

Where are the Local Committees?

A study based on Haryana and Punjab RTI report filings



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Background

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, Redressal) Act, 2013 (SHW Act), completed 10 years in December 2023. The Act recognises sexual harassment in the workplace as a violation of fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution, acknowledging that women are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment in the workplace. However, a decade since its enactment, the enforcement of the Act remains inconsistent, with many employers and employees still largely unaware of the Act and the protections it guarantees.

Following the global #MeToo movement's emergence in 2017, millions of survivors, particularly women in the formal sector, shared their experiences of sexual harassment and gender-based violence on social media. The movement also reached India, exposing the harsh realities of women's working lives. However, this awareness largely overlooks those in the informal sector, where over 90% of Indian women are employed. As a domestic worker in Gurgaon, associated with the Martha Farrell Foundation, poignantly stated, "For women like me, what is #MeToo? Poverty and stigma silence us. There is no safe space for women like us—not our workplaces, our homes, or even the roads we walk."

The Act specifically defines the workplace in Section 2, encompassing the informal sector within its scope in Section 2(p). Therefore, informal workers are covered by the Act. However, due to the precarious conditions faced by many women in the informal sector—most of whom come from resource-poor backgrounds, lack formal education, and have limited or no access to social security—these women are less likely to report incidents of sexual harassment.

Since 2014, the Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) has been dedicated to ensuring safe and harassment-free workplaces. The Foundation has engaged with both the formal and informal sectors to enhance the understanding of the SHW Act among workers and to assist employers and institutions in creating work environments that are conducive, inclusive, and safe.

Raising awareness about the law among informal and formal sector employees is only part of the solution. It is equally crucial to ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to handle complaints of sexual harassment and to deliver prompt justice to survivors.

Provisions under the SHW Act

As with all forms of gender-based violence, the reporting of sexual harassment in the workplace remains [low](#). Factors such as humiliation, fear of being blamed or not taken seriously, and the threat of negative repercussions at work deter individuals from coming forward.

Additionally, the absence of effective institutional mechanisms for lodging complaints exacerbates the difficulty of reporting. Access to these mechanisms is even more challenging for women who are further marginalised and vulnerable.

Section 6 of the SHW Act mandates the establishment of Local Committees (LCs) at the district level to address complaints of sexual harassment from informal workers and those in organisations with fewer than 10 members.

The Act specifies the composition of these committees: Section 6(2) requires the District Magistrate to appoint a Nodal Officer to receive and forward complaints to the LCs at each block, taluka, or tehsil, while Section 7(1)(d) stipulates that an officer dealing with social welfare or women and child development in the district serve as an *ex-officio* member of the LC.

Additionally, the Act assigns specific responsibilities to District Officers. Section 6 obliges the District Officer to establish an LC in their district and appoint Nodal Officers in each block. Section 20 outlines the District Officer's roles, including monitoring the timely submission of reports by LCs and implementing measures to raise awareness about sexual harassment.

Furthermore, as defined under Section 2(g)(i) of the Act, the District Officer is considered an employer, with their employees encompassing all those working within the District Administration office. In this capacity, Section 19(c) requires the District Officer to organise regular workshops and awareness programmes to sensitise employees to the provisions of the Act.

The research

As part of MFF's research and advocacy efforts, we have utilised the provisions of the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005 to assess the status of Local Committees (LCs) and the actions taken by districts under the SHW Act. In 2018, in collaboration with the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), MFF conducted a [study](#) by filing RTIs across the 655 districts in India to investigate the status and composition of LCs nationwide.

In addition to filing RTIs, MFF has engaged in various advocacy initiatives to promote and support the establishment of LCs in all districts of Delhi. You can read more about our work with LCs in Delhi [here](#).

MFF filed applications in all 23 districts of Punjab and 21¹ out of 22 districts of Haryana between 19 and 31 January 2024.

The RTI applications filed requested the following information from each district:

1. Names and contact details of the members of the Local Committee constituted under Section 6 of the Act.
2. Name and contact details of the Nodal Officer appointed by the District Magistrate to receive complaints of sexual harassment under Section 6(2) of the Act.
3. Name and contact details of the officer concerned with social welfare or women and child development in the district, appointed as an *ex-officio* member under Section 7(1)(d) of the Act.
4. Details of the workshops and awareness programmes organised by the District Magistrate as an employer to sensitise employees under Section 19(c) of the Act.
5. Details of steps taken by the District Officer under Section 20(B) of the Act to raise awareness about sexual harassment and women's rights.

According to the rules of the RTI Act, districts have one month to respond to each application filed.

Findings

Responses to RTI applications

Haryana

A total of 21 RTI applications were filed in Haryana, covering all districts except Gurugram. Responses were received from 15 districts, with 13 districts (Ambala, Bhiwani, Charkhi Dadri, Fatehabad, Jhajjar, Jind, Kaithal, Mahendragarh, Palwal, Panchkula, Rewari, Sonipat, and Yamunanagar) responding to some or all of the queries.

¹ RTI application was not filed in the Gurugram district of Haryana due to MFF's previous extensive work in the district and knowledge of the status of the LCs and the work being done by the district administration.

Two districts forwarded the applications to other departments within the district office. Hisar directed the request to the District Social Welfare Officer and District Child Development Officer on 8 February, 2024, while Karnal forwarded it to the State Public Information Officer (SPIO) on 11 March, 2024. No further information was received from these entities.

One district, Panipat, refused to share any information, citing the absence of an identity card with the RTI application.²

Five districts (Faridabad, Kurukshetra, Nuh, Rohtak, and Sirsa) did not respond to the RTI application.

Figure 1 shows the responses to the RTI applications on a map of Haryana.

