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National Human Rights Commission
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GPO Complex, INA, New Delhi-110023 India

No. R – 13/4/2024-PRPP(RU-2) dated October 23, 2026

Advisory on Women's Safety at Work and Public Spaces

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), established under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, serves as a statutory guardian of human rights, entrusted with the responsibility of protecting and promoting the dignity of all individuals. As part of its mandate, the Commission regularly issues advisories to appropriate authorities with a view to strengthening institutional responses and advancing the protection of rights, especially of marginalised and vulnerable communities.

2. Within this broader mandate, the issues pertaining to women's safety remain a priority area for the Commission. As per the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report published in 2026, nearly 4.4 lakh cases of crimes against women were reported in 2024, encompassing offences such as murder, rape, assault and sexual harassment. These figures underscore the persistent challenges in ensuring the safety and security of women and highlight the need for sustained and concerted efforts. Women's safety must be understood to extend beyond their immediate physical security, as it is a fundamental prerequisite for their meaningful participation in the workforce and society, and is intrinsically linked to their constitutional rights to equality, justice and equal opportunity.

3. The National Human Rights Commission's continued engagement, including stakeholder consultation and field interactions, have brought to light numerous emerging concerns and challenges. Keeping in mind the multi-dimensional nature of women's safety and the need for reform, the Commission has approved to issue this Advisory on Women's Safety at Work and Public Spaces.

4. In this context, all concerned authorities are requested to implement the recommendations contained in the Advisory and furnish an Action Taken Report (ATR) within a period of two months to keep the Commission informed of the progress in implementing the advisory.


(Piyush Goyal)
Secretary General

Enclosed: As above

To

- i.) Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development
- ii.) Secretary, Ministry of Education
- iii.) Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs
- iv.) Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
- v.) Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment
- vi.) Secretary, Ministry of Corporate Affairs
- vii.) Secretary, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways
- viii.) Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
- ix.) Chairperson and CEO, Railway Board
- x.) Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
- xi.) Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- xii.) Chief Secretaries/ Administrators (All States and UTs)

Copy to:

- i.) Member Secretary, National Commission for Women



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In the last few decades, the Indian society has undergone a tremendous transformation wherein the participation of women, both in the workforce and in the public sphere in general, has increased due to increased literacy rates, greater acceptance of working women, and Women's targeted initiatives by the Union and States. Women's participation in the labour force stands at 34.6% in September 2026, as per the most recent Periodic Labour Force Participation Survey. However, the safety of women remains a matter of concern, especially in the workplace and public spaces. According to the latest NCRB report published in 2026, in the year 2024, nearly 4.4 lakh crimes against women were reported, including murder, rape, assault, and sexual harassment. This indicates that there is still a long way to go when it comes to women's safety in the country.

It is worth noting that the notion of women's safety goes beyond immediate physical well-being. Without safety, women cannot participate fully in the workforce or society, which directly undermines their constitutional entitlement to justice and equal opportunities. Workplaces and public spaces are often not designed to be accessible for women, which puts them at risk. When women face negative experiences in the workplace or in public spaces, it affects not only their own mental and physical well-being, but also the morale of other women, who may hesitate to step out of their houses.

Despite the existence of stringent laws to protect the rights of women, harassment remains a pervasive issue. It is therefore important to address the matter of their safety comprehensively, focusing on both preventive and remedial measures, while being mindful of their intersectional identities. It is also imperative to address societal attitudes and mindsets that directly impact the behaviour of individuals. Keeping in mind the multi-dimensional nature of women's safety and the need for reform, the National Human Rights Commission issues this advisory to the government authorities, and accordingly, makes the following recommendations:

I.) Raising Awareness on Topics of Women's Safety and Sexual Harassment

- i.) A major issue around the topic of women's safety is the lack of awareness regarding what constitutes sexual harassment and what needs to be done once such an incident has happened. It is recommended to take steps to display targeted posters/flyers and other informational materials in public spaces and the workplace to inform women what constitutes harassment, their legal rights, as well as all emergency numbers and existing mechanisms such as SHe-Box for reporting the crime.



