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No Woman Left Behind: Closing the AI Gender Gap in Law

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The legal sector is being disrupted by the rapid advancement of AI technologies. Women in law need to actively consider their future position given they currently lag behind in positions of influence and power. This report highlights the risks and opportunities for women and organisations in this new world order.

Foreword

The versatile nature of AI presents significant potential for addressing gender disparities. However, for this potential to be fully realised, it is imperative that women are actively involved in the development, design and utilisation of AI technologies. If not, we risk the gap widening in coming years.

Recent research publications have highlighted a persisting gender gap in AI adoption. It appears that across all professions, women are less likely to use ChatGPT and other generative AI tools than men¹. Similar behaviour has been observed in college students². In a report published by Berkeley, Harvard and Stanford³, the authors observe that “the gender gap in adoption is nearly universal... From mothers in Mumbai to managers in Madrid, women use AI less than men.”

Various hypotheses have been proposed to explain this disparity. These range from women not feeling as confident in engaging with the technology to the “good girl” syndrome where women, unless given explicit approval, feel the need to do the work themselves and not “cheat” and take short-cuts. Some hypothesise that men are more confident in their skills and therefore overstate their technological competence in surveys.

Considering proficiency in AI is closely linked to the practical experience of using AI, this gap is potentially a significant challenge for women – and one that will require a holistic response. We are excited to be collaborating with The Next 100 Years and She Breaks the Law to share the results of the first of its kind survey, and to advance the conversation about the impact of this emerging technology on women in our profession.



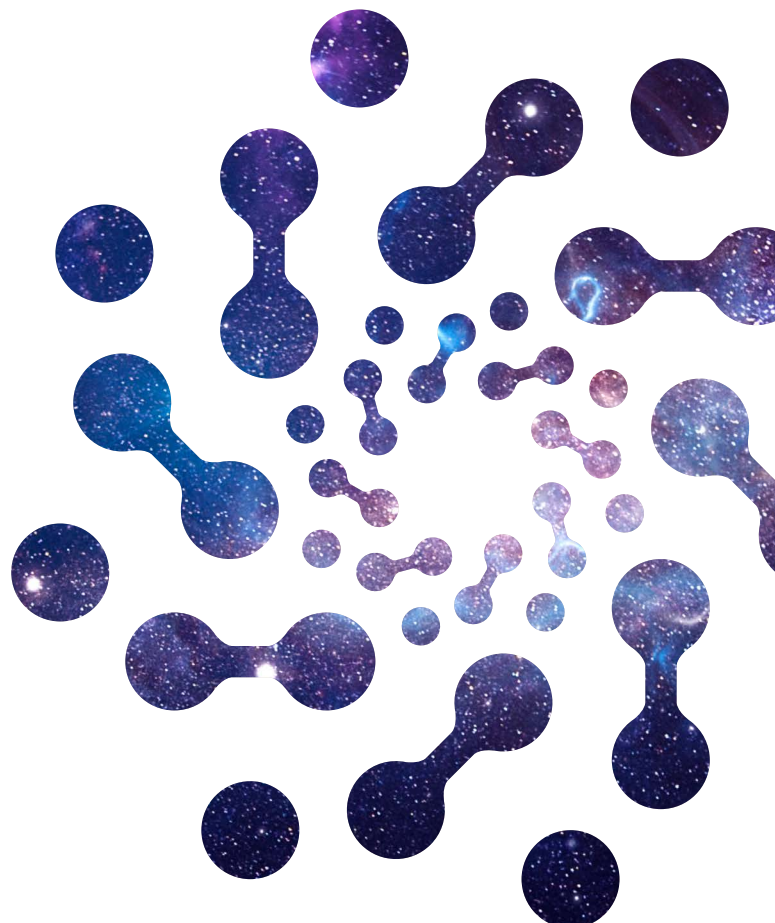
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- 1 Humlum, A. and Vestergaard, E. (2024) ‘The adoption of ChatGPT’, SSRN Electronic Journal [Preprint]. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4807516>
- 2 Carvajal, D., Franco, C. and Isaksson, S. (2024) ‘Will artificial intelligence get in the way of achieving gender equality?’ <https://openaccess.nhh.no/nhh-xmlui/handle/11250/3122396>
- 3 Otis, Nicholas G. & Cranney, Katelyn & Delecourt, Solène & Koning, Rembrand (2024) ‘Global Evidence on Gender Gaps and Generative AI’ https://nicholasotis.com/Research/Otis_et_al_2024_GenderGapsGenAI.pdf