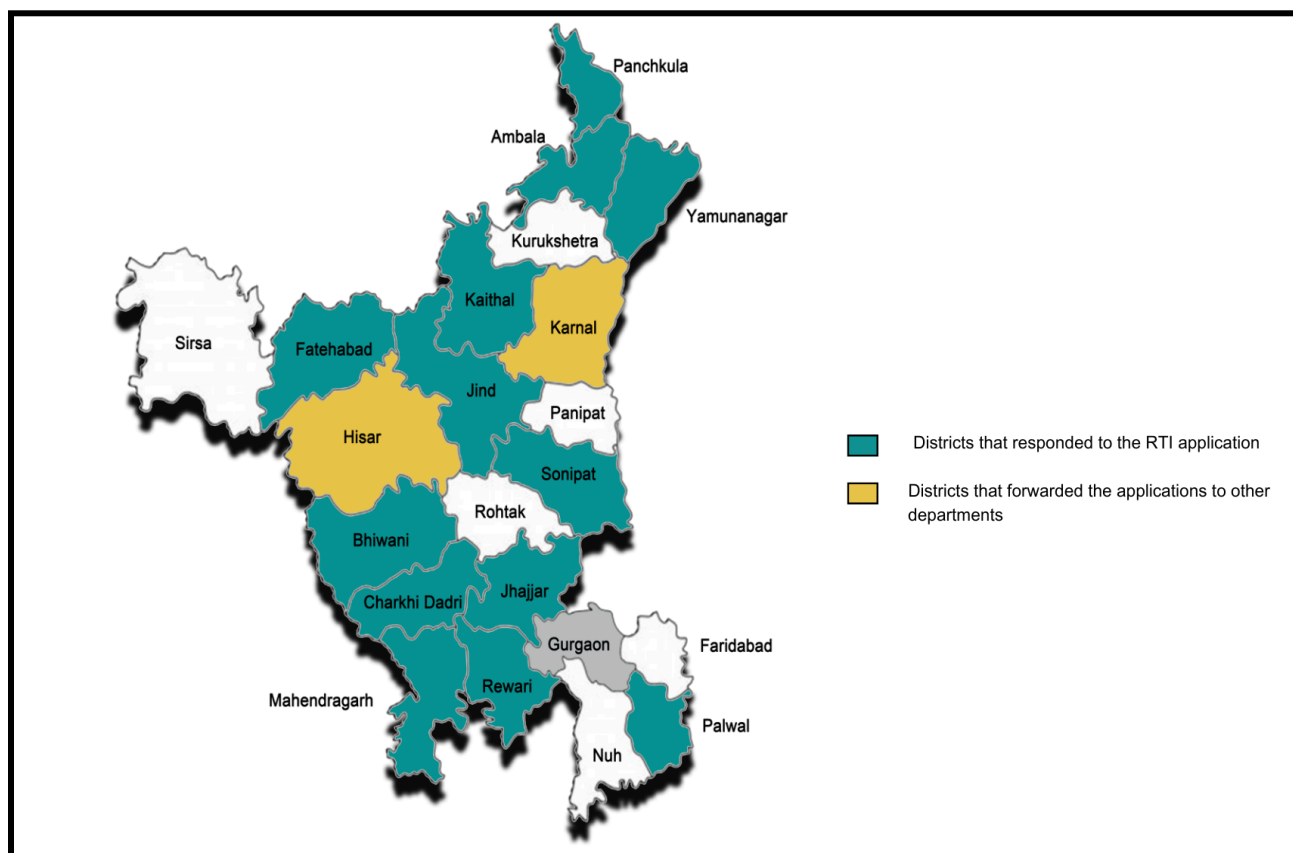


Figure 1: Map of districts that responded to the RTI application in Haryana.

² The Punjab and Haryana High Court in *Fruit and Merchant Union vs Chief Information Commissioner and others*, 2012, mandated an RTI applicant to furnish identity proof at the time of filing RTI. Based on this ruling, certain districts returned the RTI application citing lack of identity proof. An appeal was filed to such districts on 15 May 2024. No reply was received from Panipat.

Punjab

A total of 23 RTI applications were filed across the 23 districts of Punjab. Responses to some or all of the questions were received from 10 districts: Barnala, Faridkot, Gurdaspur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Patiala, Mansa, Moga, Pathankot, and Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar.

Five districts—Fazilka, Ferozepur, Kapurthala, Sangrur, and Tarn Taran—refused to provide any information at first, citing the absence of an identity card with the RTI application. However, after re-filing the RTI application, three districts—Fazilka, Sangrur, and Tarn Taran have provided information.

No responses were received from eight districts: Amritsar, Bhatinda, Fatehgarh Sahib, Hoshiarpur, Malerkotla, Roopnagar, Shahid Bhagat Singh Nagar, and Sri Muktsar Sahib.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of responses to the RTI applications on a map of Punjab.

