

Legal Professional Associations

FINDINGS BY SUBSECTOR



GLOBAL 50

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, workplace 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 review 11 bar associations (see page 16 for full list).

It's not all men, but it's always a man
Amsterdam, Netherlands. 2025.
Anna Janssen

In a dark passageway, a woman turns toward a figure in the shadows, a reminder of the vigilance demanded from women in spaces where law arrives only after harm is done.

At a glance

Our research reveals that the organisations influencing legal professional standards globally have yet to embody the principles of fairness and equity in their own leadership. The legitimacy of the legal profession depends on who gets to participate in shaping it – and whose perspectives remain outside its walls.

Partial commitments:

Almost half of legal professional associations publicly acknowledge the importance of gender equality – leaving room for improvement across the subsector.

Public commitments signal recognition of gender equality as an organisational priority, but these are found in only half of bar associations. Without formal commitments, accountability is limited, and legal professional associations' role in advancing inclusive legal practices may be weakened.

Among 11 legal professional associations

●●●●●●●●●●●●
5 have a public commitment to gender equality

Policy gaps:

Workplace policies on gender equality, fairness and equity are still not standard across legal professional associations.

Half have publicly available gender equality policies with specific measures, and around a third have fairness and equity policies with specific measures. Without such policies, efforts to advance equality risk remaining symbolic rather than structural.

Among 11 legal professional associations

●●●●●●●●●●●●
5 have gender equality policies with specific measures
●●●●●●●●●●●●
4 have fairness and equity policies with specific measures

Concentration of power:

Leadership within legal professional associations remains predominantly male and heavily concentrated among nationals of high-income countries.

Women hold few presidency roles, and women from low- and middle-income countries are barely represented. Who leads shapes the global legal professional agenda, and whose voices remain marginal.

Among 17 legal professional association presidents

●●●●●●●●●●●●
5 are women
●●●●●●●●●●●●
2 are women from LMICs

Data deficits:

No legal professional associations have a publicly available policy to systematically collect or report sex-disaggregated data or undertake gender analysis.

Key opportunities for understanding participation and programme beneficiaries are therefore missed. Without such data, gaps remain invisible, progress cannot be measured, and strategies to advance gender equality remain under-informed.

Among 11 legal professional associations

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

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



Delivering Better Gender Justice Outcomes

Improving the Quality of Judicial Decision-Making

Increasing Public Trust in the Sector

Enhancing Organisational Performance and Profitability

Expanding Access to Justice and Equity in Service Delivery

Assessing the legal professional associations

Legal professional associations are membership-based organisations that bring together lawyers and legal professional bodies across multiple jurisdictions or specialisms. These organisations represent the interests of their members, provide professional development and networking opportunities, and establish ethical and professional standards. Many also engage in advocacy, influencing policy, legal reform, and the development of transnational or regional legal norms, serving as key intermediaries between national legal systems and

international frameworks. Unlike regulatory national bars, membership is typically voluntary, reflecting professional affiliation rather than a requirement to practice law.

The 11 legal professional associations in our sample operate at global and regional levels, including networks of national bars and independent international bodies. While membership is voluntary, they are also employers of permanent staff; we examined both leadership composition and workplace policies in the broadest sense.

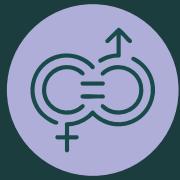
Global 50/50 only assesses publicly available information, a method that promotes transparency but is not without its limitations. Public commitments and policies do not always reflect internal practice, just as their absence does not necessarily indicate a lack of internal action, particularly in the 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.

LEGAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Table 1. Variables reviewed: Legal Professional Associations



Does the organisation make a public commitment to gender equality?



Are workplace gender equality and/or fairness and equity policies publicly available?



What is the gender and nationality of leaders,

INCLUDING

Presidents

Presidents-elect

Vice presidents



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

LEGAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Box 1.

What we measure for each variable.

We assessed organisations' 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, human rights, social justice, and/or access to justice, but makes no formal commitment to gender equality.
- No mention of gender or social justice.

2 Policies with specific measures to promote gender equality in the workplace

- 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 in the workplace

- 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; 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.

4 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.