Key findings

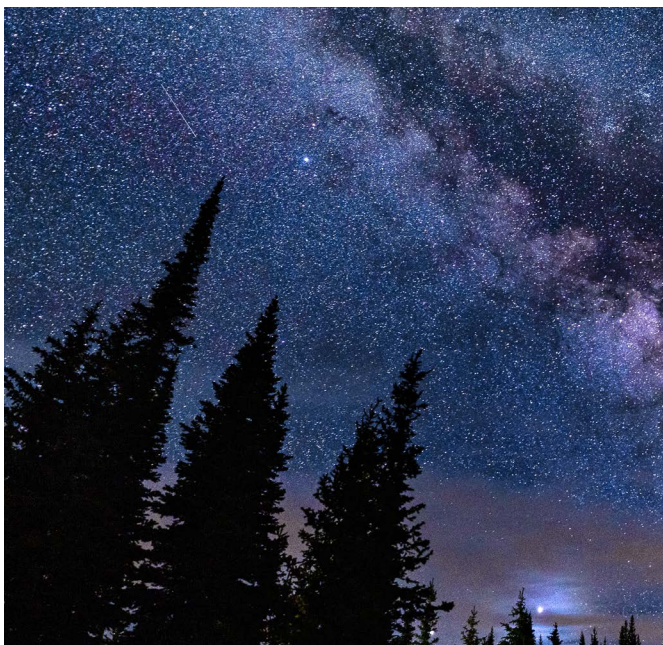
We asked: how are women in law experiencing AI?

The Next 100 Years and She Breaks the Law joined forces to conduct a first of its kind survey to understand how women in law are currently experiencing the impacts of AI⁴. The female perspective is crucial since women make up the majority of lawyers in both law firm and in-house roles (53%⁵ and 61%⁶, respectively).

While 83% of our respondents feel they are informed about AI and 77% consider it to be extremely significant for the future of the profession, the impact of AI on gender equality in the legal sector remains a critical area of concern. This report examines the key findings from our survey in conjunction with public data, and provides recommendations for women and organisations to stay ahead in this evolving landscape.



Women are crucial in any role when it comes to AI. Like it or not, AI has been injected into our life and it is something we need to handle.”



1. Women understand the disruptive power of AI – but education is still needed

The survey findings illustrate a strong consensus on the potential of AI to enhance efficiency and productivity in the legal sector, with 77% of respondents saying that AI is having an ‘extremely significant’ impact on the profession. 52% of respondents considered themselves ‘very well-informed’ about the tech: participants highlighted various applications of AI – such as automating mundane tasks (e.g. document review), contract management and legal research – which frees up valuable time for lawyers (especially juniors) to focus on high value work. It was also noted that by streamlining repetitive processes, AI not only improves operational efficiency but also enhances the overall quality of legal services.

Several key areas for AI integration were further identified, including contract drafting, case summarisation and document analysis. Participants noted that AI tools could assist with extracting clauses from contracts, summarising differences between documents and generating initial drafts.

There was a strong emphasis on AI’s potential to support the training of junior lawyers, providing them with customised feedback and aiding their professional development.

Despite this in-depth understanding from some women, 31% of respondents felt only ‘somewhat informed’ and another 17% acknowledged they had a knowledge gap. 18% did not, or were not able to, identify where AI would impact their organisation. This suggests that more consideration could be given to how the use and benefits of AI are communicated in organisations.