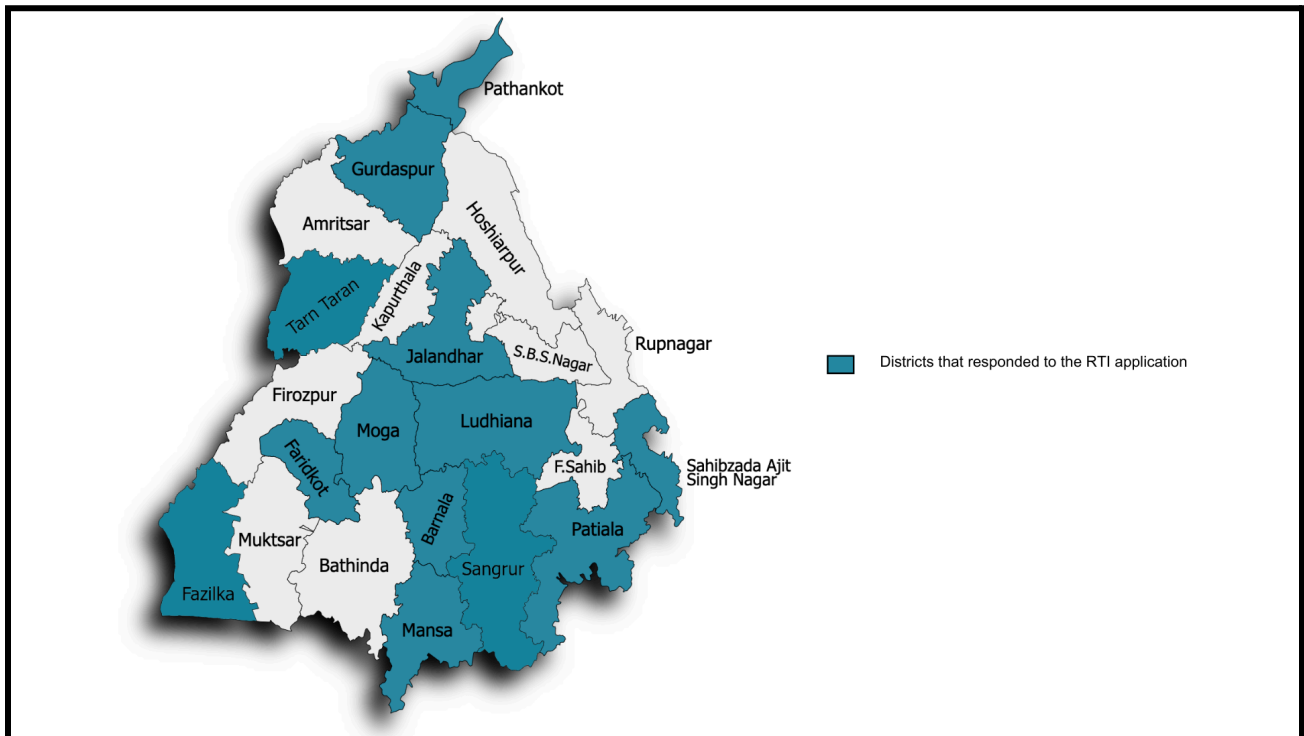


Figure 2: Map of districts that responded to the RTI application in Punjab.

Names and contact details of the LC members

The specific composition of the Local Committee is detailed in Section 7 of the Act. According to this section, the LC is to be composed of five members: a Chairperson, who is an eminent woman from the field of social work in the district; one female member from the block, *taluka*, *tehsil*, or municipality; two members (one of whom must be a woman) from a non-government organisation or association dedicated to women's issues or knowledgeable about sexual harassment; and an *ex-officio* member from the Women and Child Department or Social Welfare Department of the district.

The RTI applications sought comprehensive details about the composition of the Local Committees (LCs) at the district level, requesting the names and contact details of each member, since understanding the specific makeup of these committees, as outlined in Section 7 of the Act, is crucial for assessing their effectiveness and responsiveness.

Haryana

Of the 13 districts that responded to our RTI application in Haryana, 11 provided details about their LC members. These districts were:

- Ambala
- Bhiwani
- Charkhi Dadri
- Fatehabad
- Jhajjar
- Kaithal
- Mahendragarh
- Palwal
- Panchkula
- Rewari
- Sonapat

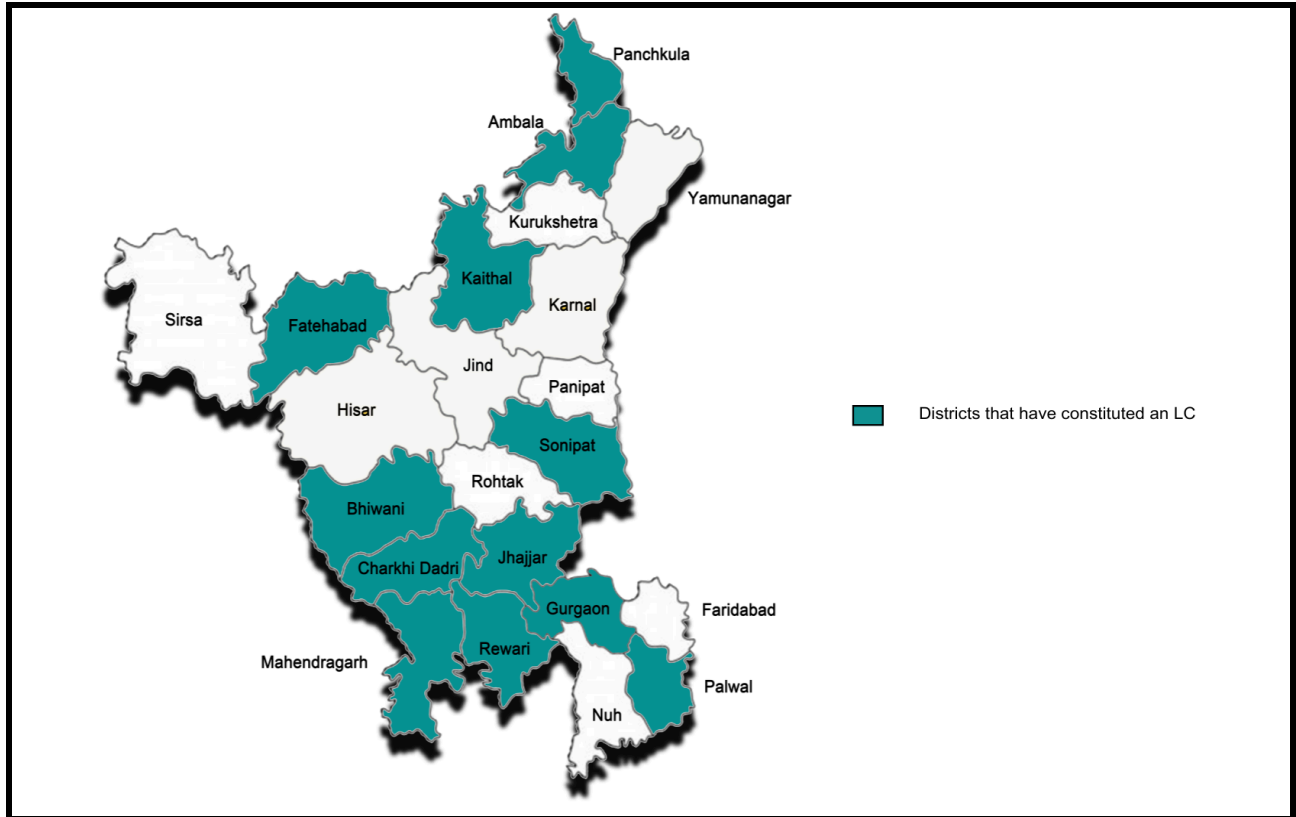


Figure 3: Map of districts in Haryana that have constituted an LC.

Further, Gurugram is known to have a constituted and functioning LC, with information available on their website. Thus, 12 out of the 22 districts in Haryana have constituted an LC. Figure 3 presents a map highlighting the districts in Haryana that have constituted an LC.