5 Gender and nationality of the head of the organisation

There is no traffic light scoring for this variable; we only report on the aggregate numbers.

6 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 and/or to undertake gender analysis.
- No policy or commitment found.

Finding 1. Half of legal professional associations publicly state a commitment to gender equality, but many could strengthen and formalise commitments

Public commitments to gender equality signal institutional recognition of its importance and provide a foundation for accountability in practice.

Five (5/11; 45%) bar associations published a public commitment to gender equality.

Figure 1. Public commitments to gender equality found, legal professional associations (n=11)



5/11
legal professional
associations have
a public commitment
to gender equality

LEGAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Box 2. Organisational examples

Example of bar association commitment to gender equality

The [International Association of Lawyers] Women's Committee works to promote and strengthen the status and role of women lawyers in the profession.

To this end, it organises workshops and seminars in order to identify the different problems to be targeted, on the basis of a comparative approach, and to establish strategies and action plans to remedy them, which it will implement with the support of UIA and in close collaboration with its collective and individual members.

The Committee also works to improve the status of women wherever needed, in particular to eliminate all forms of violence against women. In this perspective, the Committee proclaimed on 8 March in Paris the Charter of Fundamental Principles on Access to Justice for Women Victims of Violence and invited the collective members of the UIA to adhere to it (the list of adhesions is available on this link). One of the key objectives of the working group will be to implement the provisions of this Charter effectively and efficiently.

International Association of Lawyers (UIA)¹

Maria Elena Rios
Mexico. 2020.
Mahé Elipe

Maria walks through a field of marigolds with her saxophone. She survived an acid attack orchestrated by her ex-boyfriend, an influential politician, after their breakup. Although still a target, Maria refuses to hide in the shadows.



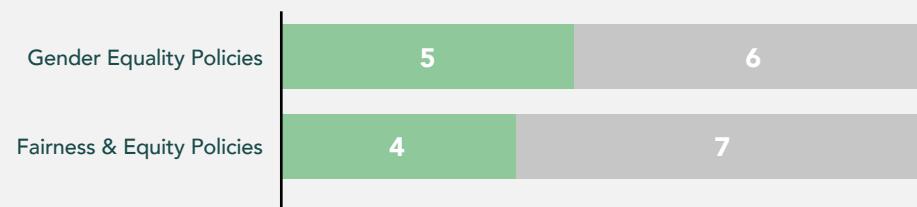
Finding 2. Half of legal professional associations publish workplace policies on gender equality, fairness and equity

Workplace policies on gender equality, fairness and equity policies with specific measures set clear standards and translate commitments into concrete, accountable actions. Five (5/11; 45%) legal professional associations had policies on gender equality with specific measures, and four (4/11; 36%) had policies on fairness and equity with specific measures.

Specific measures to promote gender equality included: gender-responsive recruitment and hiring processes; mentoring, training, and leadership programmes; targets for women's participation at senior levels; regular reviews of organisational efforts towards gender equality; and/or reporting back to all staff.

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

Figure 2. Gender equality and fairness and equity policies found, legal professional associations (n=11)



- Gender equality or fairness and equity affirmative policy with specific measures
- Stated commitment to consider gender equality or fairness and equity, but no specific measures
- Minimum legal requirement ("we do no discriminate")
- No public information found



5/11

legal professional associations have publicly available gender equality policies



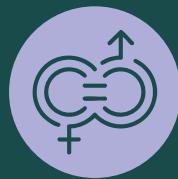
4/11

legal professional associations have publicly available fairness and equity policies

LEGAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Box 3. Organisational examples

Examples of bar association gender equality, fairness and equity policies



GENDER EQUALITY POLICY WITH SPECIFIC MEASURES:

This Policy is intended to drive cultural change within the [Commonwealth Lawyers Association] and more broadly within the legal profession throughout the Commonwealth, to support the progression and retention of women lawyers and address the significant pay gap and underrepresentation of women in the superior courts.

The Policy also intends to support diversity in a broader sense, to include culture, race and ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender identity, disability and socioeconomic status.

The intention is to create a fair and just profession for the benefit of members and clients and to meet the expectations of clients with respect to the participation and inclusion of women performing legal services.

