

GENDER (IN)JUSTICE?

Law Firms

FINDINGS BY SUBSECTOR



About:

Global 50/50 is an independent think tank that informs, inspires and incites action and accountability for gender justice. Global Justice 50/50 is part of this mission, assessing organisations' public commitments, workplaces policies, leadership representation, and data reporting practices through a gender justice lens.

The full 2026 Global Justice 50/50 Report examines 171 global and regional law and justice organisations across 30 countries. Here we report on 38 law firms in the sample (see page 18 for full list).

Covid bride

Kolkata, India. 2021.
Avijit Ghosh

In uniform and masked, Ruhina strides through her school hall, surrounded by her own handwritten testimony. After escaping child marriage, she reclaims space and voice.

At a glance

Our research reveals that senior leadership remains overwhelmingly male and dominated by nationals from high-income countries. The legal profession cannot fully uphold principles of fairness and equity until its own leadership reflects the societies it serves.

Sparse commitments:

Few law firms formally commit to gender equality, and most who do frame commitments in the context of their *pro bono* work.

Law firms play a powerful role in shaping justice, but few embed gender equality into their core values or organisational mission statements. Most firms make no commitments at all, even while offering services encompassing women's rights and access to justice. For the most part firms are silent on commitments to gender equality.

Among 38 law firms



10 have a public commitment to gender equality

Policy gaps:

Workplace policies on gender equality exist mainly for staff, with equality at the level of senior partnership largely unaddressed.

Most firms have gender equality, fairness and equity policies for staff, but far fewer apply to or are specific to senior management or partners. This split creates a two-tier system where the people with the most power – the partners – are the least accountable for gender equality. Without policies that affect the top, equality cannot be realised.

Among 38 law firms



27 have gender equality policies for the workplace



16 have gender equality policies for senior management

Concentration of power:

Senior leadership is overwhelmingly male and concentrated among nationals from high-income countries.

Very few firms have achieved gender parity at senior levels, and just a small minority are led by women. The result is a concentration of influence that sidelines the voices of women and those from low- and middle-income countries. Who leads shapes whose justice is prioritised.

Among 38 law firms



13% (5/38) have gender parity at senior levels



77% (60/78) of leaders are men from high-income countries

Data deficits:

Data transparency is essential for accountability, but most firms do not publish sex-disaggregated data or commit to undertake gender analysis.

Those that do tend to focus inward, not on the external impact of their work on women vs men. Without consistent reporting, the gendered effects of legal practice remain unexamined and unaddressed. What firms fail to measure, they fail to change.

Among 38 law firms



7 have a commitment to report sex-disaggregated data or undertake gender analysis

Gender parity in the law and justice sector benefits everyone by:



Assessing the law firms

Law firms sit at the heart of the international legal and economic order. They advise governments, corporations, and international organisations, shaping how laws are interpreted, applied, and enforced across jurisdictions. In doing so, they influence justice outcomes, market operations, and the functioning of public institutions worldwide.

The firms in our sample represent some of the largest and most internationally active 'elite' law firms, operating across multiple jurisdictions and practice areas, including commercial, regulatory, human rights, and public international law. They provide legal advice and representation in complex, high-value matters and serve as

key intermediaries between clients and domestic, regional, and international legal systems. Their work extends beyond individual cases, informing policy, corporate strategy, and global interpretations of law.

The sample is limited to large private-sector firms practising in three or more countries, with transnational influence on legal norms and governance. The final sample was triangulated from the 2025 rankings of three leading law firm directories: the *Chambers Global Guide*, *The Legal 500*, and *The American Lawyer Global 200*. Firms vary in structure, with some operating under Swiss vereins, sharing a brand but not profits. All are headquartered in high-income countries – predominantly the United States

and Europe – reflecting the concentrated geography of influence in the global legal services market and the broader architecture of global law and justice.