- 4 The Next 100 Years and She Breaks the Law conducted an online survey in May-June 2024, targeting women working in the legal profession. They received responses from 90 women working for law firms and other legal service providers, in-house teams and legal technology providers.
- 5 *Diversity of in-house solicitors* (2024). <https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/diversity-in-house/>
- 6 *Diversity in law firms’ workforce* (2024). <https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/diverse-legal-profession/>

2. Industry lag may be affecting women's exposure to AI

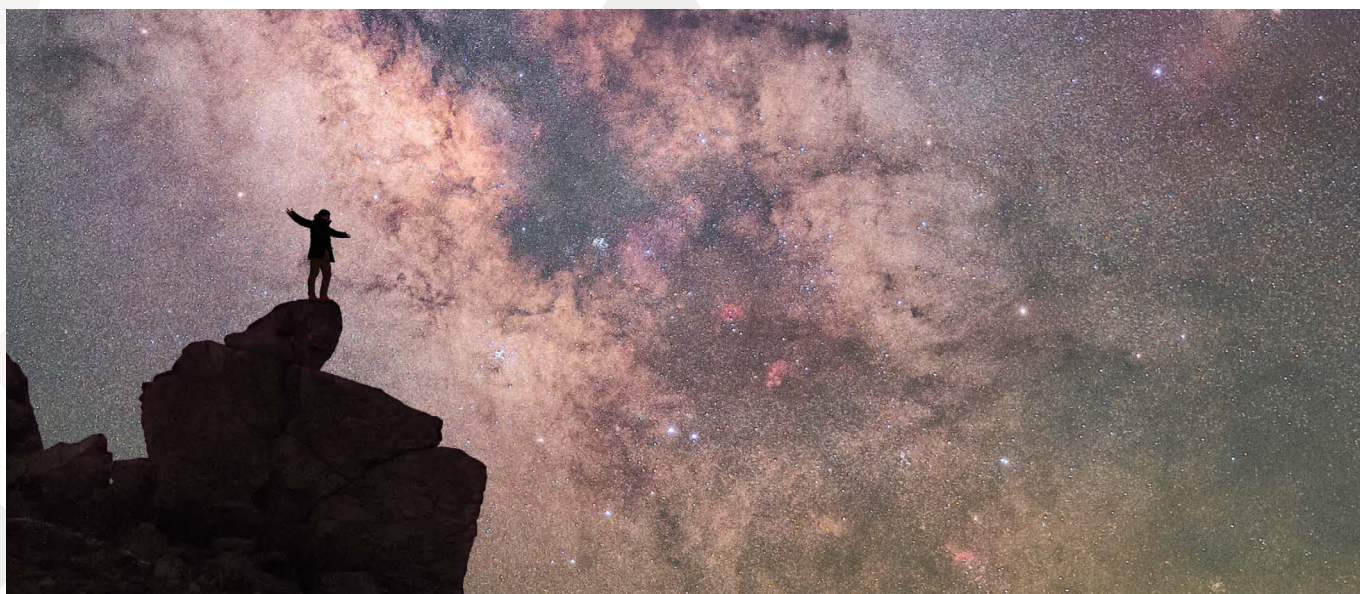
While the majority of our respondents felt their organisation has embraced AI, 37% said their organisation had not. A further 27% chose 'None/Not applicable' or gave no answer when asked what benefits of AI they have observed. These findings, if a fair depiction of the workforce, may point to organisational – or indeed, industry-wide – resistance to adopting AI, a trend that some traced back to client and stakeholder hesitancy.



Limited [benefits] at the moment, as we don't do much volume work, and most legal tech products are expensive and don't look as if they'd produce much ROI."



Willingness from clients to adopt. Everyone thinks it's scary and expensive, but it can be very cost and time effective for me."



