

Safeguarding Women

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Safeguarding Women: Legal Measures and Government Initiatives in India

Context:

In recent decades, **women in India have made significant progress across multiple domains**—education, governance, economy, science, and technology. This rise has been supported by **constitutional provisions, legislative reforms, targeted schemes, and budgetary allocations** by the Government of India.

However, despite these efforts, challenges such as **domestic violence, sexual harassment, trafficking, and cybercrime** still persist. Recognizing this, the Government has implemented a comprehensive legal framework and safety mechanisms to **ensure the physical, mental, emotional, and economic security** of women.

Legal Measures to Safeguard Women's Security

The Indian legal system has introduced several laws to protect women from violence, exploitation, and discrimination.

1. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023

- Replaces the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- Introduces **stricter penalties** for crimes against women.
- **Death penalty for rape of a girl below 18 years.**
- Expands definitions of **sexual assault and harassment.**
- Recognizes **dowry-related harassment** as a criminal offense.

2. Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012

- Addresses **sexual abuse of minors**.
- **2019 amendment**: Introduced **death penalty for aggravated sexual assault**.
- Trials under POCSO to be held in **Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)**.

3. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005

- Provides **civil and legal remedies** to women in abusive relationships.
- Covers women in **marriage-like relationships**, including live-in partners.
- **NFHS-5 (2019-21)**: Spousal violence reduced to **29.3%** from **31.2%** (2015-16).

4. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961

- Criminalizes giving, taking, or demanding dowry.
- Dowry death: Woman dies within **7 years of marriage** under unnatural circumstances → **Punishable offense**.

5. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956

- Aims to eliminate **commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking**.
- Provides for **rescue, rehabilitation**, and punishment of offenders.

6. Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006

- Declares child marriage voidable.
- **Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs)** appointed to prevent and prosecute such cases.

7. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

- Mandates **Internal Committees (ICs)** at workplaces with over **10 employees**.

- **Local Committees (LCs)** for unorganized sectors and small offices.
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Government Initiatives for Women's Safety

Nirbhaya Fund

- **Established:** December 2012 (Post-2012 Delhi gang rape).
 - **Nature:** Non-lapsable corpus fund.
 - **Total Allocation:** ₹7712.85 crore (till FY 2024-25).
 - **Utilization:** ₹5846.08 crore (~76% of total).
 - **Administered by:** Department of Economic Affairs.
 - **Monitored by:** Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
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Key Schemes Under Nirbhaya Fund

Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD):

- **One Stop Centres (OSCs):**

- Launched: **2018**.

- Offer **medical, legal, psychological and shelter support** to women facing violence.

- **Women Helpline (WHL - 181):**

- 24/7 helpline offering **emergency response and referrals**.

- Connected to OSCs and police services.

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA):

- **Emergency Response Support System (ERSS - 112):**

- Integrates **100 (Police), 101 (Fire), 108 (Ambulance), and 181 (Women)** helplines.
- Accessible via **call, SMS, email, web portal, SOS signals.**

- **Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs):**

- Prevent trafficking, especially of **women and children.**
- Coordinate with **Interpol and border forces.**

- **Women Help Desks (WHDs):**

- Over **10,000 desks** set up in police stations across India.
- Ensures a **women-friendly reporting environment.**

- **Cyber Forensic cum Training Labs:**

- Train police in handling **cybercrimes against women.**

- **Safe City Projects:**

- Implemented in **8 major cities:** Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Lucknow.
- Focus: Surveillance, smart lighting, and patrolling in public places.

- **Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF):**

- Financial support to survivors of **rape, acid attacks, trafficking.**

- Compensation: **₹1 lakh to ₹10 lakh** based on severity.
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Ministry of Law and Justice:

- **Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs):**

- Initiated in **2019** under POCSO.
 - **1,023 FTSCs** operational across India.
 - Funded through **Nirbhaya Fund** to speed up trials.
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Ministries of Railways and Road Transport:

- **Rail and Road Safety Initiatives:**

- Installation of **CCTV, panic buttons, and GPS** in buses and trains.

- **Meri Saheli Initiative:**

- Launched by **Indian Railways** to assist women passengers during travel.
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Digital and Community-Based Safety Tools

- **SHe-Box Portal:**

- Single platform to **report workplace harassment**, available to women in all sectors.

- **Mission Shakti (2021-2026):**

- Umbrella scheme for **women's safety and empowerment**.
- Two sub-schemes:

- *Sambal*: Focus on **safety and security**.
 - *Samarthya*: Focus on **economic and social empowerment**.
 - **Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences:**
 - Monitors **timely completion of police investigations**.
 - **National Database of Sexual Offenders (NDSO):**
 - Tracks **repeat offenders**, issues alerts to law enforcement.
 - **Cyber Crime Reporting Portal:**
 - Enables online reporting of **cyber harassment, threats, stalking**.
 - **Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs):**
 - Act as **community intermediaries**, assisting women in distress and bridging gaps with law enforcement.
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What Lies Ahead?

- Expansion of **One Stop Centres (OSCs)** to **every district**.
- Better **utilization and auditing** of the Nirbhaya Fund.
- Introduction of **new laws** to tackle **online abuse, deepfake crimes, and cyberstalking**.
- Enhanced **digital literacy, legal awareness, and community sensitization** programs.
- Encouragement of **crime reporting and reducing social stigma** through nationwide campaigns.