

# Hospitality Is Making the Case for Gender Equality

Hotels are promoting gender equality by ensuring that women are represented across all departments and at every level of the organisation

*By Bindu Gopal Rao*

**H**ospitality has always been a people-intensive industry globally, but the opportunity today is to be far more intentional about who participates in shaping its future.

## Being the Change

Most conscientious hotels view gender equality as a core part of their talent strategy and leadership philosophy. This is done by following a structured, competency-led hiring process designed to minimise bias and expand access across all functions, including areas where women have historically been underrepresented, such as culinary, engineering, and bar operations.

Isha Goyal, Senior Vice President & Head – Human Resources, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, says, “Hospitality is undergoing a generational shift, where leadership is increasingly defined by empathy, adaptability, and cultural intelligence. Women bring immense strength to these areas, and organisations that create environments where women can lead authentically are better positioned to deliver exceptional guest experiences.”

Prakash Jayadevan, Group COO, The Residency Hotels,

adds, “The group defines gender equality as a commitment to providing equal opportunities, fair and respectful treatment, equal pay for equal work, and impartial career advancement for all employees, regardless of gender. All policies, promotions, and performance evaluations are governed by transparent, objective, and merit-based standards.”

## An Equal Workspace

Beyond hiring, gender representation is being reviewed across departments to identify opportunities to strengthen balance. Priyanka Ahluwalia, Cluster General Manager, Portfolio of Holiday Inn Express, says, “We are committed to building a workplace where colleagues of all genders have equal access to growth, leadership pathways, and fair representation at every level. As a brand, we support the broader leadership balance goals set within the group’s 2030 commitments, including strengthening gender balance and underrepresented leadership groups. Our focus remains on developing internal talent and ensuring progression is based on skills and performance.”

People are looked at for what they actually bring to the role, their skills, their experience, and the attitude they show, rather



Isha Goyal, Senior Vice President & Head - Human Resources, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts



Prakash Jayadevan, Group COO, The Residency Hotels



Priyanka Ahluwalia, Cluster General Manager, Portfolio of Holiday Inn Express



Tejus Jose, Director of Operations at ibis & ibis Styles India



Rajiv Kapoor, General Manager, Fairmont Mumbai, and Roswyn, A Morgans Originals Hotel



Anuj Chaudhry, General Manager, Courtyard by Marriott Arravali



Dhiraj Bhushan, Director of Human Resources at Shangri-La New Delhi



Rahul Sharma, Human Resources Manager, Andaz Delhi, by Hyatt

than any assumptions about who “fits” a job. “We’re mindful about how roles are described so they feel open and inviting, and we try to have varied voices involved in interviews so decisions are shaped by different perspectives, not just one point of view. Our managers are also trained to recognise unconscious bias, because sometimes it is not about intent but about habits. We actively encourage women to apply across departments, including areas where they have traditionally been underrepresented, so that more doors feel open from the start,” avers Tejus Jose, Director of Operations at ibis & ibis Styles India.

**Women First**

In order to ensure that female applicants apply, hotels are creating an inclusive and supportive work environment. “We ensure gender-neutral hiring practices and diverse interview panels and actively engage with hospitality institutes and

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skill-development platforms to encourage more women to explore careers in the industry. By showcasing women in key operational and leadership roles, we aim to inspire confidence and demonstrate that hospitality offers meaningful, long-term career paths for women,” says Rajiv Kapoor, General Manager, Fairmont Mumbai, and Roswyn, A Morgans Originals Hotel.

Dhiraj Bhushan, Director of Human Resources at Shangri-La New Delhi, adds, “A strong female presence in senior leadership inspires aspiring women with great admiration, positioning us as their preferred choice. Supportive workplace policies underpin this approach: comprehensive maternity benefits and flexible work arrangements where operationally feasible; safe and respectful environments backed by strict anti-harassment and grievance redressal policies; and wellness initiatives supporting physical and emotional well-being. Creating psychological safety ensures women can lead confidently and contribute fully.”

*“Strong anti-harassment and safe workplace policies further help build an inclusive employer brand that is attractive to women.”*

- Rahul Sharma

**Local Love**

For many hotels, especially in tourism destinations, empowering women is integral to building a more inclusive and sustainable future for hospitality. Anand Shekhawat, Founder, Sariska Lodge, says, “Nearly 40% of our team comprises women from neighbouring villages, many of whom began their journey



Shangri-La New Delhi women team with General Manager, Abhishek Sadhoo



Women's Day Celebration at Sayaji Hotel Vadodara



Poulomi Bhattacharya, Director of People and Culture, Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity



Resham Gupta, Director of Human Resources, Conrad Bengaluru



Sandeep Gane, Assistant Director of Human Resources, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa



Shweta Hinduja, Multi-Property Director of Human Resources, JW Marriott Pune and Courtyard by Marriott Pune Hinjewadi