3. Bias and inaccuracy are key barriers to adoption



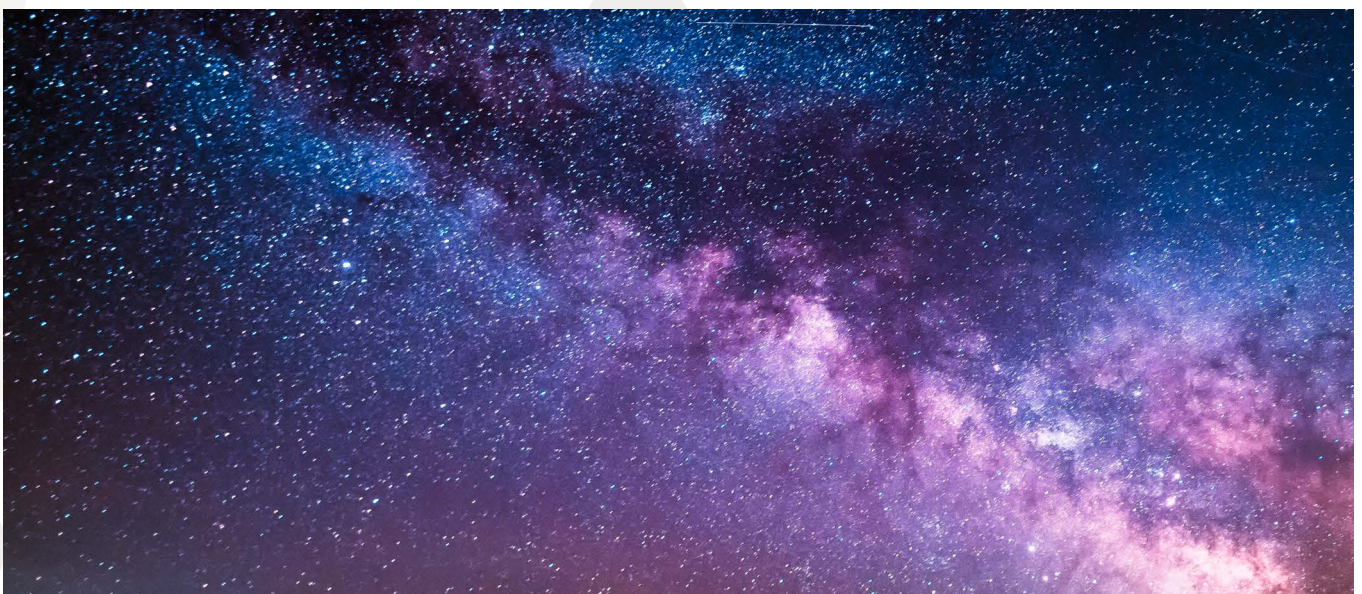
I recently heard of a female lawyer only being able to get the tone of an email right when she explicitly asked for the email to be written as a man.”

Despite enthusiasm for AI's capabilities, concerns about accuracy and the need for human oversight were identified, with 37% of respondents citing fears around AI's reliability. Many respondents emphasised the importance of validating AI outputs and ensuring that human judgement remains central to legal processes. Bias appears to be a core driver of this mistrust, with 43% saying they have observed bias in AI and Legal Tech, including biased tools, reports of biased outcomes and qualitative impacts. 26% of respondents said that lack of training and resources were also blockers to adoption.

Importantly, when we asked participants to consider what factors may be slowing down the adoption of AI by women in particular, 32% answered 'None/NA' or gave no answer. In fact, many reported that they have not observed a slower adoption rate amongst women: instead, they see female colleagues actively engaging with and driving AI initiatives within their organisations and leading innovations in AI implementation. Nonetheless, while there appear to be some prominent women trailblazers in the industry, 18% of respondents still cited fear and lack of confidence as a factor that thwarts women's engagement with AI. One junior legal practitioner at a law firm discussed how women may be more affected by AI inaccuracies due to societal factors impacting confidence, fear of harsher judgement for errors, and documented biases in AI responses based on gender. In other words, women have more to lose when AI mistakes are made.



The tools are...not very accurate, and it is not possible to query the thought process used to achieve a certain result or to make a certain mistake.”



4. Organisational culture needs to support time for women to experiment and upskill on AI



To gain benefits you need time for training and willingness to adopt. I have a male partner who really doesn't want his team using AI and is particularly vocal with females."

Our respondents said that practical experience (24%), comprehensive training (20%) and mentorship opportunities (20%) would help boost AI adoption amongst women. However, a few noted that these opportunities ultimately come down to organisational culture, leadership biases and structural inequalities. In other words, women who are out of the office for long periods to fulfil caregiving roles, occupy positions with more 'organisational dusting' responsibilities or work for leaders who are not supportive of AI adoption have less time to upskill and are therefore at a disadvantage.



Like any new tech it takes time spent to upskill and inform yourself. Women often take on a disproportionate amount of "extra-curricular" activities in an effort to boost their careers already and just may not have the time to devote to this as well."



I'm recently back from maternity leave and I'm worried about women taking leave now and in upcoming years. Taking a break during this amazingly transitional time could see women left behind and missing out on opportunities."



Women have less time for receiving training, are more busy in the daily duties than in shaping strategic planning, and have less influence in the decision making."



