



BACKGROUNDERS

Press Information Bureau

Government of India

Safeguarding Women at Work

An Overview of SH Act 2013 and SHe-Box Portal

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Key Takeaways

- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (SH Act) aims to provide a safe and secure working environment for women.
- The SH Act covers all women, irrespective of age or employment status, in public and private sectors, organised and unorganised, including domestic workers.
- Employers must form Internal Committees (ICs) in workplaces with 10 or more employees.
- The SHe-Box portal, launched on 29th August 2024, offers a single-window platform for women to file complaints online.

Introduction

A safe workplace is not merely a legal requirement but a foundational element for ensuring that women can exercise their fundamental rights to equality, dignity, and economic empowerment. Sexual harassment of women at workplace is a serious violation of their fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, the right to practice any profession or occupation under Article 19(1)(g), and the right to life and dignity under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. It creates an insecure work environment, hindering women's participation in the workforce and adversely affecting their economic empowerment and the goal of inclusive growth.

The absence of strong safeguards in the past hindered women's workforce entry and retention. Earlier criminal provisions under the Indian Penal Code and the Vishakha guidelines issued by Supreme Court in 1997 had provided a framework for safety and security of women at workplace. However, the Government after taking into account the need for a comprehensive framework, to holistically address every aspect of workplace related harassment of women, enacted 'the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013' (SH Act) on 09th December, 2013.

It provides a clear legal framework to prevent, prohibit, and redress sexual harassment. The Act protects every woman at work, across all sectors and employment types. It promotes a culture of respect, safety and dignity of every women who are part of the workforce or visit a workplace in connection with any work, while advancing inclusive economic growth. The SHe-Box portal acts as a key digital initiative, and strengthens this framework by offering an easy, secure, and transparent way for women to file and track complaints.

Key Provisions and Obligations under the SH Act

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (SH Act) was enacted on 9th December 2013. The Act seeks to prevent sexual harassment and ensure a safe, secure and inclusive working environment for women. It applies across all sectors — public and private, organised and

unorganised — and protects every woman irrespective of her age, employment status or nature of work. This also includes domestic workers.

Institutional Mechanisms

The Act establishes clear institutional mechanisms for redressal.

- Internal Committee (IC): Mandatory for workplaces with 10 or more employees.
- Local Committee (LC): Set up by District Officers in every district. It handles cases in workplaces with fewer than 10 employees or complaints against the employer.

The Appropriate Government holds overall responsibility for monitoring implementation.

The Central Government acts as the Appropriate Government for workplaces it establishes, owns, controls or substantially or wholly finances either directly or indirectly.

State Governments perform this role for workplaces they fund either directly or indirectly, and for all other workplaces within their jurisdiction. Both levels of government maintain data on the number of cases filed and disposed of under the Act.

Complaint Process

The complaint process is time-bound to ensure prompt action.

- Complaints must be filed within 3 months. This can extend by another 3 months for valid reasons.
- Inquiry is to be completed within 90 days.
- If proven, action taken as per the service rules or SH Rules, as the case may be.
- False complaints may attract penalties after inquiry proves malice.
- For women in unorganised sector including domestic workers facing sexual harassment, the LC upon examination, if required, forwards cases to the police for action under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

Employer Responsibilities

Employers have clear proactive duties under the Act. Beyond merely reacting to complaints, the law requires them to take active steps to prevent sexual harassment from occurring in the first place. This preventive approach is central to creating a respectful and secure work culture. Employers must ensure that all employees are aware of the provisions of Act and the female employees are aware of their rights and must ensure a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment. Regular engagement and training help build sensitivity and accountability across the organisation.



Monitoring and Compliance

The SH Act places strong emphasis on effective monitoring to ensure proper implementation across the country. The Appropriate Government is responsible for overseeing compliance. This includes maintaining accurate data on the number of cases filed and disposed of under the Act.

In order to support monitoring, Internal Committees (ICs) and Local Committees (LCs) prepare annual reports in the prescribed format and submit to their respective employers or District Officers. The District Officer then forwards a brief consolidated report to the State Government.

