

PRESS RELEASE

Global justice is still run by men from rich countries, new analysis finds

First-of-its-kind global review shows concentrated power and weak accountability inside global justice institutions risks undermining legitimacy, inclusion, and trust worldwide.

- Only 2% of 655 key roles across 22 international courts are held by women from low-income countries.
- Almost a third of the highest offices in the legal world are held by men from the US and UK.
- Only half of global law and justice organisations have made a public commitment to gender equality and just 18% have policies to collect the gender-related data needed to track progress.

Global law and justice is still overwhelmingly shaped by men from a small number of high-income countries, raising concerns about legitimacy, accountability, and whose interests justice systems ultimately serve, according to the report by [Global 50/50](#), a nonprofit think tank that informs, inspires and incites action and accountability for gender justice in society.

In her foreword to the report, María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, former President of the United Nations General Assembly said: "It matters profoundly who holds power in the justice sector and how decisions are made. Institutions may aspire to neutrality, yet they are rooted in history and culture. When inequality exists within systems designed to deliver justice, their legitimacy and the trust they depend on are called into question.

"The findings highlight how global justice is disproportionately shaped by a small segment of the world. Greater inclusion of leadership and ideas from the global majority are essential to ensure justice that is both participatory and universal."

The report found almost a third of the highest offices in the legal world are held by men from the US and UK. One in five are held by US or UK women but only 9% are held by women from low- and middle-income countries. Representation from other major jurisdictions, such as the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), is almost absent.

Global 50/50's research provides the first in-depth analysis of **171 global law and justice organisations**. It goes beyond other monitors to assess leadership demographics as well as

organisational commitments and policies to guide fairness and equity in law and justice bodies.

The report's authors warn that without stronger commitments to equality, data transparency, and accountability, justice institutions risk falling further behind the values they are meant to uphold, particularly given that just 18% of organisations commit to collecting and reporting the gender-related data needed to track progress.

While overall, women are getting close to equal representation to men, holding 43% of senior roles and 40% of the top offices, the traditional hubs of power and prestige lag behind:

- **Women occupy only 29% of top roles in international courts.**
- **Women account for 30% of top roles in global bar associations.**
- **Only 20% of global law firms are led by women.**
- **Only 2% of 655 senior leaders across 22 international courts are women from low-income countries.**
- **77% of leaders of global law firms are men from high-income countries.**

A global problem

These inequalities are seen across continents. In Africa, women increasingly enter the law but may confront entrenched 'old boys clubs'. In Asia, women are joining the profession in growing numbers but rarely reach court or 'elite' firm leadership. In the Middle East and North Africa, despite more women than men choosing a career in the field and the first appointments of women judges, leadership roles held by women remain limited.

Latin America has also experienced rising female judicial participation through enhanced equity policies and training, though outcomes vary.

Women are often overly represented in lower-status and lower-paid specialisations such as family law, while men remain dominant in higher-prestige and higher-earning fields such as commercial law.

Only 13% of global law firms have gender parity at senior levels, and it is only in 5% of firms that women outnumber men.

Of 17 presidents across 11 international bar associations, just five were women, only two of which were from middle-income countries. None were from low-income countries.

Better justice outcomes

The report presents evidence suggesting that when women serve as judges and legal decision-makers, outcomes more effectively address gender justice. Women judges, for example, may impose harsher sentences when it comes to crimes that affect women and girls differently based on their gender – women jurists on panels at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia imposed more severe sentences on defendants who committed sexual violence against women than did their male colleagues.

Having more diversity among judges and lawyers can help check implicit bias and promote fairer, more nuanced, and innovative rulings. It can also combat historical alienation and distrust in the justice system and result in communities seeing the legal system as fairer and more objective.

Women are more likely to be committed to law firms that establish inclusive cultures where they feel heard, while clients also value diversity in firms they instruct.

Transparency and accountability

While a public commitment to gender equality was found for just over half of organisations, that varied significantly across subsectors from 82% of intergovernmental organisations to half of courts, 45% of bar associations, and just 26% of global law firms.

Among law firms, workplace policies on gender equality exist mainly for staff, with equality at the level of senior partnership largely unaddressed – less than half (42%) have a gender equality policy for senior management.

At present, few organisations track who the justice system serves when it comes to gender – just 18% of organisations commit to collecting this data. The majority (71%) of global law firms have no policy or commitment to reporting sex-disaggregated data and most bar associations, funders and courts do not systematically collect or report on it.

Govindi Deerasinghe, head of Global 50/50's justice research said: "Organisations across the global law and justice sector must embody the principles of fairness and accountability they exist to uphold. Embedding gender justice within governance is not only right; it is essential to legitimacy, public trust and understanding who is left behind.

"Our research shows that while 40% of senior roles in global justice are held by women, in several parts of the sector, the upper echelons of power do not extend to women from low- and middle-income countries.

"We need to see more than incremental improvements. A fundamental shift in how institutions confront power, accountability, and inclusion is required. Progress is possible, but we need bold action: adopting and publishing robust gender equality, fairness and equity policies, investing in disaggregated data, and putting commitments into practice."

Mark Ellis, Executive Director of the International Bar Association and member of Global 50/50's Advisory Council said:

"Justice systems are strongest when they reflect the societies they serve. Expanding women's leadership across law and justice, from all regions of the world, supports better decision-making, fairer outcomes, and public confidence. By combining leadership data with analysis of institutional policies, the inaugural Global Justice 50/50 report shines a light on both progress and remaining disparities, providing a constructive basis for collective action."

Matt Meyer, Managing Partner at Kingsley Napley and member of Global 50/50's Advisory Council said:

"Progressive law firms recognise that gender equality is fundamental. Clients demand diversity in the firms and teams they use, inclusive workplaces are more successful at attracting and retaining the best talent and gender equality in leadership drives wider priorities, greater innovation and better decisions. Transparency and better data are essential if the legal sector is serious about addressing gender inequality – and that's what Global Justice 50/50 aims to deliver."

-ENDS-

Methodology

The Global Justice 50/50 Report, the first of its kind, provides a comprehensive review into 171 major organisations working in and/or influencing the field of global law and justice, examining the extent to which those organisations commit and take action to promote gender justice and wider aspects of fairness and equity, and who gains access to positions of power within those organisations. Researchers analysed publicly available leadership and policy data to enable independent verification and repeat analysis over time.

The research was conducted between February and August 2025 and data was collected from organisations headquartered in 30 countries.

Organisations comprised:

- 22 global and regional adjudicatory bodies (courts)
- 19 global and regional commissions and expert mechanisms (commissions)
- 11 intergovernmental organisations with a mandate for justice / rights
- 51 international non-governmental organisations (international NGOs) working in the justice / rights space
- 38 law firms
- 11 bar associations
- 19 funders and philanthropists (funders) that support gender justice in the justice sector

About Global 50/50

[Global 50/50](#) is an independent think tank to advance action and accountability for social and gender justice. Drawing on over three decades of research, policy analysis and multilateral strategy development, Global 50/50 generates evidence to challenge inequity and drive institutional change.

Since 2017, Global 50/50 has published Global Health 50/50 a trusted, evidence-driven authority advancing accountability for gender equality in the global health sector.