Anand Mishra, Director of Operation, Sayaji Hotel Vadodara



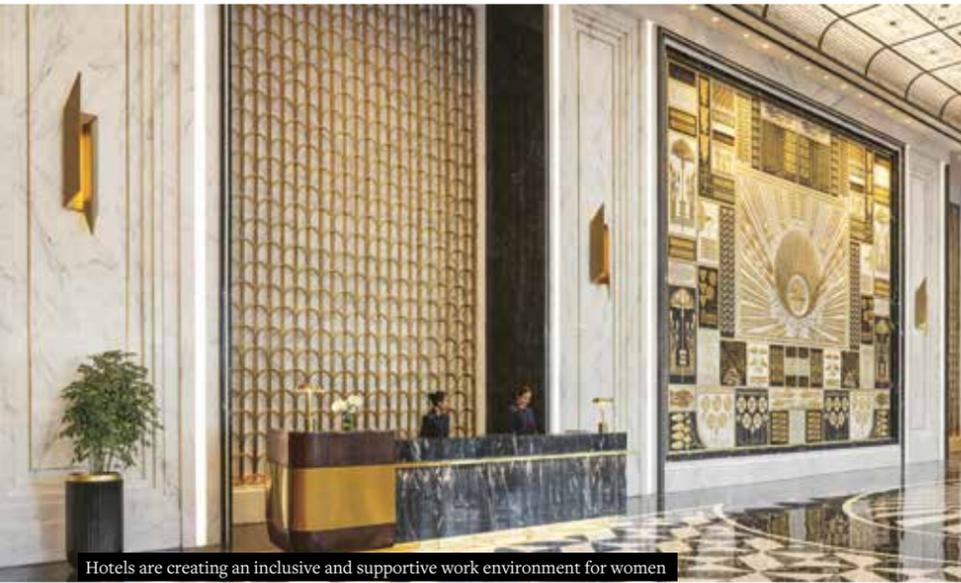
Chandan Rani, People and Culture Manager, Grand Mercure Bangalore



Rohit Anand, Director of Human Resources at Radisson Blu Dwarka



Anand Shekhawat, Founder, Sariska Lodge



Hotels are creating an inclusive and supportive work environment for women

Image courtesy: Fairmont Mumbai.

*“High potential women are encouraged for succession planning, task force assignments, and special projects to build confidence and readiness for leadership positions.”*

- Sandeep Gane

with us as construction workers and have since been trained into roles across service, housekeeping, and guest operations. We believe true hospitality extends beyond our guests to the communities around us, which is why we actively create opportunities for local women, provide skill development, and ensure safety measures at the workplace through dedicated female-only staff accommodation.”

### Second Innings

Hotels are also ensuring that women who want to return to work after a career break are given an opportunity again. “At the hotel, we remain open and encouraging toward women who wish to restart their careers, regardless of the stage they are at. We focus on their potential, provide the right guidance, and help them ease back into the work environment with supportive teams and flexible approaches wherever possible. The idea is simple: if someone is ready to come back, we should be ready to welcome them,” says Poulomi Bhattacharya, Director of People and Culture, Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity.

Anuj Chaudhry, General Manager, Courtyard by Marriott Arravali, adds, “We recognise that life milestones often require time away. Our “Career Comeback” approach focuses on empathetic onboarding and “refresher” training to help women

transition back smoothly. We prioritise skills and potential over the length of a resume gap, offering flexible shifts during the initial months of return.”

### Train Right

Many hotels offer several targeted training and mentorship programmes to support women employees. These include POSH awareness sessions, self-defence training, financial well-being workshops, and role-specific skill-building programmes. “We also support underprivileged women through Project Pranita, enabling them to pursue graduation through IGNOU. We also support and hire individuals taking a career break who want to restart their careers under Project Springboard. To prepare women for higher roles, we prioritise them for Marriott leadership programmes such as Embark, Ignite, and Evolve. High potential women are encouraged, supported, and identified for succession planning, task force assignments, and special projects to build confidence and readiness for leadership positions,” says Sandeep Gane, Assistant Director of Human Resources, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa.

Andaz Delhi, by Hyatt, offers general training on human rights, harassment prevention, ethical conduct, and awareness programmes for all employees. Managers are also

*“Nearly 40% of our team comprises women from neighbouring villages, many of whom began their journey with us as construction workers and have since been trained into roles across service, housekeeping, and guest operations.”*

- Anand Shekhawat

trained to ensure fair treatment, appropriate breaks, proper compensation, and adherence to human rights standards. “We foster a culture of mutual respect, inclusion, and equal opportunity, which appeals broadly to diverse applicants, including women. Strong anti-harassment and safe workplace policies further help build an inclusive employer brand that is attractive to women,” says Rahul Sharma, Human Resources Manager, Andaz Delhi, by Hyatt.

