

Torn in the USA, but Inclusion Runs Deeper in India Inc Now

Cos using theatre trainings, maternity policies, etc to grow women's share in workforce

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New Delhi: American companies may be toeing the line set by Donald Trump and ditching their policies on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), but corporate India is resolute on its commitment and in fact doubling down on initiatives to achieve the next level inclusion targets.

The RPG Group that owns companies such as CEAT, KEC International and Zensar Technologies is working on increasing gender diversity at mid and senior leadership, while engineering and construction major Larsen & Toubro is taking initiatives to create "a more enabling and nurturing ecosystem" for its female employees.

Others from telecom operator Bharti Airtel, courier and logistics company Blue Dart Express and IT services provider LTIMindtree to new-age firms like fashion platform Myntra are also increasing their DEI efforts.

They are doing this at a time when US majors like Google, Walt Disney Co, Ford, Walmart, Target, Lowe's and John Deere have gone back on their diversity and inclusion plans after President Trump dismantled federal DEI programmes.

India Inc Trumps on DEI Agenda



FRONT RUNNERS → RPG Group → L&T → Myntra
→ Bharti Airtel → Blue Dart → LTIMindtree → Hindustan Zinc

Latest DEI Initiatives

Roping in diversity-focused search firms to recruit women leaders

Paying higher for women searches

Safeguarding ratings of women on maternity leave

Creating creche at workplace/giving creche allowance

Setting up wellness rooms at plants, factories and offices for women

Increasing women headcount at all levels

Using theatre as a medium to overcome unconscious bias

Over the past decade, Indian companies that have adopted DEI policies have seen those initiatives helping them get diverse perspectives, experiences and talent that drive innovation, collaboration and growth, say experts. These companies have now "robustly established" the business case for such programmes, said Saundarya Rajesh, founder-president the Avtar group, a workplace culture consulting firm, explaining why Indian businesses are not slowing down, but rather strengthening, their DEI efforts.

The RPG Group is hiring diversity-focused search firms to recruit women leaders and is paying a higher percentage for diversity candidates, said Riya Dalvi, the group's DEI chairperson.

Currently, women account for about 23% of the group's

headcount of more than 30,000.

Companies are also adopting novel measures to create awareness about diversity and to avoid discrimination. Tyre manufacturer CEAT is making use of theatre as a medium to overcome unconscious bias through plays conducted by experts.

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L&T recently introduced measures in its appraisal process to safeguard the performance ratings of women on maternity leave. It offers creche allowance to female employees with young children.

They can also take infants and a caretaker on business trips at the company's expense.

"We have launched dedicated initiatives this year for our women employees to create a more enabling and nurturing ecosystem," said L&T chief HR officer C Jayakumar. It is in the process of setting up wellness rooms across some shopfloors and offices, especially for women.

Women now have a 9% share in L&T's 60,000-plus full-time employees. It has a five-year target of increasing that share to 10%, and towards achieving that, it plans to step up hiring of women from campuses and lateral channels this year.

For Myntra, chief HR officer Govindraj MK said, one the goals in 2025 will be to strengthen representation, retention and engagement for women at all levels, including leadership roles, through higher diversity in hiring.

Hindustan Zinc is looking to increase the share of women in its workforce to 30% by 2030 from 25% now, chief executive Arun Misra told ET. "HZL employs over 700 women out of which around 500 are in core operations, significantly surpassing many peers in India's core manufacturing, metals and mining sectors," he said.

Airtel's recently introduced initiatives have helped it have 18% women in the total workforce, chief people officer Amrita Padda said.