Global 50/50 only assesses publicly available information, a method that promotes transparency but is not without its limitations. Public commitments and policies do not always reflect internal practice, just as their absence does not necessarily indicate a lack of internal action, particularly in the context of the current global anti-gender backlash. The value of our approach, however, lies in offering a clear, comparative snapshot of how organisations publicly present their commitments and policies at a given moment in time.

Figure 1. Headquarter locations of 38 law firms

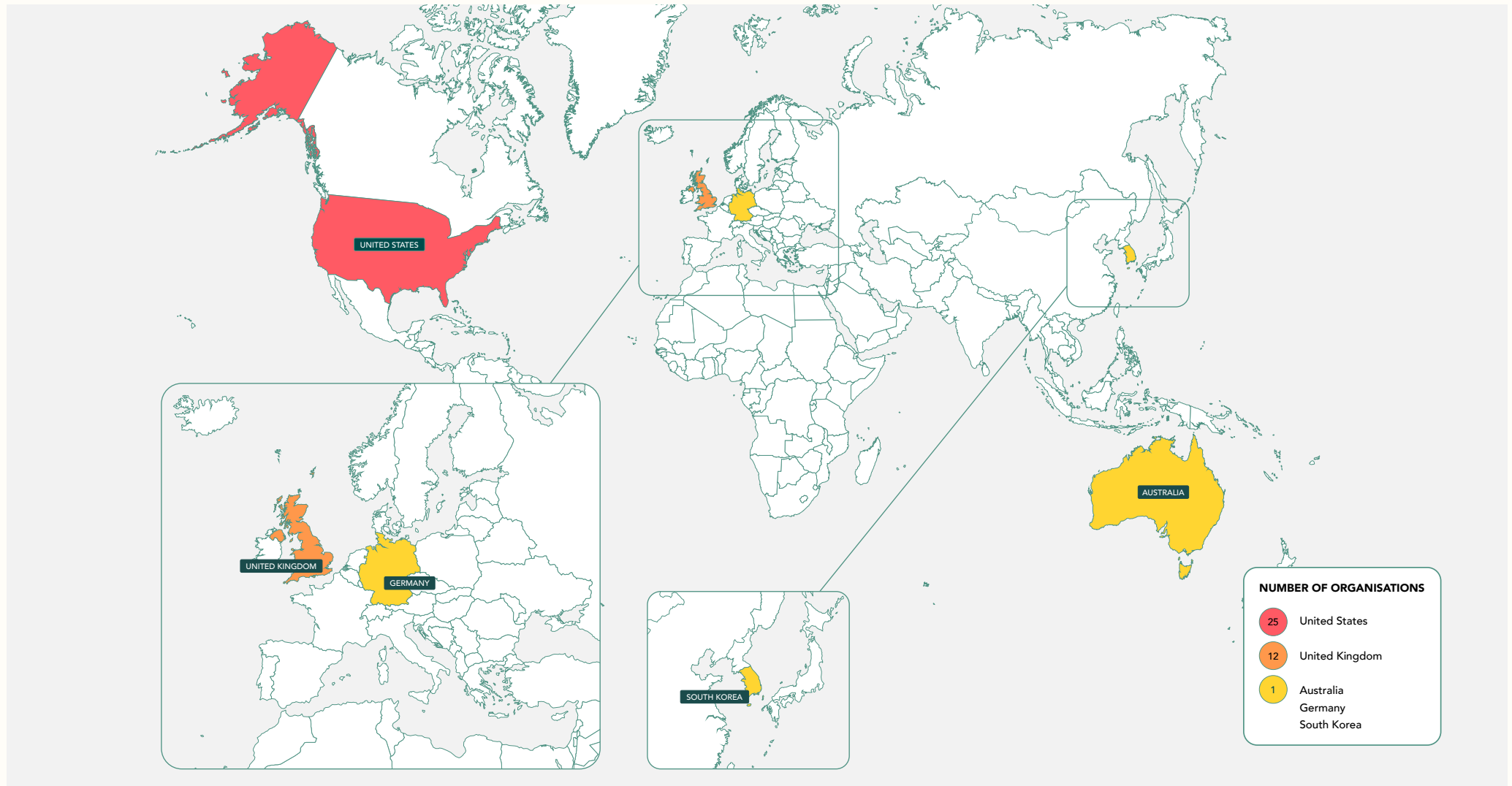


Table 1. Variables reviewed: Law Firms



Does the firm make a public commitment to gender equality?