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- ii.) There is increasing evidence to suggest that interventions at the school level help shape long-term attitudes. The Directorate of Education may take steps to issue guidelines to ensure that the school syllabus includes topics like gender sensitisation, consent, challenging existing notions of masculinity, and legal rights, and especially Acts like POCSO.
- iii.) All educational institutes, including schools, colleges, and universities, may be encouraged to regularly organise gender sensitisation programmes for pupils across all age groups to increase sensitivity and familiarise students with topics like gender-based discrimination, stereotypes, consensual and respectful conduct towards others, etc.
- iv.) A visible, mass campaign over a sustained period, targeted at evolving social norms, especially conduct towards women, explaining the idea of consent, may be initiated. Different media like television, radio, and the internet may be used to widen the campaign's reach. The campaign may also be translated into regional languages to increase its impact.
- v.) Periodic community-level engagement through RWAs, SHGs, trade unions, etc., will help take this issue beyond conventional institutional spaces and help the government understand the ground realities, including gaps in existing policies and their implementation.
- vi.) It would be beneficial to involve men, especially young boys, in matters like gender sensitisation, instead of making it a women-specific issue. This may be done by developing age-appropriate curricula and modules and circulating them periodically in schools, colleges, and workplaces.
- vii.) Emergency response mobile applications like the 112 app, India's Emergency Response Support System (ERSS), launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs, should be popularised through awareness campaigns, posters, and billboards.
- viii.) Steps may also be taken to raise awareness about One Stop Centres and NCW's Her Legal Guide mobile application so that women are aware of their legal rights and existing support systems when faced with violence.



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II.) Infrastructure

- i.) Steps should be taken to ensure that workplaces and public spaces are designed in a way that addresses the needs of women. This includes well-lit corridors and functional, clean, and hygienic washrooms for women in public buildings and on the road. Regular inspections of lights and emergency buttons must be undertaken.
- ii.) Steps should be taken to ensure proper lighting for corridors in buildings, subways, washrooms, public bus stands, parking lots, ATMs, roads, railway stations, and metro stations, as these are often areas where women feel the most vulnerable, especially at night.
- iii.) Functional CCTV cameras should be installed in all workplaces as well as in public locations. Existing CCTV cameras are often not operational; therefore, regular inspection of these cameras must be undertaken by local authorities.
- iv.) As in the case of the Delhi Metro, passenger emergency alarm buttons may be made available in buses and other forms of public transport like trains.
- v.) Details of the driver, vehicle number, license number, as well as emergency response numbers may be displayed prominently in buses and cabs. The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways may consider issuing a directive in this regard to all public road transport corporations and privately-run buses and cab services.
- vi.) To make sure that the workplace and public spaces remain inclusive for women, it is recommended to ensure that operational and fully stacked sanitary pad dispensers are available in all female washrooms, including and especially in railway stations, bus stands, metro stations, and all airports across the country. Care must also be taken to ensure that clean, safe, and functional feeding rooms are also available in these places.
- vii.) Women with disabilities face greater risks when they step out in public spaces. It is recommended to ensure that facilities like washrooms, and means of public transport are accessible to them and cater to their needs. Appropriate signage and



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markers should be present in all places. It would also be beneficial to consult with disability organisations while designing infrastructure.

III.) Encouraging Bystander Intervention

- i.) A major issue regarding crime in India, particularly crime against women, has been the lack of support from bystanders, who are often unwilling or afraid to intervene. A law along the lines of the “Good Samaritan Law” of 2016 may be considered for increasing interventions when crimes against women (or suspicion of crime against women) are taking place, especially in public spaces.
- ii.) Bystanders are often not aware of the right way of intervening during violence. Steps may be taken to educate ordinary people about what they can do to stop these crimes, through the medium of pamphlets, posters, social media campaigns, and advertisements on radio and television. For this purpose, the Ministry of Women and Child Development may consider developing standardised bystander intervention protocols and take steps for their wide circulation across multiple platforms.

IV.) Role of the Police

- i.) Survivors of gender-based violence often report facing resistance and moral policing in police stations when they try to register their complaints. It is recommended that police personnel be adequately sensitised to avoid making moral judgements and victim-blaming. To address this, the nodal ministry may consider developing a Standard Operating Procedure clearly mentioning protocols for dealing with victims of gender-based violence and circulate the same widely, including on social media.
- ii.) It is also recommended to develop time-bound response standards for helplines and police arrival in case of violence in public spaces.
- iii.) Police officers may undertake regular patrolling, especially in places that are deserted during the night and/or are crime hotspots.
- iv.) As of December 2025, 14,658 out of 16,469 police stations (89%) in the country have a Women's Help Desk (Ministry of Home Affairs). It is recommended that steps may be taken to ensure that the remaining police stations also have a functional



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Women's Help Desk to assist women in distress. It would also be beneficial to conduct regular reviews of these help desks, as well as surprise inspections to check for efficiency.

- v.) Police personnel should regularly undergo gender sensitisation training. It should be made a mandatory provision for all ranks and both male and female personnel.
- vi.) Regular checks should be in place to ensure that all emergency helpline numbers (112, 1091, etc.) are operational, and operators should be regularly trained to ensure that they are sensitive and act promptly and efficiently.