Yamunanagar district provided details about its Internal Committee (IC) but did not submit information regarding the LC.

After reviewing the data provided and cross-referencing it with the provisions of the law, we found that among the 11 districts that responded to the application, only two—Fatehabad and Bhiwani—had constituted their Local Committees (LCs) in full compliance with the rules stipulated by the Act.

Punjab

Of the 10 districts that responded to our RTI application in Punjab, eight provided details about their Local Committee (LC) members. These districts included:

- Barnala
- Faridkot
- Jalandhar
- Ludhiana
- Mansa
- Moga
- Patiala
- Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar

We reviewed the details of the constituted LCs against specifications mentioned under Section 7 of the Act and concluded that among the 10 districts that provided details about their LC members, only two districts—Ludhiana and Mansa—have constituted their LCs as per the stipulated rules of the Act. Pathankot responded to the RTI application but indicated that they do not have any such information in their records and did not address any further questions.

Figure 4 displays a map highlighting the districts in Punjab that have established an LC.

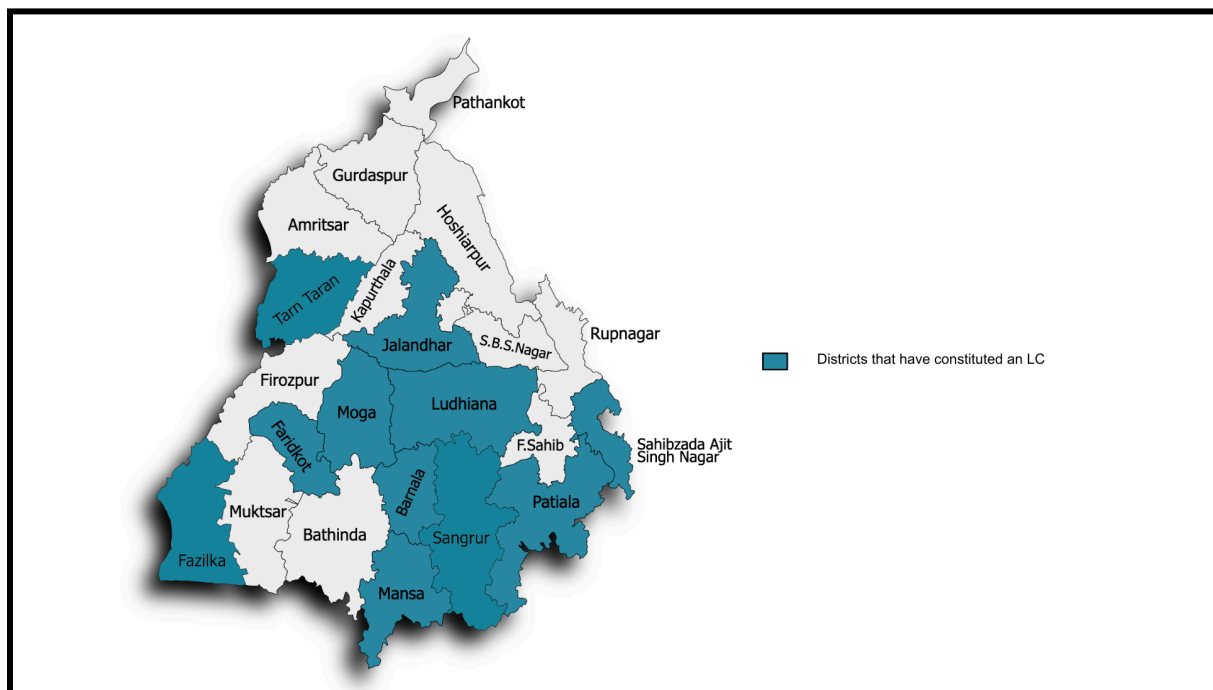


Figure 4: Districts in Punjab that have established an LC.

Name and contact details of the Nodal Officer

According to Section 6(2) of the Act, the District Officer is required to designate one Nodal Officer in each block, *taluka*, and *tehsil* in rural areas, as well as inwards or municipalities in urban areas. This Nodal Officer is responsible for receiving complaints and forwarding them to the relevant LC within seven days.

The second question in the RTI application requested details of the Nodal Officer appointed to receive complaints of sexual harassment.

Haryana

In Haryana, 11 districts provided information about their Nodal Officers, these were:

- Ambala
- Bhiwani
- Charkhi Dadri
- Jhajjar
- Jind
- Kaithal
- Mahendragarh
- Palwal
- Panchkula
- Rewari
- Sonapat

Jhajjar and Kaithal have appointed the District Programme Officers as Nodal Officers for their respective blocks. Jind has designated a Child Protection Officer as the Nodal Officer for all blocks within the district. In all other districts, a single District Programme Officer serves as the Nodal Officer for all blocks.

While the RTI application requested the names of the Nodal Officers, the districts of Ambala, Charkhi Dadri, Kaithal, and Sonapat did not provide this information.

Figure 5 displays a map highlighting the districts in Haryana that have appointed Nodal Officers.