Are gender equality and/or fairness and equity policies available in relation to:

Senior management/
partners

Staff



What is the gender and nationality of leaders,

INCLUDING

Managing partners

CEOs












Chairs


















Are policies available on reporting data disaggregated by sex or on undertaking gender analysis?

Box 1.

What we measure for each variable and how we assess the findings.
We assessed firms' websites for publicly available information on the following:

1	Public statement of commitment to gender equality			Commits to gender equality/equity, gender justice, or gender mainstreaming in policy and planning.
				Work on women's rights, social justice, human rights, and/or access to justice, but no formal commitment to gender equality.
				No mention of gender or social justice.
2	Policies with specific measures to promote gender equality for senior management/partners or for staff	Senior management/partners		Policy with specific measure(s) to improve gender equality and/or support women's careers in senior positions.
				Stated commitment to gender equality and/or diversity in senior positions but no specific measures to carry out commitments; and/or reports on gender distribution of senior management/partners.
				Policy is compliant with law but no more = "we do not discriminate".
				No reference to gender equality or non-discrimination in the workplace found.
		Staff		Policy with specific measure(s) to improve gender equality and/or support women's careers.
				Stated commitment to gender equality and/or diversity in the workplace (above the legal requirement) but no specific measures to carry out commitments; and/or reports on gender distribution of staff.
				Policy is compliant with law but no more = "we do not discriminate".
				No reference to gender equality or non-discrimination in the workplace found.

3	Policies with specific measures to promote fairness and equity for senior management/partners or for staff	Senior management/partners		Policy with specific measure(s) to improve diversity, inclusion, fairness and or equality.
				Commitment to promoting fairness and equity evidenced by a) aspirational comments and b) listing protected characteristics, but does not state what specific measures are in place to promote equality/diversity; and/or some reporting on characteristics among senior management/partners.
				Policy is compliant with law but no more = "we do not discriminate".
				No reference to equality or non-discrimination in the workplace found.
		Staff		Policy with specific measure(s) to improve diversity/inclusion/equality.
				Commitment to promoting fairness and equity evidenced by a) aspirational comments and b) listing protected characteristics, but does not state what specific measures are in place to promote equality/diversity; and/or some reporting on characteristics among staff.
				Policy is compliant with law but no more = "we do not discriminate".
				No reference to equality or non-discrimination in the workplace found.
5	Gender parity in senior management			56-100% women represented.
				45-55% women represented; or difference of one individual.
				35-44% women represented.
				0-34% women represented.
6	Gender and nationality of managing partners, CEOs, and chairs			There is no traffic light scoring for this variable; we only report on the aggregate numbers.
7	Policy on sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis			Policy or organisational commitment found to regularly report sex-disaggregated data and/or to undertake gender analysis.
				Project-specific commitments to report sex-disaggregated data or to undertake gender analysis.
				No policy or commitment found.

Finding 1. Few law firms publicly commit to gender equality, and those who do frame it in the context of their *pro bono* commitments

Public commitments to gender equality signal institutional recognition of its importance and provide a foundation for accountability in practice. We reviewed whether law firms had stated such a commitment on their websites, including statements found on *pro bono* pages.

10/38 (26%) firms had a formal, public commitment to gender equality – most of which were found on *pro bono* pages – while the remaining 28 (28/38; 74%) firms had no formal commitments, though all work on access to justice.

Box 2. Organisational examples

Example of law firm commitment to gender equality

In 2024, Gibson Dunn was proud to launch its *Justice for Women and Girls* initiative, a project that will bring together the Firm's attorneys around five distinct yet overlapping goals to advance justice and equity for women and girls around the world: (1) educational equity; (2) access to healthcare; (3) legal and social equity; (4) economic empowerment; and (5) prevention of violence against women. Work on behalf of women and girls, as well as other marginalized communities, has always been a cornerstone of our *pro bono* practice. This initiative seeks to deepen and expand our existing work on behalf of women and girls, with the goal of making real, systemic, and lasting change.

