

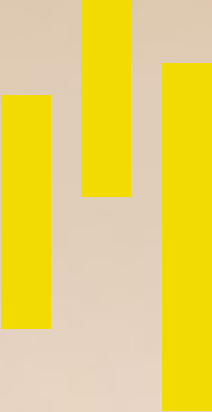


2026

Inside the Legal Mind

The European Legal
Profession Survey

 **KARNOV**
GROUP



This report presents data from Karnov Group's European survey among legal professionals, identifying their thoughts on motivation, challenges and the future. Its purpose is to deepen the readers' understanding of the legal profession and invite readers to a productive, creative dialogue about its development.



Table of contents

Welcome letter	2
4 overarching conclusions stand out	3
Methodology and Demographics	6
Chapter 1 – Increasing Pressures on the Rule of Law	9
Chapter 2 – AI’s entry into the Legal Scene	31
Chapter 3 – Motivation, Working Life and Career Structure	61
Chapter 4 – The Next Generation of Legal Professionals	81

Executive Summary

Rule of Law, AI, Motivation – and the Next Generation of Legal Professionals

This report presents findings from a survey of 3,129 legal professionals in Denmark, Spain, France, Norway and Sweden. The aim is to understand:

1. Whether rule of law and access to justice are perceived to be under pressure – and why.
2. Perceived benefits and drawbacks of implementing AI in legal work – and the consequences.
3. Current motivation and expected future competence requirements for legal professionals.
4. How the younger generation (≤ 30 years) differs from older cohorts on these themes.



Welcome letter

Recent years have brought increasing public debate about democratic backsliding, misinformation, technological disruption and labour market changes in Europe. Legal professionals hold a central role as guardians and practitioners of the rule of law, and their perception of these developments provides an important “inside view” of the state of justice systems.

The purpose of this report is to present a cross-European analysis of legal professionals’ views on topics relevant to the legal industry. These topics include pressure on the rule of law and access to justice, the role and impact of AI in legal work, and motivation and competence requirements now and in the future.

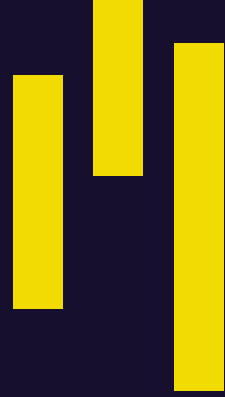
This report seeks to identify common European patterns and meaningful differences between countries, segments, and age groups on these important topics.

I hope these insights will support European legal professionals to continuously clear the path to justice in European society.

Best regards,

Pontus Bodelsson

CEO, Karnov Group AB



4 overarching
conclusions stand out

Rising perceptions of pressure on the rule of law

Legal professionals across Europe report growing concern about the rule of law. While perceptions of current pressure differ significantly between countries, **72 % believe pressure has increased over the past three years**. Political decisions, misinformation, and corporate power are seen as key drivers.

Persistent inequalities in access to justice across Europe

Access to justice is not seen as fully equal. 39 % believe there is only a small or very small extent of equal access, with **large differences between countries** and between those working within the justice system and those outside it.



Widespread use of AI raises doubts about trust and legal competence

AI is already widely used (60 % use AI at least weekly), and about half believe it **improves the quality of legal advice**. At the same time, 40 % expect AI to negatively affect trust in the justice system, and 64 % fear a risk of insufficient legal competencies among younger lawyers due to AI.

Committed to the rule of law, yet many consider leaving their workplace

Motivation is strongly driven by intrinsic factors – interesting tasks (48 %) and contributing to the rule of law/legal certainty (24 %) – yet more than **one in three** has considered leaving their workplace in the last six months.



5 european countries

6 professional segments

3,129 legal
professionals

The data stems from an online survey of 3,129 legal professionals, conducted in Denmark, Spain, France, Norway and Sweden.

Respondents self-identified their professional backgrounds and demographic characteristics.

Methodology

Analytical approach

The analysis follows four main themes:

1. Rule of law and access to justice – whether they are perceived to be under pressure and why.
2. AI in legal practice – usage, perceived benefits, risks, and governance.
3. Motivation and competence requirements – what drives legal professionals and their views on future skills required.
4. The next generation – a closer look at the under-30 group in relation to the first three themes.