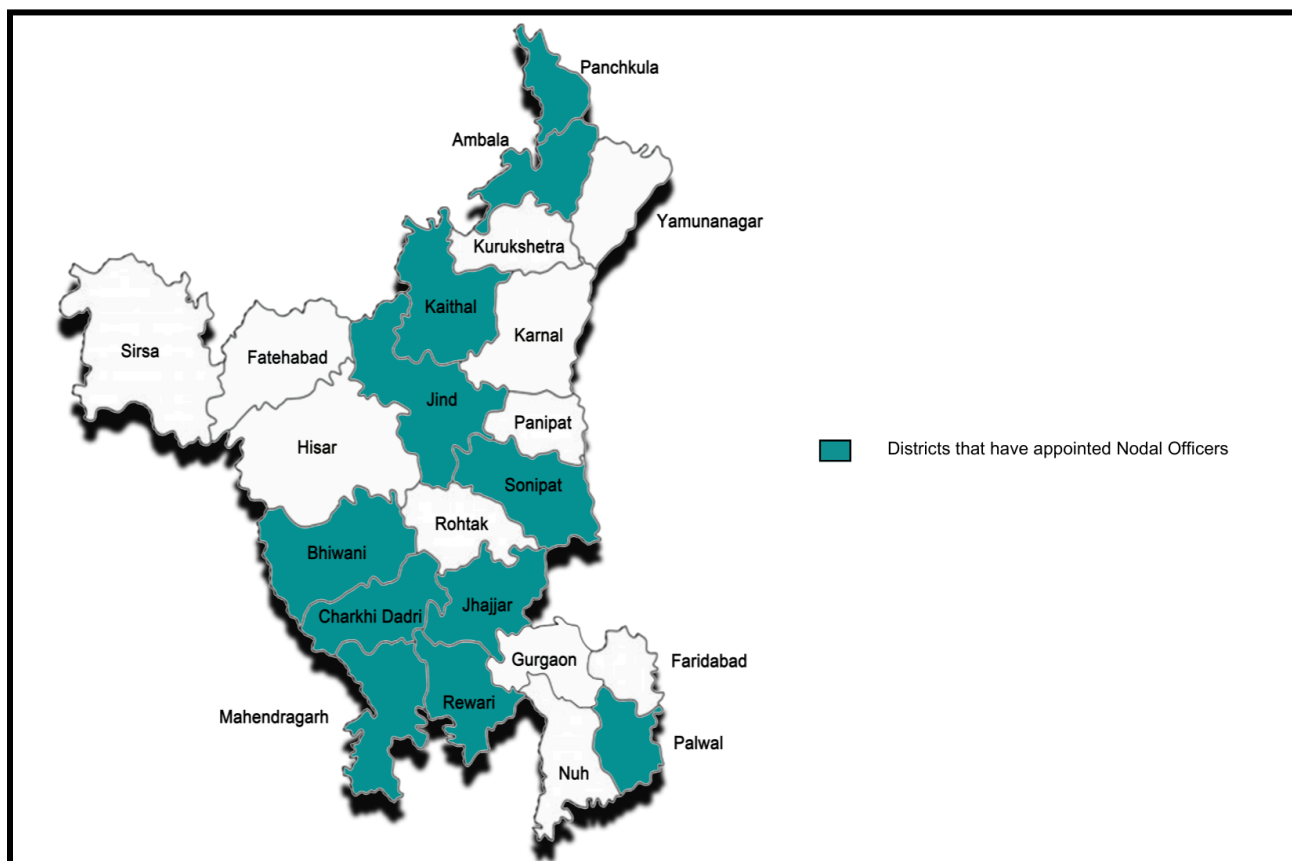


Figure 5: Districts in Haryana where Nodal Officers have been appointed.

Punjab

In Punjab, three districts provided details regarding their appointed Nodal Officers:

- Barnala
- Moga
- Jalandhar

Barnala has appointed a Social Security Officer as the Nodal Officer for all blocks. Jalandhar designated their Superintendent of Police as the Nodal Officer, while Moga appointed the Women and Child Development Officers as Nodal Officers. Only Jalandhar and Moga provided the names of the Nodal Officers.

Figure 6 illustrates the districts in Punjab where Nodal Officers have been appointed.

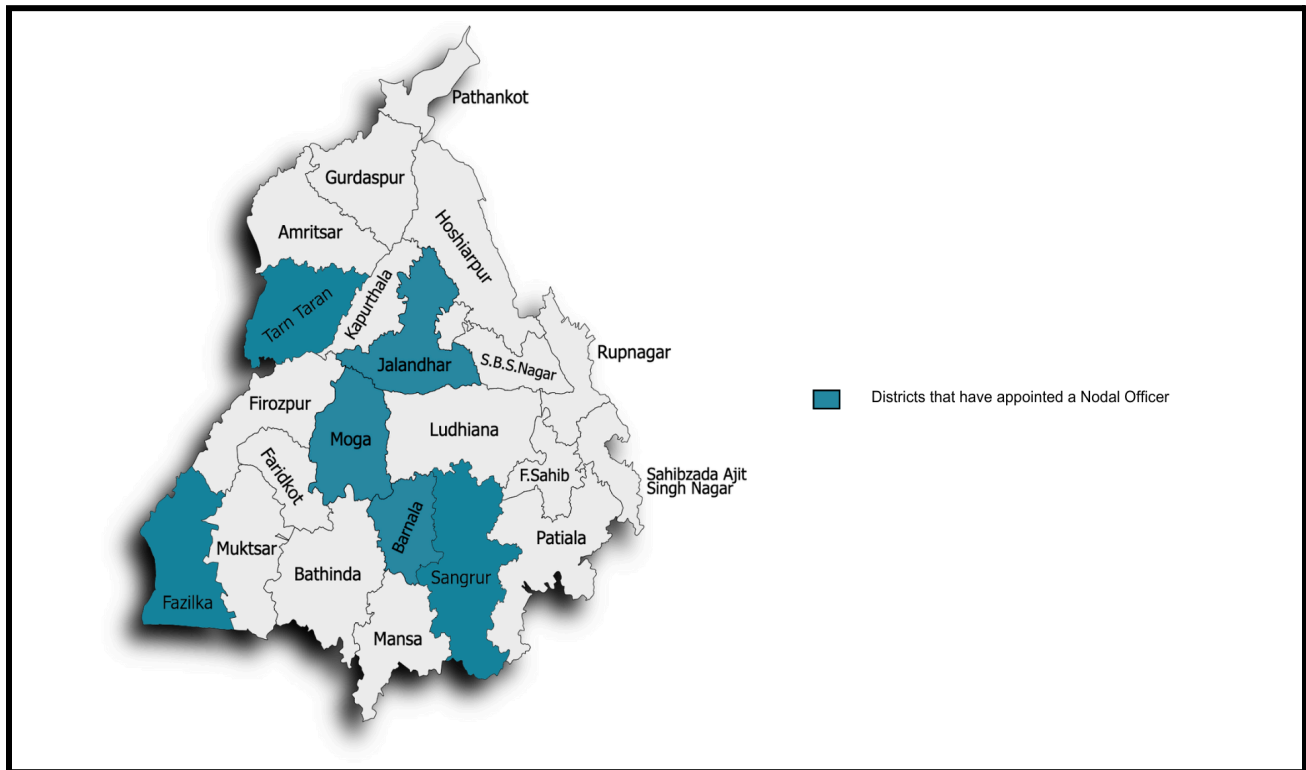


Figure 6: Districts in Punjab where Nodal Officers have been appointed.