5. Women believe in their power to shape AI for the better – but they need to be included

Our respondents agree that women in the legal profession can positively shape the development of AI technologies, and should play a role in the implementation and ethical use of AI in law. These roles include advocacy and participation, decision-making and leadership, technical engagement, training and education, and addressing bias. In addition, collaboration and networking, mentorship, change management, forum creation, and involvement in policy and legislation were raised as essential actions for women in the industry.



We need women’s voices in user testing, policy making, thought leadership and [to] counter views about the direction AI is taking and its impact on society, work, family life and relationships.”

Still, 30% of respondents did not, or were not able to, point to a role for women to play, perhaps attesting to a fundamental issue with how women across the sector are included in conversations around AI development and deployment. Indeed, only one respondent said that AI adoption was ‘fully inclusive’, with 29% of respondents perceiving a lack of inclusivity, and 23% of respondents saying they were unsure. This suggests a critical need to target AI communication strategies to women and recruit women of influence to drum up enthusiasm for engaging with the new technologies.

Looking to how AI could serve the aims of justice and equity in broader society, we received mixed responses, with most respondents saying that AI would be ‘somewhat effective’ in this capacity. Ideas for how AI could be deployed to create a more equitable legal landscape included: using AI to improve access to legal guidance through chatbot interfaces, automated legal documentation and other self-service tools; ensuring quality control in rulings and judgments; and integrating AI into government and community services to ensure a broader, more inclusive service delivery.



[We need] Change Managers – to ensure ‘female-driven’ communication is part of the implementation process [and] Champions – to ensure females adopt and champion AI”.

The risks of unchecked AI disruption for women in law

On analysing our results and the body of public research on this topic, we have identified the following risks of AI disruption that, if left unchecked, will have a profound impact on women in law and beyond:

1. Entrenched gender bias and discrimination: Without equal female participation in AI development, there is a significant risk that AI systems will perpetuate or even amplify existing gender biases in the legal profession. For instance, AI tools have been observed defaulting to male pronouns and creating stereotypical images, such as portraying men as CEOs or lawyers, while casting women in less professional roles. Furthermore, there’s a risk that AI systems, if not properly designed and monitored, could make biased decisions in areas like recruitment, promotions or case outcomes, disadvantaging women lawyers as well as clients.

2. A critical skills gap emerges: Without appropriate communication and engagement strategies aimed at women or the right organisational cultures to support them to upskill, women will miss out on opportunities to become fluent in the new technologies. This could lead to a critical skills gap and potentially limit career advancement opportunities in an increasingly tech-driven legal sector.

3. Increased gender gap in leadership: With AI and technology reshaping the legal landscape and changing the way legal services are deployed, the existing gender gap in senior positions could widen. For example, only 32% of equity partners in law firms are women, even though women make up 62% of associates in law firms.⁷ If women are not adequately involved in AI implementation and leadership, this disparity could worsen.

4. Unequal impact of job displacement: As AI automates certain legal tasks, job displacement could disproportionately affect women, especially if they are overrepresented in roles most susceptible to automation.

5. ‘Not for us, not by us’: With women underrepresented in AI research and development (women represent only 14% of AI paper authors and 22% of AI professionals globally⁸), AI tools for the legal sector may not adequately consider women’s perspectives and needs, creating higher barriers to adoption.

6. Deficient ethical frameworks governing AI: Without adequate representation in roles shaping legislation, policy and ethical oversight, ethical frameworks governing AI in law may not sufficiently address gender-specific concerns.

⁷ *Diversity in law firms’ workforce* (2024). <https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/diverse-legal-profession/>

⁸ *Why we must act now to close the gender gap in AI* (2022). https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/08/why-we-must-act-now-to-close-the-gender-gap-in-ai/?utm_source=perplexity

Our recommendations for women in law



Women need to have many seats at the table when it comes to deciding the policies that will govern the use of AI. If we get to decide how the policies are written [then] this directly impacts what and how the tech is implemented.”