Gibson Dunn¹

Figure 2. Public commitments to gender equality found, law firms (n=38)



of law firms have a public commitment to gender equality

Finding 2. Workplace gender equality, fairness and equity policies exist for staff, but those that seek to advance equality in senior leadership are less common

Workplace policies on gender equality, fairness and equity with specific measures are important for setting clear standards and translating commitments into concrete, accountable actions. In law firms, however, assessing such policies is complicated by the diversity of roles within “leadership” and “staff”.

Firm leadership can include:

- Equity partners (typically owners of the firm and not employees)
- Salaried partners (partners in title but legally employees)
- Non-lawyer business services leaders (employees in senior management)

Staff can also encompass a mix of lawyers and non-lawyers, and the composition of these categories varies by firm.

Because firms do not consistently classify roles in the same way, distinctions between leadership and staff are not always clear cut. To attempt comparability across the 38 firms in our sample, we simplified these categories into two variables: one assessing policies covering “staff” broadly, and another assessing whether firms had policies with specific measures for senior management or partners.

27/38 (71%) firms had published policies on gender equality for staff. Fewer than half (16/38; 42%) had policies with specific measures to improve gender equality in senior management or in senior partners.

Examples of specific measures included: gender-responsive recruitment and appointment processes; mentoring, training, and leadership programmes; targets for women’s participation at senior levels; gender analysis and action in staff performance reviews and staff surveys; regular reviews of organisational efforts towards gender equality; and/or reporting back to all staff.

Similar to their performance on gender equality policies, 26/38 (68%) firms had publicly available fairness and equity policies for staff, while 8/38 (21%) had such a policy for senior management or senior partners.

Specific measures included: inclusive recruitment processes; mentoring, training, and leadership programmes; targets for representation; fairness and equity analysis and action in staff performance reviews; regular reviews of organisational efforts towards fairness and equity; and/or employee resource groups.

LAW FIRMS



of law firms have publicly available gender equality policies for staff



of law firms have publicly available gender equality policies for senior management/partners



of law firms have publicly available fairness and equity policies for staff



of law firms have publicly available fairness and equity policies for senior management/partners

Figure 3. Gender equality policies found, law firms (n=38)

- Gender equality policy with specific measures for gender equality/ women's careers
- Stated commitment to gender equality, but no specific measures
- Minimum legal requirement ("we do not discriminate")
- No public information found

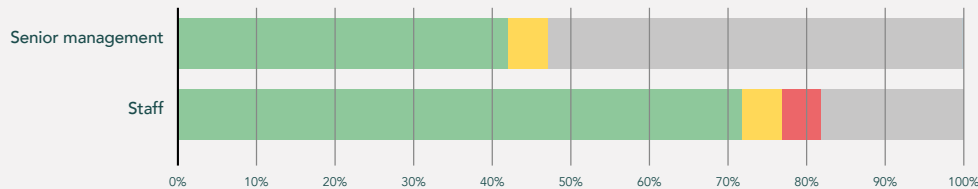
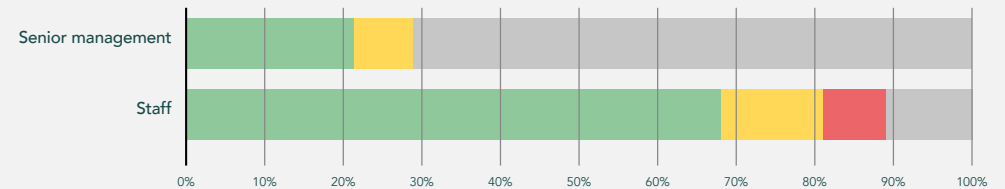


Figure 4. Fairness and equity policies found, law firms (n=38)

- Fairness and equity policy with specific measures
- Stated commitment to promoting fairness and equity, but no specific measures
- Minimum legal requirement ("we do not discriminate")
- No public information found



Box 3. Organisational examples

Examples of law firm gender equality, fairness and equity policies


**GENDER EQUALITY
POLICY WITH SPECIFIC
MEASURES FOR SENIOR
MANAGEMENT/PARTNERS:**

In 2021, we launched ambitious five-year global commitments to diversity and inclusion, setting targets for gender, race and ethnicity and LGBTQ+ representation.