Information on *ex-officio* members of the LCs

The third question in the RTI application requested details about the *ex-officio* member of the LC. As per Section 7(1)(d) of the Act, every LC must include an *ex-officio* member who holds a position in the district related to social welfare or women and child development.

In our experience working with LCs in Delhi, we have observed that even when an LC is formally constituted at the district level, it is often not established in full compliance with the legal requirements, including the appointment of an *ex-officio* member.

Haryana

In Haryana, 12 districts provided information about the *ex-officio* members of their LCs. These included:

- Ambala
- Bhiwani
- Charkhi Dadri
- Fatehabad
- Jhajjar
- Jind
- Kaithal
- Mahendragarh
- Palwal
- Panchkula
- Rewari
- Sonipat

Figure 7 depicts the districts in Haryana where the Local Committees have the required *ex-officio* members.

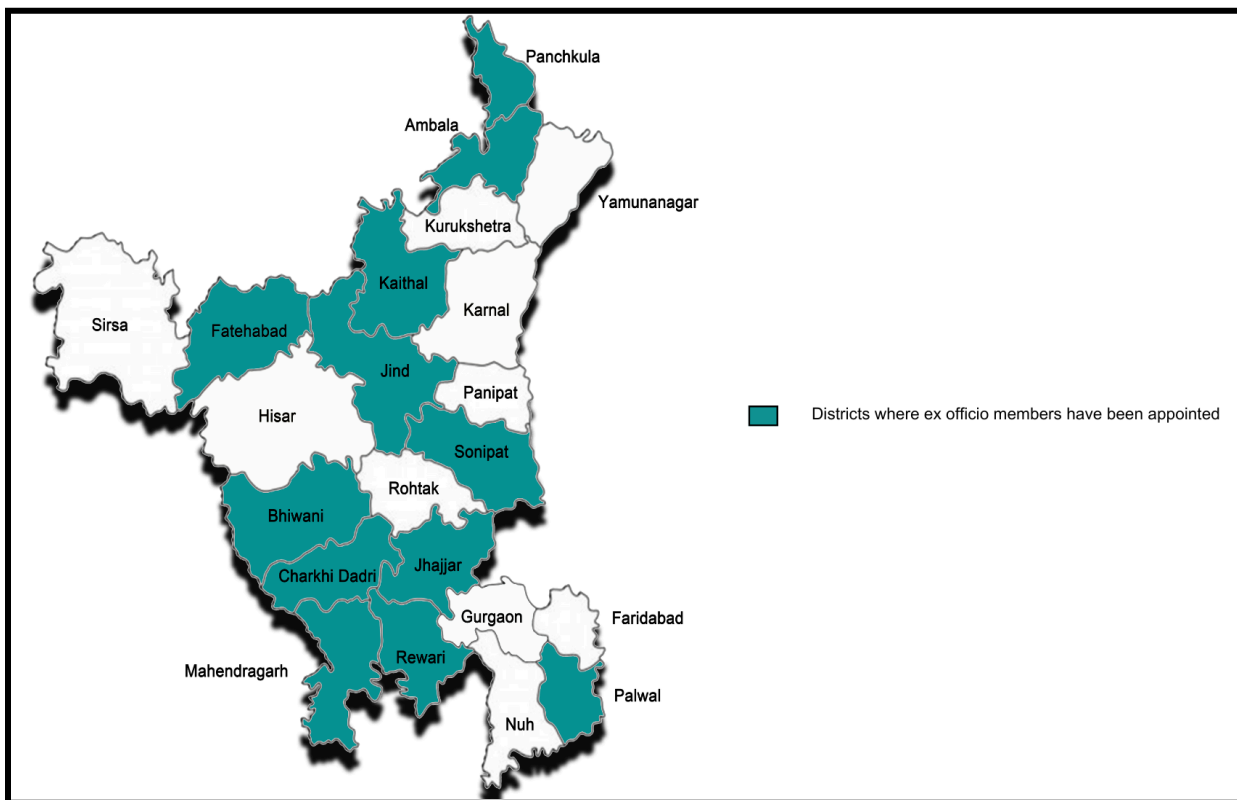


Figure 7: Districts in Haryana where *ex-officio* members have been appointed.

Punjab

Eight districts in Punjab provided details about the *ex-officio* members of their LCs:

- Barnala
- Gurdaspur
- Jalandhar
- Ludhiana
- Mansa
- Moga
- Patiala
- Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar

Figure 8 displays a map of the districts in Punjab that have properly appointed *ex-officio* members on their LCs.