The report emphasises

- Cross-country patterns and country differences.
- Differences between professional segments.
- Differences between gender and age groups.

Formal statistical significance tests are not provided; “significant” differences are discussed in a practical sense where differences are large and consistent across subgroups.



Demographics

Countries and sample sizes

The results have not been weighted by country, as there is no sufficiently precise weighting basis for the number of legally trained professionals working within the legal field in each market. As response levels differ between countries, Sweden and Denmark may be overrepresented in the total results, while Spain and France may be underrepresented. The results should therefore be interpreted with the country sample sizes in mind.

Country	number
Denmark (DA)	643
Spain (ES)	501
France (FR)	395
Norway (NO)	532
Sweden (SV)	1.058

Gender	
Male	44 %
Female	53 %
Other	3 %

Professional segments

Police, courts and prosecution services have been grouped for reporting purposes. We recognise that these institutions operate independently and represent different perspectives within the legal system. Results for this segment should therefore be interpreted as a broad justice-sector view rather than as one homogeneous group.

Professional segments	
Law firm	31 %
Private company (in-house lawyers)	17 %
Organisation (e.g. trade union, NGO)	7 %
Police, courts or prosecution services	12 %
Public sector	26 %
Other	7 %

Age	
Younger than 30	9 %
30-39 years old	17 %
40-49 years old	22 %
50-59 years old	28 %
59+ years old	22 %
Prefer not to answer	2 %

Chapter 1

Increasing Pressures on the Rule of Law





Increasing Pressures on the Rule of Law

In this chapter, we take a closer look at the European legal professionals' view on whether the rule of law and access to justice are under pressure in their country. If so, what are the causes of the pressure, and what are the consequences?

Rule of Law

Across the five surveyed countries, 53 % of legal professionals believe that the rule of law is under pressure in their country. However, perceptions vary substantially between countries, ranging from 36 % in Norway and 41 % in Sweden to 85 % in Spain and 78 % in France.



Respondents were asked:

"Is the rule of law under pressure in your country?"

Yes

No

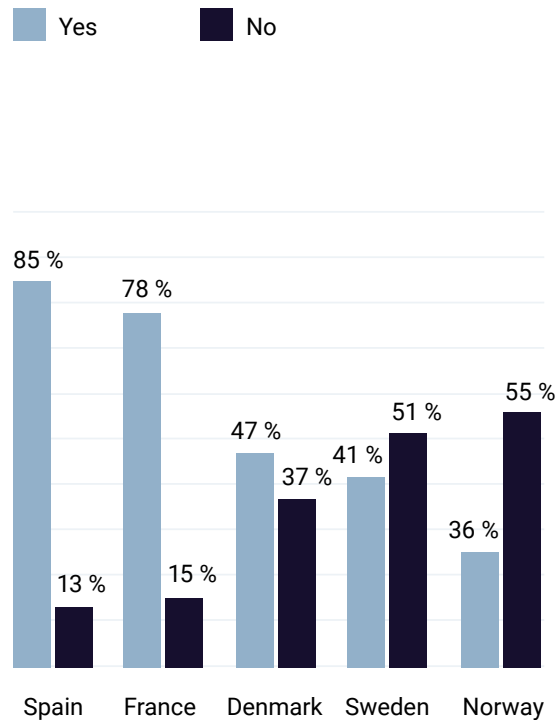
Don't know

53 %

38 %

9 %

Country differences



Legal professionals in Spain and France are significantly more likely to perceive pressure on the rule of law, whereas those in Norway and Sweden have a different perception. Denmark balances with a preponderance towards yes (47 %).