*Gender balance: firm leadership**

**Board, sub-committees, Executive Committee and Managing Directors*

Our goal was for our firmwide leaders to be ethnically diverse, and for this group to comprise at least 40 per cent women and 40 per cent men (20 per cent men, women and non-binary) by the end of 2023.

Freshfields²

We have made significant progress on gender diverse representation, just missing our target. We partially met our ethnicity goal and both continue to be a focus.

**GENDER EQUALITY POLICY
WITH SPECIFIC MEASURES
FOR STAFF:**

We are committed to creating an environment in which women are able to progress and where all genders feel supported in balancing their responsibilities inside and outside of the workplace.

We seek to do this by:

- *Creating a balanced and sustainable pipeline of female talent at every career level;*
- *Ensuring women have access to development and sponsorship opportunities through our talent programmes, including our Women's Leadership Programme for senior associates, and Stepping Forward, our group coaching programme for more junior female associates;*
- *Leading the way with our parental leave and support benefits;*
- *Being agile in our approach to working arrangements and career paths; and*
- *Creating opportunities to build understanding of different perspectives and experiences, for example our celebration of International Women's Day 2023.*

Linklaters³



FAIRNESS AND EQUITY POLICY WITH SPECIFIC MEASURES FOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT/PARTNERS

Elevate

Elevate is DLA Piper's international sponsorship programme which supports those from underrepresented groups achieve partnership or another leadership role. During the programme, participants are matched with partner sponsors to help them raise their profile internally and shape their business case for promotion to partner.

The programme has been a success, with participants telling us that Elevate helped them achieve their goals, contributed to personal and professional development, and provided practical tools to support their aspirations to become partner.

DLA Piper⁴

Momentum

While Elevate is designed to support those already in senior roles make the leap to partner, there is also a lack of representation at senior levels. Running alongside Elevate, Momentum is a six-month development programme for high potential lead lawyers from underrepresented groups. During the programme, participants are exposed to realistic work-related simulations, as well as the latest thinking in psychology, to help develop the mindset and confidence required to meet their career aspirations.

FAIRNESS AND EQUITY POLICY WITH SPECIFIC MEASURES FOR STAFF:

We are committed to promoting a culture of respect for people living with disabilities by removing barriers and challenges they may face in the workplace. Our strategy is two-fold: supporting accessibility and adjustments, while becoming confident and knowledgeable about disability.

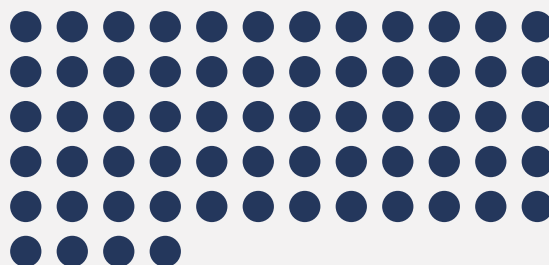
Our disability confidence and awareness resources are designed to support our people to feel confident in working with and supporting people living with disabilities, allowing them to overcome any fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. We aim to remove assumptions, and instead, have respectful and meaningful interactions with people living with disabilities.

Norton Rose Fulbright⁵

Finding 3. Law firm leadership is well below gender parity, and concentrated among nationals of high-income countries

We collected demographic data on the highest levels of leadership in law firms: managing partners, CEOs, and chairs. Across the 80 holders of highest office in the 38 firms in our sample, 64/80 (80%) were men.