It is clear that women’s perspectives in the development, deployment and oversight of AI are vital. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into our lives, it is essential that women become active members of the AI ecosystem and do not feel that they need to be experts in order to gain membership. Our recommendations for women working in the legal profession (in whatever capacity) are:

- 1. Get practical experience:** Actively pursue access to AI tools and software for hands-on experience. Many legal tech companies offer free trials or training programmes specifically designed for legal professionals.
- 2. Train and upskill yourself:** Engage in thorough AI training programmes tailored for legal professionals. Organisations such as [The Law Society](#) provide valuable insights into the technology’s applications in legal practice.
- 3. Find a mentor or mentee:** Seek mentors and also offer mentorship to others in legal tech. Programmes such as the [Women in Law Hackathon](#) focus on promoting gender diversity in legal innovation and can provide valuable connections.
- 4. Network with other women:** Attend and participate in legal tech events and communities such as She Breaks the Law. Conferences like the [Women of Legal Tech Summit](#) offer opportunities to connect with other women in the field and stay updated on the latest developments.
- 5. Collaborate across disciplines:** Work with technologists and data scientists to better understand and influence AI development. Interdisciplinary collaboration can lead to more robust and fairer AI systems in law.

6. Lead an AI initiative: Take leadership roles in AI-related projects within your organisation. Women-led initiatives, like the [AI for Good Foundation](#), demonstrate the impact of female leadership in shaping ethical AI development.

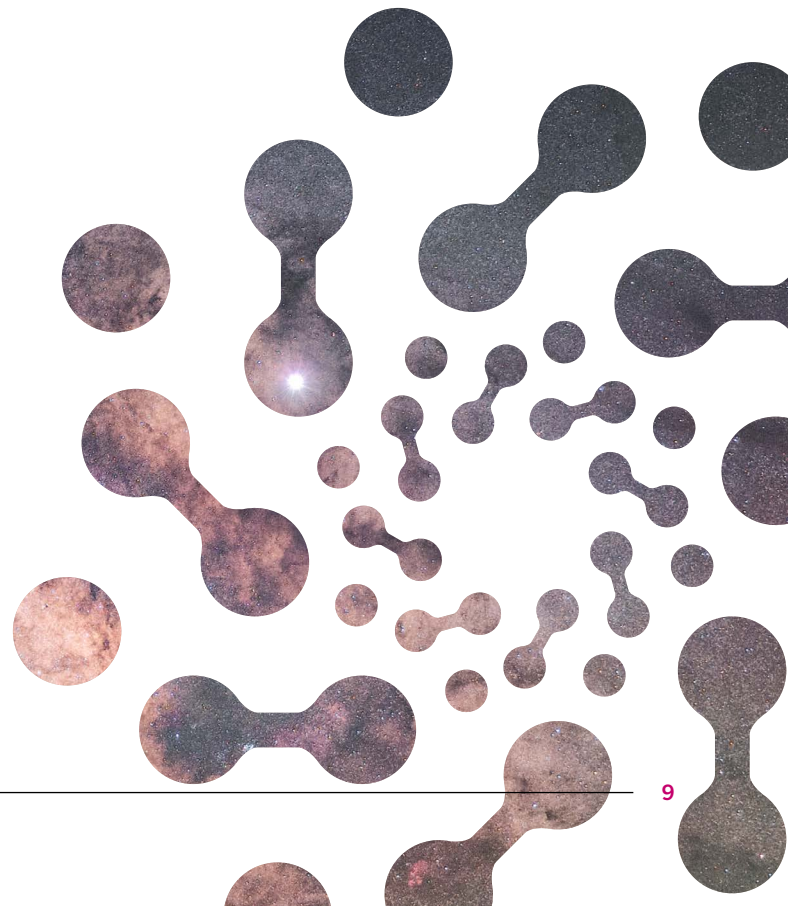
7. Contribute to policy development: Engage in shaping policies and guidelines for AI use in the legal profession. Organisations like [The Law Society](#) are actively working on AI governance frameworks and welcome input from diverse voices.

8. Join an ethics committee: Seek positions on ethics committees to help address biases and ensure the ethical use of AI. The [IEEE Global Initiative on Ethics of Autonomous and Intelligent Systems](#) provides guidelines adaptable for legal contexts.

9. Use your voice: Promote diverse perspectives in AI development and implementation within your organisation. Research shows that diverse teams are more likely to create unbiased AI systems⁹.

10. Stay up-to-date: Regularly update your knowledge of AI advancements in the legal sector. Subscribe to legal tech publications and follow thought leaders in the field through their blogs or on social media platforms.

