

Google Staff Protest Over Sexual Harassment Policies

Google CEO Sundar Pichai has promised changes to the tech giant's sexual harassment policies, a week after thousands of its employees across the world, including in India, walked out in protest against the company reportedly shielding some top executives accused of sexual misconduct.

In a memo to employees on Thursday, the Indian-origin CEO said, "We recognise that we have not always gotten everything right in the past and we are sincerely sorry for that. It's clear we need to make some changes." "This is an area where we need to continually make progress and are committed to doing so," Pichai said while detailing the comprehensive action plan to address the demands of the Google employees.

"We will provide more transparency on how we handle concerns. We'll give better support and care to the people who raise them. And we will double down on our commitment to be a representative, equitable, and respectful workplace," he assured the employees.

More than 20,000 Google employees across the world walked out of their offices last Thursday following a bombshell New York Times report that detailed how the company has shielded and gave multimillion-dollar severance packages for senior executives accused of sexual misconduct, with organisers of the protest demanding concrete changes like a new system for reporting abuse and an employee representative on the company's board.

Some 150 Google employees participated in the walkout in India. The employees were from Hyderabad, Gurgaon and Mumbai offices.

Google leadership also held a town-hall style meeting with

employees following the publication of Pichai's memo on Thursday, the CNBC reported.

While the policy changes Pichai outlined met many of the protesters' requirements, they do not include adding an employee representative to Alphabet's board or elevating the chief diversity officer to report directly to the CEO, it said.

Google's plan includes providing more transparency around sexual harassment investigations and outcomes as part of its annual "Investigations Report," revamping its reporting channels for incidents of misconduct, updating and expanding its sexual harassment training and making arbitration optional for sexual harassment claims.



Organisers of the protests had specifically demanded Google put an end to its policy of forced arbitration for sexual misconduct allegations a practice that prevents employees from taking cases to court and is generally criticised for suppressing victims' stories.

Pichai's memo says that while Google "never required confidentiality," employees with harassment or assault claims can now choose whether or not to go through the arbitration process.

Organisers of Google's protests were also deliberate about including contract workers in their original demands. Google said in an additional document detailing changes that it will routinely review contractor and temp worker suppliers to see if they adhere to agreements around the handling of employee

complaints.

However, the Tech Workers Coalition, which launched a retaliation hotline for Google employees who participated in last week's protest, says that the new policies don't do enough to protect those temp, vendor and contract workers (TVCs), the report said.

"TVCs didn't receive this email this morning, and have been excluded from the town-hall," a spokesperson said. "This deliberate slight demonstrates the caste-like system deployed by Google, which fails to protect its workers and our colleagues."

The protest's organisers also released a statement saying that while Google made progress towards addressing their demands, they would "not let up" until all of them were met.

"We demand a truly equitable culture, and Google leadership can achieve this by putting employee representation on the board and giving full rights and protections to contract workers, our most vulnerable workers, many of whom are Black and Brown women," CNBC quoted Google employee Stephanie Parker as saying in that statement.

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