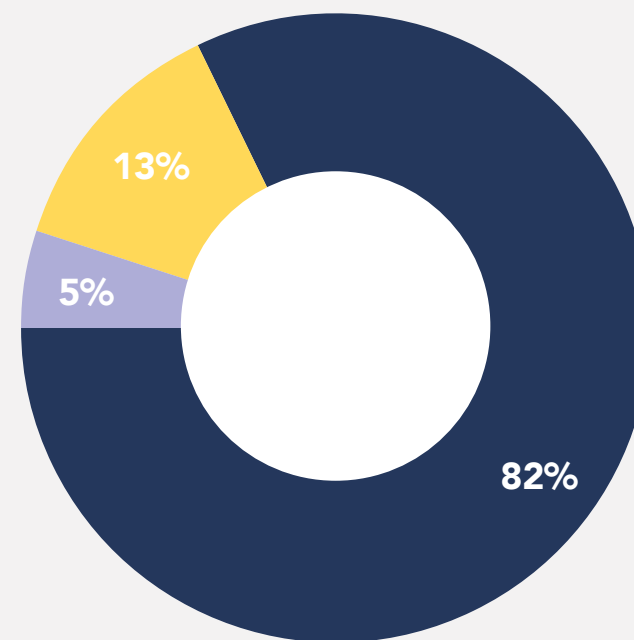
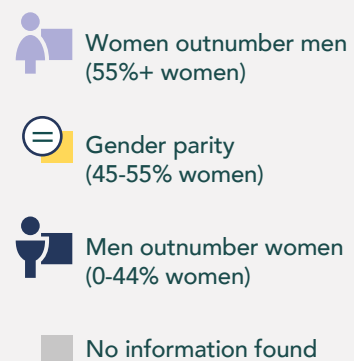
Figure 5. Law firms with gender parity in senior management (n=80)



From data collected according to each firm's publicly available structuring, we reviewed the gender data for 2,567 individuals to assess how many firms had achieved gender parity at the senior management level.

Five (5/38; 13%) firms had achieved gender parity (45-55% women), two (2/38; 5%) firms had women outnumbering men in senior management (55%+ women), and 31/38 (82%) firms had men outnumbering women (0-44% women).

Figure 6. Proportion of men and women among power holders in law firms (n=38)



LAW FIRMS

Distribution of gender and nationality across leadership roles in law firms

Leadership is also geographically concentrated. All holders of highest office for whom data were available (78/78; 100%) are nationals of high-income countries, including two dual nationals of two high-income countries. Combined, these patterns highlight that both gender and geographic diversity remain limited at the highest levels of private-sector legal practice.

ALL LEADERS
(n=78)

- **HICs: 77%** (60/78) men and **21%** (16/78) women.
- **MICs:** No men or women represented.
- **LICs:** No men or women represented.

Global Managing Partners run day-to-day operations, strategy, and implementation of partner decisions. Comparable to a corporate CEO, they are typically an elected partner.

Global Chairs (Senior Partner) lead the partnership board and steers long-term vision, focusing on governance, oversight, and external representation.

CEOs are often a professional manager (sometimes non-lawyer) responsible for business operations like finance, IT, and global integration.

HICs: high-income countries
MICs: middle-income countries
LICs: low-income countries

Ali and Setar dressed up for a gathering
Kabul, Afghanistan. 2017.
Loulou d'Aki

Both born as girls, Ali wears jeans and a shirt while Setar wears a traditional outfit for men. Bacha Posh means 'dressed as a boy' and is a tradition in Afghan families without sons. Dressing as a boy also means having more privilege and freedom.



Finding 4. Most law firms do not publicly report sex-disaggregated programmatic data or commit to gender analysis, limiting transparency and accountability

Sex-disaggregated data alongside gender analysis is essential for understanding who benefits from a firm's work – both internal programmes, such as professional development and leadership initiatives, and external programmes, including fee-earning services work, *pro bono* support, and legal aid initiatives – and where gender gaps persist. Publishing such data supports accountability to gender equality commitments and informs more equitable programme design.

