FICCI DE&I CONCLAVE & AWARDS

Building Belonging Brick by Brick
Date: 2nd April 2026
Venue: FICCI House, New Delhi

On 2nd April 2026, a group of DEI leaders and practitioners from across industry, academia, and civil society gathered in FICCI for the 3rd DEI Conclave and Awards. The 2026 edition, focusing on the theme "Building Belonging Brick by Brick," examined the role of both physical and digital design in creating workplaces and public infrastructure, paying attention to the differential needs of intersectional identities.

Snapshot of the day

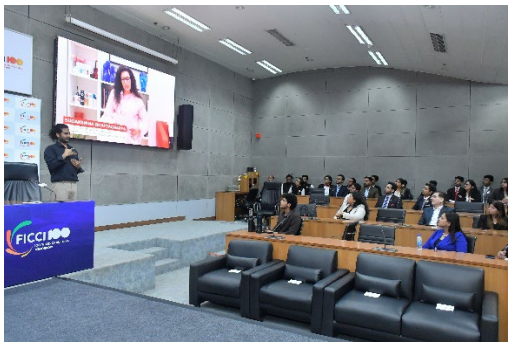
The conclave brought together multi-sectoral perspectives through:

Inaugural leadership addresses
UN Women WEP Principles presentation on gender equality
Panel on transgender rights and legal realities
Session on inclusive spaces and built environments
Session on AI, bias, and emerging technologies
DE&I Awards ceremony recognizing sectoral leadership

Leadership Perspective on Belonging



The welcome remarks by Uma Seth (ASG, FICCI) positioned inclusion as a design question and introduced the DE&I Conclave as a space where industry leaders and practitioners come together to reflect and deliberate on the way forward. She noted FICCI's role as a catalyst and convenor led by the DE&I committee, and its distinguished members, enabling an industry-wide dialogue that translates into actionable change.

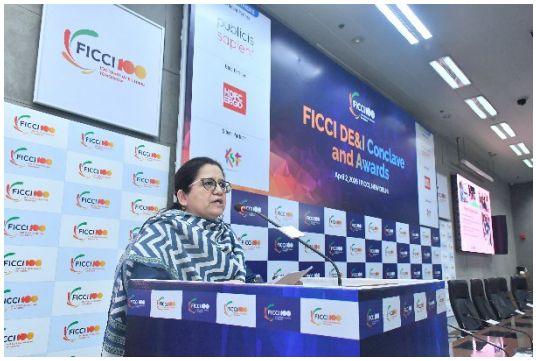


Opening Address by Sudakshina Bhattacharya, Co-Chair-FICCI DE&I Committee & President & CHRO, HDFC ERGO General Insurance, noted that inclusion is under increasing pressure globally. She noted that "inclusion is not a destination,it is a choice we make every day, a commitment we renew continuously," and cautioned that organizations must resist the tendency to treat DE&I as dispensable during challenging times.



Delivering the theme Address, Keshav Suri, Chairperson, FICCI DE&I Task Force & Executive Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, stated that "DE&I cannot just be talked about, it has to be felt," urging organizations to create enabling environments rather than savior-driven frameworks.

A Brief Introduction to the UN Women's WEP Principles



Savita Sethi's (Think Through Consulting) presentation highlighted the business case for gender equality. Drawing on global data and an overview, she argued that gender equality is not just the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do, given the economic benefits of inclusion.

From Law to Life: Advancing Transgender Rights in India



This conversation, moderated by **Akshay Tyagi** from the Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, discussed the widening legal gap between the legal recognition and the lived realities of Transgender persons in India. **Raghavi Shukla**, Advocate and LGBTQIA+ Rights Activist, foregrounded the concerns about identity erasure and surveillance, especially in the context of the changing legal landscape in India. She further highlighted that trans men risk being excluded from legal recognition frameworks, pointing to a narrowing of definitions that invisibilize sections of the community. **Arundhati Katju**, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India, offered a legal perspective on the current landscape, particularly given the rollback of previously secured rights. She emphasized that only a minuscule minority availed themselves of the benefits of the Transgender Act, despite its broader definitions, and that the impact of the amendment is likely to be devastating, as these numbers would further decline.

From Barrier-Free to Belonging – Rethinking Inclusive Spaces



Moderator: Eittee Gupta (Randstad India)
Speakers: Vertika Vaish (Bata Group); Jai Shri Sharma (DMRC); Dr. Manu Mahajan (School of Planning and Architecture); Poornima Kamath (Amadeus); Nishtha Nishant (The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group)

This panel, consisting of DE&I practitioners from corporates, experts from academia, and people with lived experiences of exclusion, discussed a wide spectrum of identities and concrete ways to incorporate inclusion into everyday language. Some of the key takeaways from the session are:

- Built environments are exclusionary by default unless intentionally designed otherwise
- Designers and leadership must be open to the demands of people with lived experience of exclusion, whether it is from a working-class neighbourhood asking for a community gym or a colleague asking for the right pronoun.
- Retrofitting is insufficient; inclusion must be embedded at the design stage.

Emerging Technologies: Bias and Exclusion



Moderator: Amrita Tripathi (The Health Collective)
Speakers: Mihir Kulkarni (Wadhwani AI); Rajiv Kumar Singh (Shiv Nadar University); Abhishek Kumar (Scentlogix Labs); Vishakha Dutta (Publicis Sapient); Indira Pathak (Tech Mahindra)

Speakers, ranging from AI/ML scientists, academic experts, DE&I experts, and industry leaders, deliberated in this session on the impact of digital systems and the reinforcement of exclusions through them. Some of the key takeaways from the session are:

- Technology requires continuous monitoring, auditng and governance to be bias-free
- The data sets on which the HR systems and other technological tools are trained need to be scrutinized for bias
- Humans in the loop systems are essential for accountability
- As technological development is often outsourced, it is often difficult to be involved in the development of a specific tool. However, it is more important that organizations take accountability for this process and create safeguards.

Stars of the day

FICCI DE&I Awards 2026 – Categories & Winners



1. Diversity & Inclusion Strategy of the Year

Winner: Tata Steel Limited

Jury Commendations:

Tech Mahindra Limited

HDFC ERGO General Insurance Company Limited

Kellogg India Private Limited (Kellanova)

2. LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Initiative

Winner (Large Private Sector): Deutsche Bank Group

Winner (Up to INR 200 Cr category): NatWest Digital Services India Private Limited

3. Innovative Diversity & Inclusion Practices

Winner (Public Sector): Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd

Winner (Private Sector – Large): Minda Corporation Limited

4. Special Recognition

FICCI DE&I Champion of the Year: The LaLiT (Bharat Hotels Limited)



The special Address by **Dr. Jyotsna Suri,** Past President FICCI & Chairperson and Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, and Mentor, FICCI DE&I Committee, highlighted that Indian industries cannot claim to be truly world-class unless inclusivity is built into them. She also emphasized that the DE&I Awards are not just a recognition but also a demonstration and encouragement of the values the industry should uphold.



Ira Singhal IAS, Deputy Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI, in her special address, mentioned how society's and medical communities' perceptions of disabled people have changed over time, noting that in the 70s and 80s, they were considered disposable. She recognized the role of FICCI and awards such as this in mainstreaming disabled people and their contribution to workplaces. She reflected on how inclusion is not a charity but an economic benefit for families, corporations, and the nation.