The CLA will:

- Develop a broad set of principles consistent with this Policy promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in the legal profession throughout the Commonwealth;
- Support the development of a Women Lawyers Forum;
- Undertake recruitment for CLA Ex Co, Council, Regional Hubs and working groups conscious of the need for diversity of members;
- Strive for diversity of representation in all Conference sessions and public events;
- Promote the use of unconscious bias tools and programs that reveal persistent discriminatory biases;
- Promote flexible workplace structures and tools; and
- Develop codes and practices that address sexual and other forms of unlawful harassment and discrimination noting such conduct will not be tolerated within the legal profession.

Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA)²

LEGAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS



FAIRNESS AND EQUITY POLICY WITH SPECIFIC MEASURES:

The [International Bar Association] is concerned to eliminate discrimination and bias – including discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, culture, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, socioeconomic standing, gender identity or sexual orientation – and to support and promote the full and equal participation of all persons within the IBA and its membership.

The IBA will:

- *Develop a broad set of principles consistent with this Policy, promoting equality, diversity and inclusion within the IBA and its committees, sections, fora and membership.*
- *Support the work of the Diversity and Inclusion Council.*
- *Undertake positive measures in the recruitment of the IBA Executive, Management Committee, sections and committees, conscious of the need for diversity of members.*
- *Establish diversity officers across the organisation.*
- *Strive for diversity of representation at all IBA conference sessions and public events, and establish a Speakers Bureau to support this aim.*
- *Promote the use of tools that reveal and address persistent discriminatory biases.*
- *Establish an online hub for diversity and inclusion, including current research on diversity and inclusion measures and best practice tools and templates on such matters as bullying and harassment, flexible workplace structures and tools, networks and mentoring.*
- *Develop codes and practices that address sexual and other forms of unlawful harassment and discrimination, noting that such conduct will not be tolerated within the legal profession.*
- *Consider opportunities for research projects and the collation of statistics to establish benchmarks, and measure progress.*
- *Establish a President's award or scholarship, acknowledging the diversity and inclusion work or potential of individuals.*
- *Create video and social media tools to promote diversity and inclusion.*

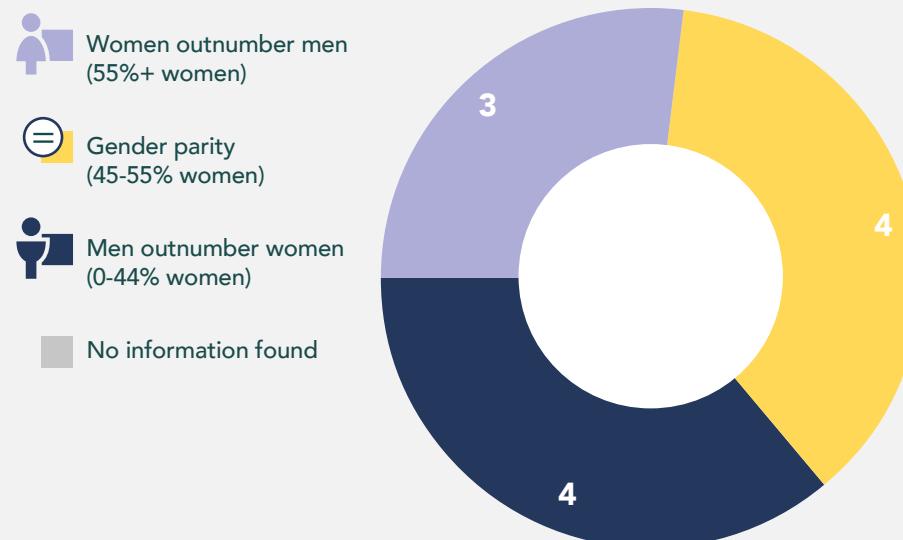
International Bar Association (IBA)³

Finding 3. Gender parity in legal professional association leadership is far from a reality, and women from low- and middle-income countries are only minimally represented

We collected demographic data on the highest levels of leadership within legal professional associations, focusing on presidents as well as presidents-elect and vice presidents. Of 17 presidents across 11 legal professional associations, five (5/17; 29%) were women. Of 31 senior management positions, which included presidents-elect and vice presidents, nine (9/31; 29%) were held by women.