⁹ Radulovski, A. (2024) *How does diversity in AI teams influence product development and design?* <https://www.womentech.net/forum-topic/how-does-diversity-in-ai-teams-influence-product-development-and-design?cachebust=1730818206967>



Our recommendations for organisations

While some control for greater gender diversity in AI lies in the hands of women themselves, most are beholden to the environment in which they operate. For sure, organisations that are not supportive of AI adoption, have no leadership role-modelling, do not acknowledge the potential impact of bias, or are generally content to take a ‘wait-and-see’ approach to AI, risk excluding women’s voices and denying them opportunities to get ahead of this rapidly encroaching technology. Our recommendations for organisations looking to close AI gender gaps – and therefore wider gender gaps – before they become too pronounced are:

1. Prioritise inclusive recruitment into AI roles: Review how you attract and recruit talent for AI-related roles through a gender lens. For example: are your recruitment efforts reaching gender diverse pools of talent? Are your job adverts free from gendered language? Are you scrutinising your short-lists and hiring decisions for signs of bias? Are you investing in programmes that raise aspirations for women to enter this field (e.g. through schools or university outreach programmes etc.)?

2. Support women into AI leadership roles: Use the power of mentoring and sponsoring to create a pipeline of female talent for leadership positions. Consider setting aspirational targets for women in leadership roles to keep progress on gender diversity measurable and trackable. Roll out leadership development programmes aimed at women to demystify the upper echelons and get candidates leadership-ready.

3. Create space for upskilling: Allow staff dedicated time to experiment and practise using new technology. Allocate some team meetings to group training time and encourage leaders to role-model AI adoption and support its use in real-life situations.

4. Integrate AI skills into career development pathways: Incorporate AI skills into career development frameworks – for example, make AI literacy a factor in promotion decisions and create specific career tracks for legal professionals specialising in AI and technology.

5. Use your women’s networks: Road-test your communication and engagement strategies with your organisation’s women’s network. Solicit their advice and opinion to ensure that your campaigns are landing as intended.

6. Implement ethical oversight: Establish robust ethical oversight mechanisms for AI implementation by creating ethics committees with strong female representation to address biases and ensure the ethical use of AI. Ensure committees have the authority to review and approve AI systems before implementation, as well as conduct regular audits to ensure ongoing compliance with ethical standards.

7. Create a buzz! Use celebrated speakers, women of influence and high-profile stakeholders to generate enthusiasm for the AI revolution and dispel persistent myths. Support particularly reticent women to attend conferences and expos to assuage fears and concerns about what is to come.

Conclusion

The integration of AI in the legal profession presents both challenges and opportunities for women in law. While awareness of AI’s significance is high among female legal professionals, significant barriers to adoption remain, including concerns about accuracy, bias, and lack of time to undertake training and upskilling. These challenges are exacerbated by existing gender disparities in the legal sector, where women continue to be underrepresented in senior positions.

As the legal industry evolves alongside AI, there is a risk that the gender gap could widen if these issues are not addressed proactively. The perception of AI as a biased or exclusive space and the lack of equal representation in tech roles further complicate the landscape. However, by actively engaging with AI technologies, prioritising training and experimentation time, and advocating for inclusive development and oversight, women can play a key role in shaping the future of AI in law. The initial recommendations provided offer a roadmap for women and their organisations to not only adapt to AI-driven changes, but also lead and drive innovation in this space.

It is essential that women’s voices and perspectives are at the forefront of this transformation to ensure a more equitable and effective legal system for all. By taking proactive steps to engage with AI and technology, women in law can position themselves to overcome traditional barriers to advancement and leverage these new tools to accelerate their careers. This will require concerted efforts from individual professionals, law firms and the broader legal community to ensure that AI integration does not exacerbate existing gender disparities, but instead serves as a catalyst for greater equality in the profession.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

We want to hear from you. How are you preparing for the AI revolution in law? What excites or concerns you about this disruption? **Get in touch** with us to share your thoughts.

About us

The Next 100 Years

The Next 100 Years project is the successor to the First 100 Years and is dedicated to achieving equality for women in law.

The project aims to accelerate the pace of change by encouraging collaboration across the legal profession, improving the visibility of women in law and supporting the women lawyers of the future.

The project is powered by Spark21, a charity founded to celebrate, inform and inspire future generations of women in the profession. It builds on the success of the First 100 Years project, which was created to chart the journey of women in law in the first 100 years following the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, which paved the way for women to become lawyers for the first time. The five-year project culminated with the centenary celebrations in 2019.