The Appropriate Government has additional powers to enforce compliance. It can request any relevant information from employers or District Officers. It can also authorise inspections of records and workplaces related to sexual harassment cases. These measures help track progress, identify gaps, and ensure the Act is implemented in both letter and spirit.

Penalties for Non-Compliance

These monitoring and enforcement measures are backed by strict penalties for anyone who fail to comply with the Act.

- First violation: Fine of Rs. 50,000.
- Repeat violations: Double fine, plus possible license cancellation or non-renewal.

Role of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) is the nodal ministry for the SH Act. It issues advisories to Central Ministries, States, UTs and private bodies and plays a pivotal role in effective implementation.

- Constitution of the Internal Committee (IC) is now a mandatory disclosure under Companies Act, 2013, by amending the Company (Account) Rules, 2014.
- MoWCD has also developed a Handbook on the SH Act. It is on the website and SHe-Box portal.
- Training module on SH Act has been created with Institute of Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM), which is available on the portal.
- The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has issued several advisories. These cover annual reports, timely inquiries, no re-victimisation and special leave for complainants.

Direction of Hon'ble Supreme Court

The Hon'ble Supreme Court has also monitored the progress of implementation of the SH Act in course of some cases, and issued directions, including to State / UT authorities to ensure nationwide compliance to the Act, expedite constitution of ICs and making the information available on SHe-Box portal. In line with these directions, the MoWCD regularly issues advisories to Central Ministries, State Governments, Union Territories, and private sector bodies. These advisories focus on organising regular workshops and awareness programmes to sensitise employees and build capacity of committee members and also setting up LCs in every district and ICs wherever required.

The SHe-Box Portal

The MoWCD launched the Sexual Harassment electronic Box (SHe-Box) on 29th August 2024.

SHe-Box serves as a single-window, centralised digital platform. By creating a central repository — which was previously not available — the SHe-Box portal strengthens monitoring of the Act's implementation. It helps track cases filed and disposed of nationwide. The platform promotes accountability, faster redressal, and long-term cultural change in workplaces. Ultimately, SHe-Box contributes to safer work environments and advances women's empowerment.

It enables any woman facing sexual harassment at the workplace — irrespective of whether she works in the public or private sector, organised or unorganised sector — to register her complaint easily and securely. Once a complaint is submitted, the portal automatically forwards it to the relevant Internal Committee (IC) or Local Committee (LC) based on the details provided by the complainant.

The revamped portal includes several user-friendly and secure features:

- Real-time tracking of complaint status, allowing women to monitor progress and actions taken.
- Multi-lingual support to break language barriers and make the platform accessible across the country.
- Strong emphasis on confidentiality to ensure a safe and secure reporting experience.
- A resource hub providing training materials, information on rights, and step-by-step guidance on the redressal process.



Nodal Officers appointed for monitoring the portal play a key role. They regularly update and maintain accurate information on the portal, including details of ICs and LCs, and ensure timely handling of complaints and other compliances.

The portal also supports compliance and monitoring by requiring workplaces to upload essential information:

- Details of IC members.
- Details of LC.
- Annual reports submitted under the SH Act.
- Records of awareness programmes and training sessions conducted for employees and IC members.

Conclusion

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 remains a landmark law. It protects women's right to a safe and dignified workplace. The Act, together with strong institutional mechanisms, time-bound redressal, and employer duties, works to prevent harassment and ensure justice. The Ministry of Women and Child Development continues to lead implementation. It issues regular advisories, builds capacity, and promotes awareness across sectors. The revamped SHe-Box portal, launched in August 2024, marks a major step forward. It provides easy, secure, and transparent access to file and track complaints. It also creates a national database for better monitoring and accountability.

The Government remains committed to effective enforcement of the SH Act and to empowering every woman with a harassment-free work environment.

References:

Ministry of Women and Child Development:

<https://shebox.wcd.gov.in/>

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