Among the 38 law firms in our sample, seven (7/38; 18%) have a policy to report sex-disaggregated programmatic data or undertake gender analysis.

Figure 7. Policies or commitments to report sex-disaggregated data or undertake gender analysis found, law firms (n=38)



18%

of law firms have a commitment to publicly report sex-disaggregated data or undertake gender analysis

LAW FIRMS

Box 3. Organisational examples

Example of law firm policy to sex-disaggregate data or undertake gender analysis

To ensure diverse perspectives are included around the table — whether it be for the purposes of monitoring the gender balance of lawyers in our practice groups or for staffing client teams — we use internal gender reporting dashboards that provide real-time interactive insights based on monthly data updates. In addition to real-time snapshots of gender data by role level, practice area and region, the dashboards allow us to provide clients with precise insights into the gender balance on their matters — a data point that is becoming increasingly important to our clients.

Baker McKenzie⁶

Water is life
Bangladesh. 2017.
Sumit Sanyal

A woman collects water from the communal handpump. With unplanned urbanisation, population growth, and inadequate water management practices, millions in Bangladesh face the grim reality of water contamination.

Towards a gender-equal global law and justice sector

Achieving gender justice in the law and justice sector demands more than incremental improvements. It requires a fundamental shift in how institutions confront power, accountability, and inclusion. As this chapter shows, progress is possible, but only when organisations commit to transparency, embed equity in workplace culture, and ensure leadership that reflects the diversity of the communities they seek to serve. The path forward

calls for bold action: adopting and publishing robust gender equality, fairness and equity policies, investing in disaggregated data, and putting commitments into practice.

Global 50/50 provides tools, evidence, and guidance to help organisations move beyond rhetoric towards systemic, sustained change. The moment for decisive action is now, and the sector has both the responsibility and the opportunity to lead.

**EXPLORE RESOURCES
TO HELP YOU TAKE ACTION**



Law firms in the Global Justice 50/50 sample

- A&O Shearman
- Akin
- Ashurst
- Baker McKenzie
- Bird & Bird
- Cleary Gottlieb
- Clifford Chance
- CMS
- Cooley
- Covington
- Debevoise & Plimpton
- Dentons
- DLA Piper
- Eversheds Sutherland
- Freshfields
- Gibson Dunn
- Goodwin
- Greenberg Traurig
- Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer (HSF Kramer)

- Hogan Lovells
- Jones Day
- Kim & Chang
- Kirkland & Ellis
- Latham & Watkins
- Linklaters
- Mayer Brown
- McDermott Will & Schulte
- Morgan Lewis
- Norton Rose Fulbright
- Quinn Emanuel
- Reed Smith
- Ropes & Gray
- Sidley Austin
- Simpson Thacher & Bartlett
- Skadden
- Squire Patton Boggs
- White & Case
- WilmerHale

Endnotes

- 1 Gibson Dunn. (nd). Pro Bono: Justice for Women and Girls. <https://www.gibsondunn.com/pro-bono/justice-for-women-and-girls/>
- 2 Freshfields. (2024). Responsible business report. <https://www.freshfields.com/globalassets/about-us/rb/reports/2024-freshfields-responsible-business-report.pdf>
- 3 Linklaters. (nd). Diversity Equity Inclusion. <https://www.linklaters.com/en/about-us/diversity-equity-inclusion>
- 4 DLA Piper. (2024). People Deep Dive 2024. <https://edge.sitecorecloud.io/dlapiperukl2c48-dlapiper7aff-prodb8eb-83a9/media/project/dlapiper-tenant/dlapiper/about-us/sustainability/sustainability-report-23-24/people-deep-dive-2024.pdf>
- 5 Norton Rose Fulbright. (nd). Disability confidence. <https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/en/about/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/goals-and-priorities/disability-confidence>
- 6 Baker McKenzie. (2024). Annual Sustainability Report 2024. <https://www.bakermckenzie.com/-/media/files/newsroom/2024/baker-mckenzie-annual-sustainability-report-2024.pdf>