us at: Email: chr-cmgi@iima.ac.in. Please note that any communication with the CMGI is strictly confidential.