



The *Aliança Jurídica pela Equidade de Gênero (Legal Alliance for Gender Equity)* has the mission of promoting gender equity in the legal sector, including by increasing the percentage of women in senior leadership. The member law firms of the Alliance encourage initiatives and policies to stimulate women's participation across all levels and practice areas.

As a result of our reflections, we have formulated a Common Minimum Agenda that aims to increase equitable opportunities for women in law firms and promote more inclusive, diverse, and equitable organizational cultures that recognize and value the potential and talent of women.

The agenda contains ten key initiatives for increasing the presence of women in leadership positions at law firms, which are based on successful experiences, best practices, and implemented policies that benefit not only the professionals involved, but the entire community. Nevertheless, we stress that this is not a unique or definitive model but rather a flexible point of reference that firms can adapt to their reality and needs.



## Ten initiatives for advancing women to leadership positions at law firms

### Leadership Engagement

Engaging leadership in the gender equity agenda is essential to creating an inclusive work environment for women. As changes in organizational culture tend to come from the top, leaders should lead by example. Leaders committed to gender equity genuinely care about identifying, developing, retaining, and promoting women to leadership positions – they speak on the topic with authority, participate in events, and foster peer participation, including in literacy programs. They promote the development of diverse talent, exercise their influence, and inspire others to act similarly.

### Robust Career Development Programs

Ensuring women lawyers have access to career mentoring from the firm's partners at certain stages helps to effectively transfer knowledge and experience, and supports them in developing both their strengths and potentially weaker points in line with the firm's needs. If possible, firms should also run a sponsorship program for senior female lawyers with high potential and proven high performance to help propel them toward leadership. It is essential to offer tools, tactics, and strategies to enhance their business development skills for this to occur effectively. Additionally, networking opportunities, ways of overcoming insecurity to strengthen self-confidence, and encouraging collaboration (rather than competition) among women should also be prioritized.

### A Focus on Retaining Women Lawyers

Retaining female lawyers at all levels and addressing their specific needs at different stages of their careers is essential to increasing the number of senior female lawyers qualified for partnership. Possible reasons for women leaving include difficulties in balancing their personal and professional lives and perceptions of injustice in the workplace or in career advancement opportunities. To address these specific reasons at each firm, it is necessary to create space for active dialogue between women lawyers and HR/the firm's partners, facilitating the sharing of challenges and potential solutions. Moreover, it is also important to evaluate discussions in exit interviews and track turnover rates at each hierarchical level. Ideally, women should make up at least 50% of staff at all levels, particularly at the middle levels of the firm's hierarchy.

### Parental Leave Policy

Establishing a policy for extended maternity and paternity leave (at least 180 days and 20 days, respectively, as provided for in Brazil's *Empresa Cidadã* program) is essential for fostering a more balanced distribution of parental responsibilities and gender equity in the workplace. These benefits should be extended to same-sex families (primary and secondary caregivers) and adoptive families.

### Hiring Policy

Implement a policy that encourages gender balance among candidates at the final stage of hiring processes throughout all levels of the firm's hierarchy.

### Internal Audience Awareness

Promote awareness within the firm about sexism, discrimination against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, racism, ableism, and other related topics. Ongoing training should be offered – including for the human resources team – to guarantee an inclusive work environment for women.

### Mandatory Training

Conduct regular mandatory training to all professionals on tackling unconscious bias and moral and sexual harassment in the workplace.

### Attention to Intersectionality

Acknowledge overlapping forms of discrimination (i.e., intersectionality), as these can further complicate the inclusion of women professionals – consider the limited representation of black, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women or women with disabilities in leadership positions at law firms.

### Whistleblowing/Reporting Channels

Provide all professionals with internal or external means of reporting (anonymously and otherwise) violations of laws and internal regulations, with particular regard for moral/sexual harassment and gender discrimination cases. Such channels should be consistently promoted to professionals and should be secure, confidential, reliable, and impartial, with clear procedures for investigating reports.

### Goal for Increasing Women in Leadership

Firms should seek to commit to a goal to increase the number of women in leadership – ideally through a public pledge (such as *Elas Lideram 2030*, from the United Nations Global Compact). While commitments do not guarantee an increase in and of themselves, they help firms act with real intent and ensure that actions are much more likely to yield results. This goal requires monitoring the organization's gender-related demographics and adopting initiatives focused on retaining and advancing professional talent. Depending on the percentage of women in the organization's top leadership and management bodies, it may be necessary to encourage the adoption of an affirmative action policy to accelerate the process.