### Being Safe

Safety is non-negotiable, and hospitality is ensuring that women team members have access to secure, CCTV-monitored accommodation with female wardens and hygiene-focused facilities. “For late working hours, we provide guarded home-drop transportation, ensuring they return home safely. The hotel also enforces mandatory POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) training for all employees. Our POSH committee is active, visible, and approachable. This structured ecosystem reinforces our commitment to providing an environment where women feel respected, safe, and included,” says Resham Gupta, Director of Human Resources, Conrad Bengaluru.

Rohit Anand, Director of Human Resources at Radisson Blu Dwarka, adds, “Our fully functional Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) ensures that concerns are addressed with confidentiality, sensitivity, and fairness. Clearly defined maternity leave policies support women through important life milestones without compromising career continuity. Additionally, self-defence training initiatives are conducted to promote confidence and personal safety awareness.”

### Amplifying Voices

Hotels are committed to cultivating the growth of women associates through a range of dedicated training, mentorship, and leadership development opportunities. “As a hotel we participate in Marriott’s support group for women, the ‘Women’s Associate Resource Group,’ which reinforces our commitment to inclusion and provides a space where all women can feel they belong. We maintain a deep focus on getting women leaders together, empowering them, amplifying their voices, and connecting with allies to support our efforts,” says Shweta Hinduja, Multi-Property Director of Human Resources, JW Marriott Pune and Courtyard by Marriott Pune Hinjewadi.

Anand Mishra, Director of Operation, Sayaji Hotel Vadodara, adds, “We track gender ratios, retention levels, internal promotions, participation in training programmes, and feedback from employees. These insights help us continuously refine our policies and strengthen our commitment to workplace equality.”



From L-R: Perminder Puri, Director of Sales and Marketing; Mala Makan, Director of Events; Parinita Samanta, Director of Marketing and Comms at Shangri La New Delhi



Kavindra Tewari, Director of Human Resources, The Ritz-Carlton, Pune



Sandeep Udupa, Director of Human Resources, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru



John Paul D'Souza, Director of Human Resources, The Ritz Carlton, Bangalore



Jeevan K Arul, Associate Director of People & Culture, Radisson Blu Bengaluru Outer Ring Road



Image courtesy: Fairmont Mumbai.

Creating a safe and inclusive workplace for women is rooted in the hospitality industry's culture of putting people first

*“We use a combination of quantitative metrics, qualitative feedback, and compliance reviews to assess how well gender-equality initiatives are working. This ensures that progress is measurable, transparent, and aligned with DEI goals.”*

- Kavindra Tewari, The Ritz-Carlton, Pune

### Handling Complaints

Most hotels follow a confidential complaint process managed by the HR department and the Internal Complaints Committee. “All complaints are investigated promptly and fairly. Appropriate disciplinary action is taken when required, and the complainant is protected from any form of retaliation,” says Chandan Rani, People and Culture Manager, Grand Mercure Bangalore.

“The hotel also enforces a strict non-retaliation policy, ensuring that complainants, witnesses, or supporting employees are fully protected from any form of victimisation. Through these measures, we reaffirm our commitment to maintaining a safe, respectful, ethical, and inclusive workplace culture,” adds Jeevan K Arul, Associate Director of People & Culture, Radisson Blu Bengaluru Outer Ring Road.

### Measuring Right

Hotels measure gender equality efforts through clearly defined representation goals, careful tracking of women’s hiring, promotion, and leadership progression, and ongoing assessments.

Kavindra Tewari, Director of Human Resources, The Ritz-Carlton, Pune, says, “The hotel uses a combination of quantitative metrics, qualitative feedback, and compliance reviews to assess how well its gender-equality initiatives are working. This ensures that progress is measurable, transparent, and aligned with the hotel’s DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) goals.”

Sandeep Udupa, Director of Human Resources, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru, adds, “We track hiring trends, leadership representation, promotion patterns, and tenure among women employees to understand whether our efforts are translating into progress. Regular pulse surveys offer qualitative insight into lived experiences, while declining attrition and stronger leadership participation signal meaningful movement. Measurement, for us, is not about validation; it is about staying honest and continually raising the bar.”

### A Fair Balance

Creating a safe and inclusive workplace for women is rooted in the hospitality industry’s culture of putting people first. “We review participation in development opportunities, monitor retention, and expect our leaders to champion inclusivity with accountability built into their performance measures. By regularly reviewing our progress and refining our practices based on data and feedback, we ensure that our commitment to equity is not only sustained but continually strengthened, reflecting our legacy of excellence and our dedication to creating a workplace where every individual can thrive,” says John Paul D’Souza, Director of Human Resources, The Ritz Carlton, Bangalore.

Ultimately, hotels are ensuring that the focus remains on creating a respectful, supportive, and growth-oriented work environment for women even as they reinforce a culture of respect. 