V.) Survivor Support

- i.) It is recommended to ensure that survivors of harassment/assault are immediately provided the necessary support when they approach authorities, including timely medical examinations and psychosocial support.
- ii.) Medical practitioners should be sensitised about conducting medical examinations on victims of sexual violence, in alignment with the Guidelines and Protocols for Medico Legal Care for Survivors/ Victims of Sexual Violence (issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2014). The Two-Finger Test, a practice deemed unscientific and prohibited by the Supreme Court in the judgment of *State of Jharkhand v. Shailendra Kumar Rai (2022)*, should be explicitly discontinued.
- iii.) Media coverage of the crime often re-victimises women, causing emotional distress to them and their families. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting may consider developing guidelines on the ethical reporting of violent crimes against women, keeping in mind that:
 - a) Reports on such crimes should not reveal the identity of the victim(s) and their families, especially not while the investigation is underway or if the matter is ongoing in court.
 - b) Details of ongoing investigations must not be reported unless released in the public domain by the authorities.



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- c) Sensational headlines that may invoke strong reactions should be avoided. Care should be taken to report the incident with sensitivity.
 - d) The media should desist from victim-blaming and avoid the usage of words like “provoked”, “incited”, especially in cases of sexual violence, as it often puts the blame squarely on the victim and their behaviour.
 - e) Victims/ survivors of violence should be treated with dignity, and the media should avoid using terms like “unfortunate”, “unlucky”, etc.
 - f) The guidelines should also include digital media, including online news portals.
- iv.) Victims, after their initial examinations, should be taken to the nearest One Stop Centre, should they require any additional support. Care should be taken to ensure that referrals between the police, hospitals, and One Stop Centres, take place in a timely and efficient manner.

VI.) Cybercrime against Women

- i.) Violence against women is no longer limited to physical harm. With the rise of digital technology, particularly AI, there has been a sharp increase in the number of cases of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in the last few years. It is recommended to sensitise women across age groups about the risks posed by technology like revenge porn, doxxing, sharing of non-consensual explicit images and videos, and deep fakes.
- ii.) Awareness programmes may be conducted in schools, colleges, universities, and workplaces on the topic of cybercrime, as well as the existing grievance redressal mechanisms like the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal and the Sahyog Portal.
- iii.) It is also recommended to review existing cyber laws from a gender-sensitive lens and bring forth any necessary amendments/ reforms.
- iv.) It is recommended to sensitise the police and other stakeholders about cyber-enabled crimes against women.



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VII.) Long-term Reforms

- i.) There is a need for high-quality and real-time gender-disaggregated data to better understand the nature, magnitude, and consequences of gender-based violence at the workplace and public spaces, including on the effectiveness of the existing redressal mechanisms.
- ii.) Gender-auditing of the workplace and public spaces may be undertaken at regular intervals by the relevant authorities to make sure that these spaces remain gender-inclusive. The Women Safety Audit Survey by the National Commission for Women (2025) may be used as a reference point. Additionally, when undertaking new large-scale infrastructural projects, it is recommended to have a gender audit as a mandatory prerequisite.
- iii.) Gender-budgeting may also be taken up by both public and private bodies to promote gender-inclusive policies, programmes, monitoring and assessment of existing mechanisms, and allocation of budgets to promote gender-inclusive spaces. The Gender Budgeting Handbook, released by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2015, may be used for reference purposes.
- iv.) It is recommended to ensure that the budget under the Nirbhaya Fund is utilised in a timely and efficient manner by States and Union Territories. As officials at the district level often lack awareness about the nature of the Fund, it is recommended to raise awareness on its utility, provide technical support to States and Union Territories in developing proposals, and encourage them to utilise these funds, keeping in mind their intended use.

VIII.) Other Measures

- i.) Any place of work that requires female employees to work at night must ensure that adequate security is provided to them in the workplace, as well as means of transport to reach home safely. Care must be taken that all drivers and security staff are adequately vetted before hiring. Employers may also be encouraged to develop their own standard safety protocols for night shifts.



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- ii.) While the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 provides detailed guidelines on sexual harassment at the workplace, it is observed that the Act lacks proper implementation on the ground, especially the formation of a functional Internal Complaints Committee and Local Complaints Committee.
 - a) It is strongly recommended to ensure that the Act is implemented at all establishments (both formal and informal) across all States and Union Territories.
 - b) All enterprises covered under the Act must ensure that they submit all enquiry reports to the District Officer annually, as specified under the Act.
 - c) Regular awareness and sensitisation programmes must be organised on the topic of sexual harassment. Particular care must be taken to ensure that these programmes target all the employees, regardless of their gender.
- iii.) States may encourage educational institutions to impart self-defence training, particularly at the school and college level. This will not only prepare young girls and women to face potential threats but will also help build their confidence.