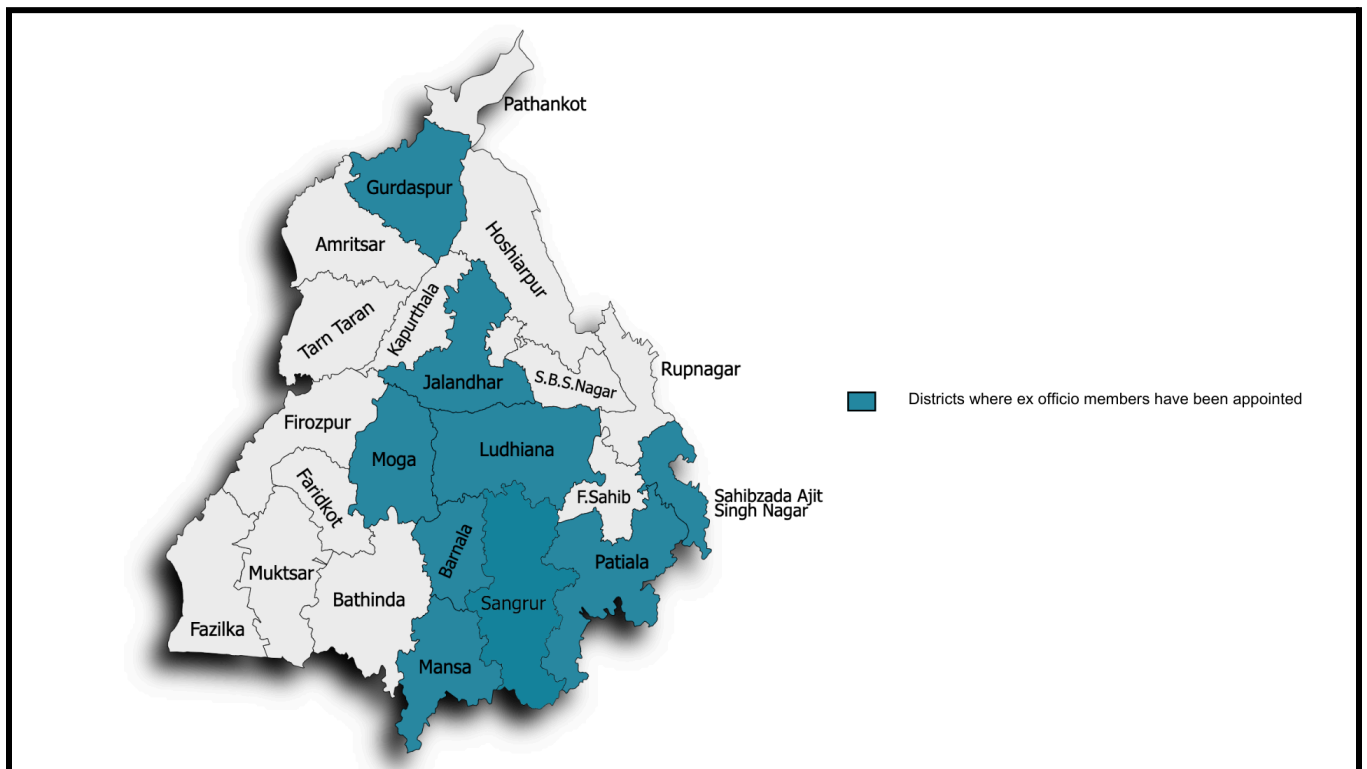


Figure 8: Districts in Punjab where *ex-officio* members have been appointed.

Measures for sensitisation and awareness of Sexual Harassment

Section 19(c) of the Act requires the District Officer (considered an employer under Section 2(g)(i) of the Act), to organise regular workshops and awareness programmes to sensitise employees on the provisions of the Act. Furthermore, under Section 20, the District Officer (DO) is responsible for implementing measures to raise awareness about sexual harassment.

Based on the requirements outlined in the Act, the fourth and fifth questions in the RTI application sought information on the measures taken by the DO (as an employer) to sensitise district employees about the Act and its provisions, as well as the steps implemented to raise awareness about sexual harassment and women's rights.

Haryana

In Haryana, four districts provided information on their efforts to sensitise employees and raise awareness about sexual harassment and women's rights. These districts are:

- Bhiwani
- Jhajjar
- Mahendragarh
- Palwal

Figure 9 displays a map indicating the districts in Haryana that have implemented awareness initiatives.

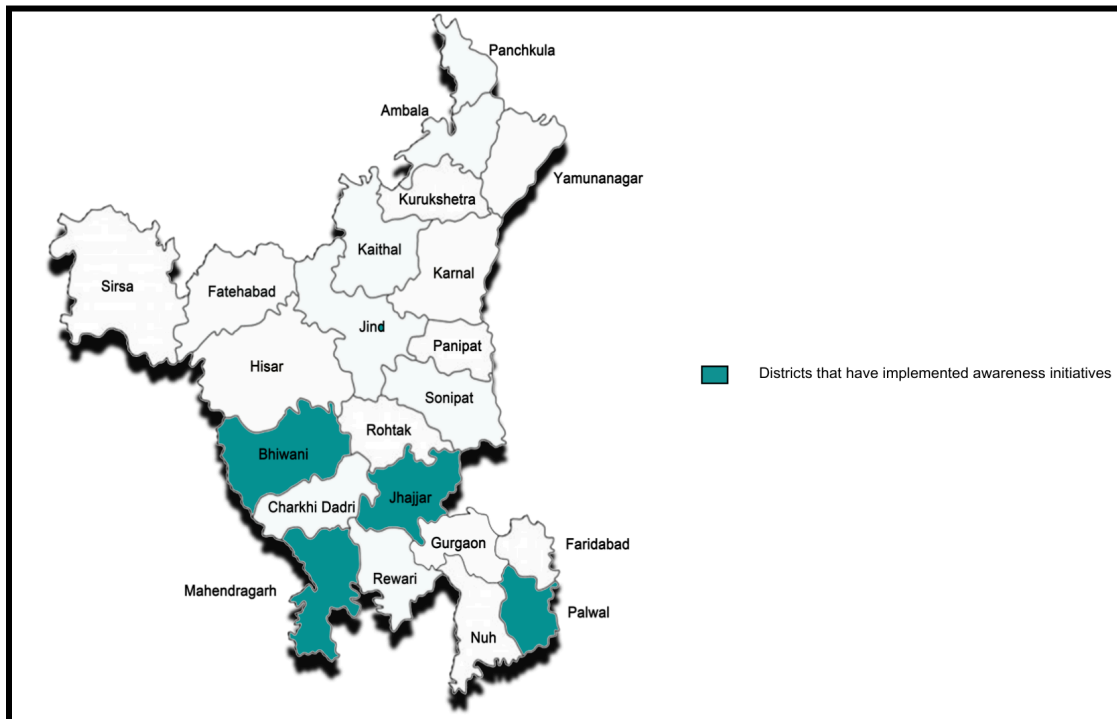


Figure 9: Districts in Haryana that have implemented awareness initiatives.

Mahendragarh reported conducting awareness-raising efforts via video conference in 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jhajjar mentioned that awareness activities are conducted during district-level meetings and village-level camps for various government schemes. Bhiwani stated that awareness is created through workshops organised by the district office and various departments. Palwal provided specific dates for their awareness sessions: 5 January, 2021, 26-27 December, 2023, and 2 January, 2024. Although the Act does not specify the frequency of awareness sessions that are supposed to be conducted by the District Officers, the sessions were not held frequently.

The responses did not differentiate between awareness sessions for employees and broader awareness sessions for the district.