The Next 100 Years continues the work of the First 100 Years, capturing the inspirational stories of today's pioneering women lawyers, educating the public on the legacy of the legal pioneers of the past and driving the change needed to create an equal future for women in the legal profession.

She Breaks the Law

She Breaks the Law is a global network of women leaders and change makers (aka lawbreakers) who are passionate about the power of innovation and collaboration. Launched on International Women's Day 2019, it has become a thriving community of nearly 4,000 women from 50+ countries.

The collective is driven by a mission to accelerate transformation in the legal profession, breaking down barriers by bringing together women of all backgrounds and disciplines and supporting them in their strive for change.

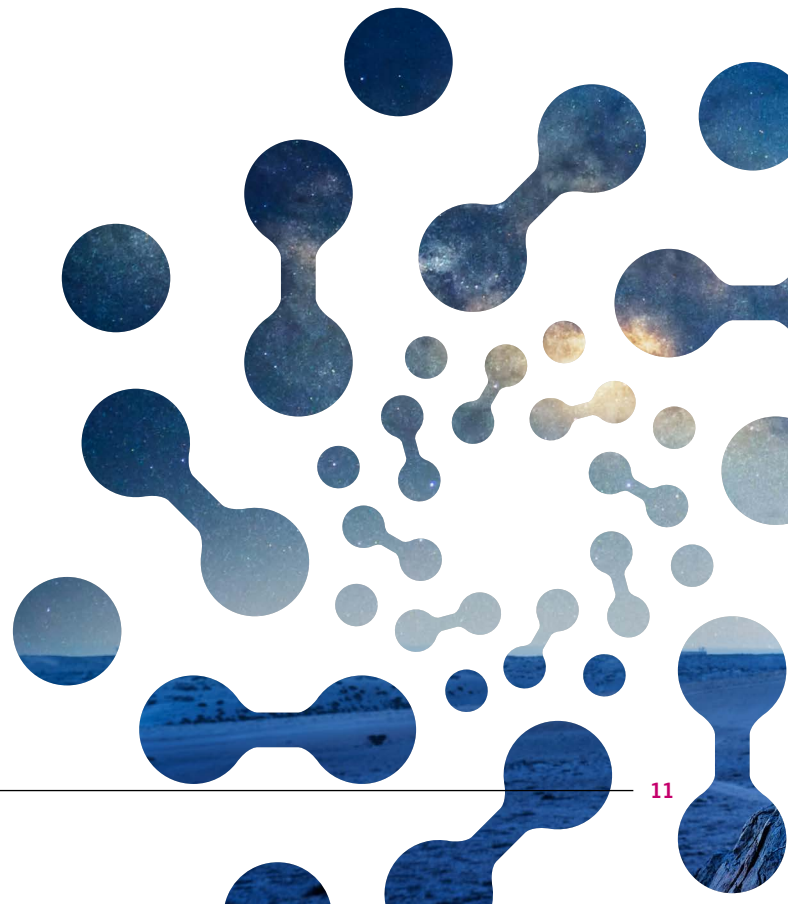
She Breaks the Law is a voluntary and non-profit organisation providing a forum for women to learn, share and inspire each other.

Linklaters LLP

Linklaters LLP is a leading global law firm with 31 offices in 21 countries, advising the world's leading companies, financial institutions and governments on their most important and challenging transactions and assignments.

We consider Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to be the pulse of our firm, running through our global business strategy and firmly embedded in our culture and values. Gender diversity is one of our six priority DEI strands and our dedicated Executive-level Gender Champions are responsible for driving cultural change in the firm. Some of our key gender initiatives include aspirational gender targets for partnership elections and leadership positions, our Women's Leadership Programme and our Stepping Forward Coaching Programme.

In 2024, 41% of our new partner cohort were women (against our 40% target), and 38% of our Partnership Board and 31% of our Executive Committee are women (exceeding our 30% target). We are delighted to have been named as a 2024 Times' Top 50 Employer for Gender Equality (making it 11 years in a row), a 2024 Working Families Top 30 Employer, and to have been awarded Best Strategy (Private Companies) Award at the 2024 INSEAD Alumni Balance in Business Awards.



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