We collected gender data for 83 senior managers across 11 legal professional associations and assessed how many organisations had achieved gender parity at this level. Three (3/11; 27%) legal professional associations had senior management teams in which women outnumbered men (55%+ women), while four (4/11; 36%) had reached gender parity (45-55% women).

Figure 3. Legal professional associations with gender parity in senior management (n=11)



Among 17 presidents,
5 are women

Among 31 senior managers,
9 are women

LEGAL PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Distribution of gender and nationality across leadership roles in legal professional associations

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

Income classification data were found for the nationalities of 16 of the 17 presidents. Ten (10/16; 63%) presidents are from high-income countries (HICs) and five (5/16; 31%) are from middle-income countries (MICs), with no representation of nationals of low-income countries (LICs). One of the sixteen presidents was classified as a dual national.

Income classification data were found for 29 of the 31 senior management roles, with two individuals classified as dual nationals. Fourteen (14/29; 48%) are from HICs, eleven (11/29; 38%) are from MICs, and four (4/29; 13%) are from LICs.

PRESIDENTS
(n=16)

- **HICs: 50%** (8) men and **19%** (3) women.
- **MICs: 19%** (3) men and **12%** (2) women.
- **LICs: no men or women represented.**

OTHER
LEADERS
(n=31)

- **HICs: 29%** (9) men and **16%** (5) women.
- **MICs: 22%** (7) men and **13%** (4) women.
- **LICs: 13%** (4) men and no women.

Box 4.

We attempted to collect data on board members of legal professional associations. However, we were able to identify board chairs for only one organisation and board members for two organisations. For this reason, we have not reported this data.

GENDER (IN)JUSTICE?

Blindfolded justice
Kolkata, India. 2025.
Rajesh Dhar

A blindfolded clay head is styled after the Hindu goddess Durga, a symbol of feminine strength, during a march for justice for survivors of sexual violence. Inscribed with the words "We demand justice," the sculpture becomes an indictment of a system that has failed to protect women.



Finding 4. The potential of data disaggregated by sex alongside gender analysis is still unrealised among most legal professional associations

Sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis are essential for understanding who participates in bar association activities, who benefits from services or programmes, and where gender gaps persist. Opportunities for disaggregation could include membership demographics, participation in training and professional development, attendance at conferences and workshops, engagement with public legal education events, beneficiaries of *pro bono* coordination efforts, involvement in committees and working groups, and participation in advocacy or rule of law initiatives.

Collecting such data would help understand whether women and men are represented and supported equitably in membership, professional development, and sector engagement.

Across the 11 legal professional associations reviewed, none had a policy to report sex-disaggregated data or to undertake gender analysis. One (1/11; 9%) legal professional association had a project-specific commitment to collect or use such data.

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 institutions move beyond rhetoric towards systemic, sustained change. The moment for decisive action is now, and the sector has both the responsibility

EXPLORE RESOURCES
TO HELP YOU TAKE ACTION



Marked
Downtown Los Angeles, California, USA. 2025.
Lela Edgar

A protester stands before police during an anti-ICE demonstration in Los Angeles, baring his chest to reveal the scar left by law enforcement. He lifts his chin high in defiance, facing the armoured line without fear. His body becomes both evidence and resistance, a counterpoint to their riot shields.



Legal professional associations in the Global Justice 50/50 sample

- Asian Society of International Law (AsianSIL)
- Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC)
- Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA)
- European Bars Federation (Fédération des Barreaux d'Europe; FBE)
- International Association of Lawyers (UIA)
- International Association of Prosecutors (IAP)
- International Bar Association (IBA)
- International Council of Advocates and Barristers (ICAB)
- International Criminal Court Bar Association (ICCBA)
- International Institute of Law Association Chief Executives (IILACE)
- Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU)

Endnotes

- 1 International Association of Lawyers. (nd). Women's Committee. <https://www.uianet.org/en/network/committees/womens-committee>
- 2 Commonwealth Lawyers Association. (2021). Commonwealth Lawyers Association Diversity and Inclusion Policy. <https://www.commonwealthlawyers.com/cla/commonwealth-lawyers-association-diversity-and-inclusion-policy/>
- 3 International Bar Association. (nd). IBA Diversity and inclusion policy. <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=Diversity-Inclusion-policy-doc>