Punjab

In Punjab, only two districts—Gurdaspur and Ludhiana—provided information on their efforts to sensitise employees and raise awareness about sexual harassment and women’s rights in their districts.

Figure 10 displays a map of the districts in Punjab where awareness initiatives have been implemented.

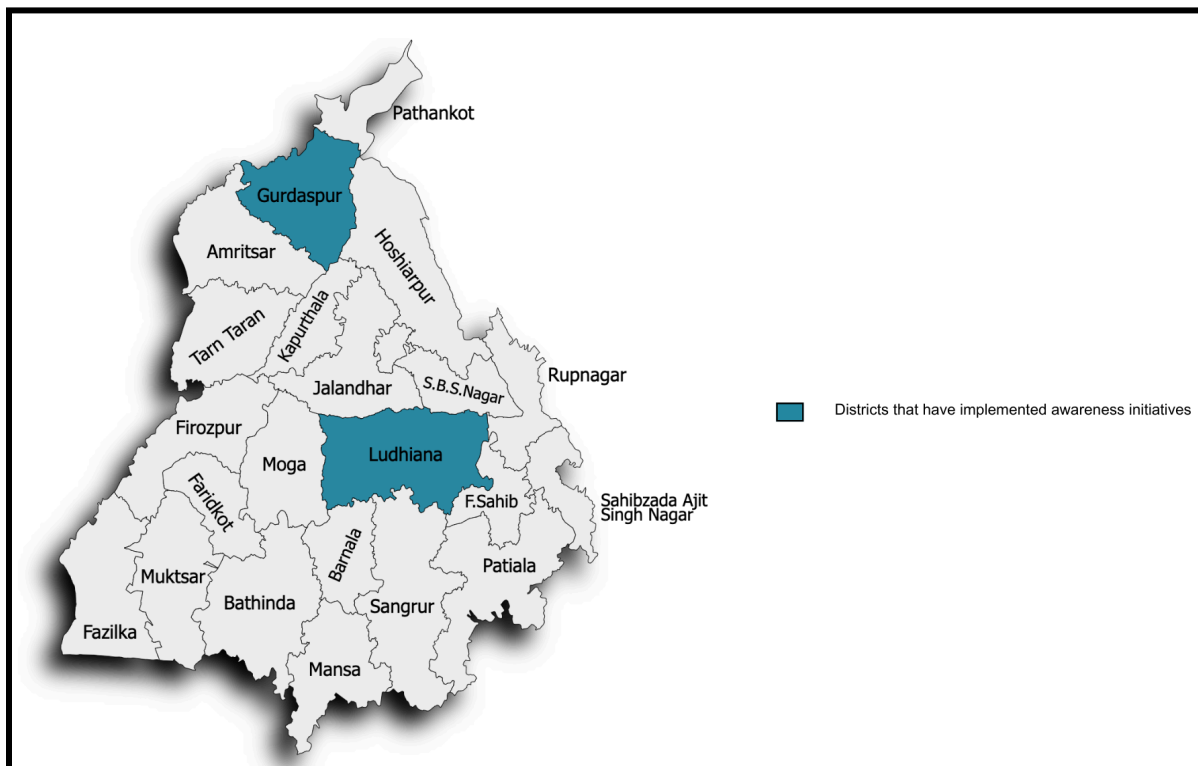


Figure 10: Districts in Punjab that have implemented awareness initiatives.

Gurdaspur reported that, under Section 19(c), they have conducted sensitisation programmes for teachers, police officials, Anganwadi workers, and department officials.

Ludhiana detailed that awareness sessions were held for the sensitisation of employees such as police officials, departmental employees, Anganwadi workers, and NGO representatives. Additionally, Ludhiana reported that they used One Stop Centers to raise awareness within the district.

Conclusion

The responses to our RTI applications in 21 districts of Haryana and 23 districts of Punjab reveal a lack of compliance with the SHW Act. A full decade after its enactment, it appears that nearly half of the districts in both states have either failed to establish Local Committees (LCs) or are unable to provide the relevant details mandated by the Act, despite this being a fundamental requirement under the law.

Effective implementation of the Act requires well-established and trained LCs to uphold the safety and dignity of women at work. The lack of LCs impedes the ability of women in smaller organisations and the informal sector—who rely heavily on LCs to report sexual harassment—to access justice. Given that sexual harassment at the workplace remains grossly underreported, the establishment of operational LCs is a critical first step in providing a pathway to justice.

This weak enforcement of the law at the district level highlights the persistent gaps in the SHW Act and the pressing need to make it effective and relevant to working women. Districts must assume responsibility for implementing the provisions of the Act, starting with the establishment of properly constituted LCs that are equipped to sensitively handle cases of sexual harassment. While further efforts are necessary to ensure that the law is accessible to all, meeting its fundamental requirements and establishing strong, operational LCs across all districts are critical first steps.

About MFF

Established in 2016, the Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) carries forward Dr. Martha Farrell's legacy with a vision for a world where all formal and informal learning and working spaces are safe and gender equitable. MFF's mission is to ensure that all individuals feel secure and valued in their working and learning environments through:

- **Education:** Co-designing learning programs to inform, raise awareness, and empower individuals and institutions on issues of safety and gender equity.
- **Research:** Generating knowledge on gender equity and preventing gender-based violence in both learning and working environments.
- **Advocacy:** Influencing stakeholders to design and implement effective policies, institutional practices, and laws.

Since its inception, MFF has been working to ensure that formal and informal workplaces are safe and harassment-free for all. In its work with formal workplaces, MFF advances its core mission by fostering the creation of safe, diverse, inclusive, and violence-free learning and working environments for all. Collaborating closely with organisations and institutions across various sectors, MFF aims to educate, raise awareness, and empower employees and students, with a focus on mainstreaming gender and preventing gender-based violence. Ensuring meaningful compliance with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 is one of the key areas of focus of the work done by the Foundation.

MFF also actively works with women informal workers to raise awareness about their right to safe workplaces and to help them collectively demand these rights from their employers and government bodies. Additionally, MFF works with government institutions, particularly legally mandated Local Committees, to ensure the establishment of responsive and effective mechanisms for preventing, prohibiting, and addressing sexual harassment under the Act.



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