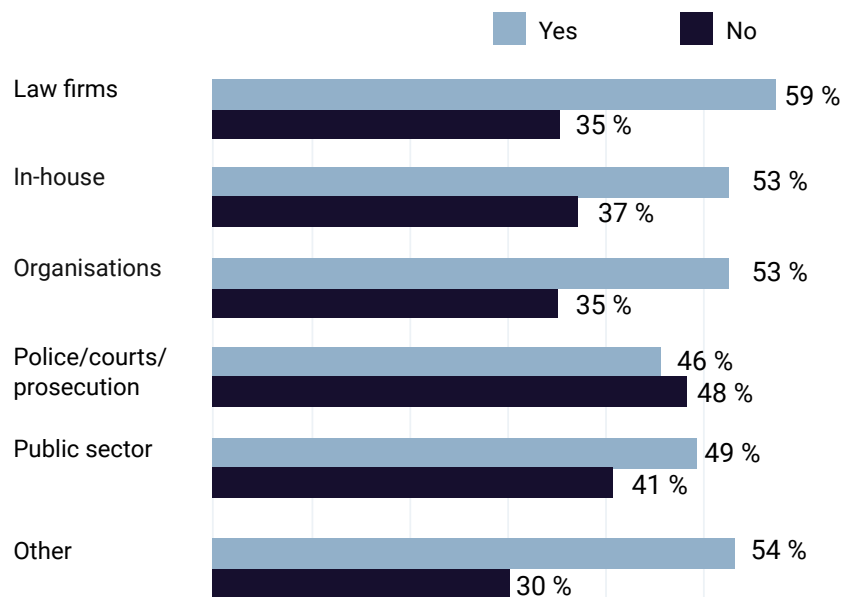


“We need to bring our solid legal expertise to the table as early as possible. If we continue moving in a direction where the rule of law is increasingly under pressure, we risk eroding the common foundation on which our democratic society is built.”

Andrew Hjuler Crichton, Secretary General,
Danish Bar & Law Society Denmark

Segment differences

Perceptions vary somewhat by segment but remain high across the board:

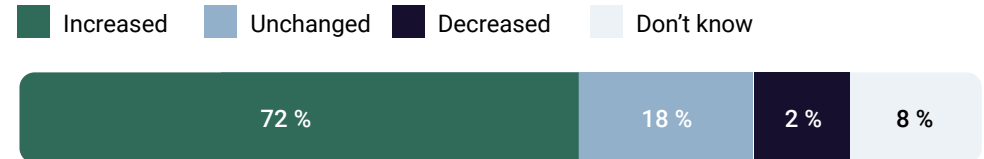


Concerns about the rule of law are widely shared across sectors, suggesting a systemic rather than sector-specific perception.



Respondents were asked:

"Do you think the pressure on the rule of law has increased or decreased over the last 3 years?"

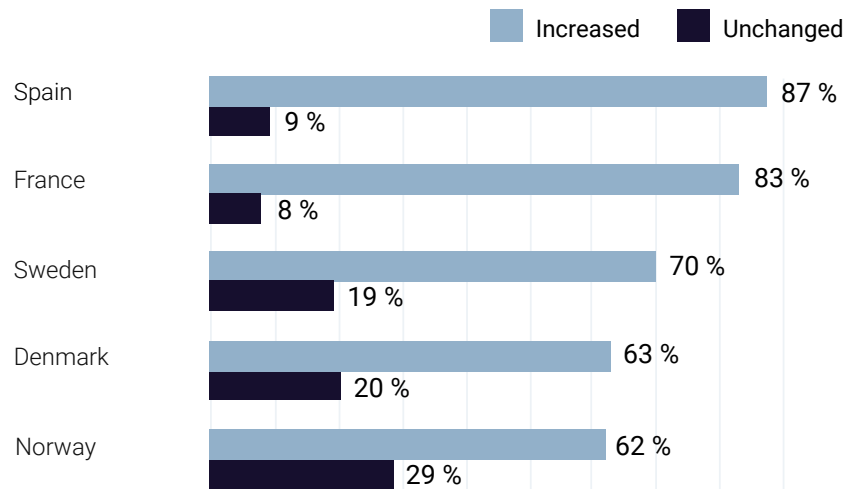


Among those who already believe that the rule of law is under pressure, as many as **91 %** say that the pressure has increased over the last three years. Even among those who believe the rule of law is not under pressure, half (**50 %**) perceive an increase in pressure.

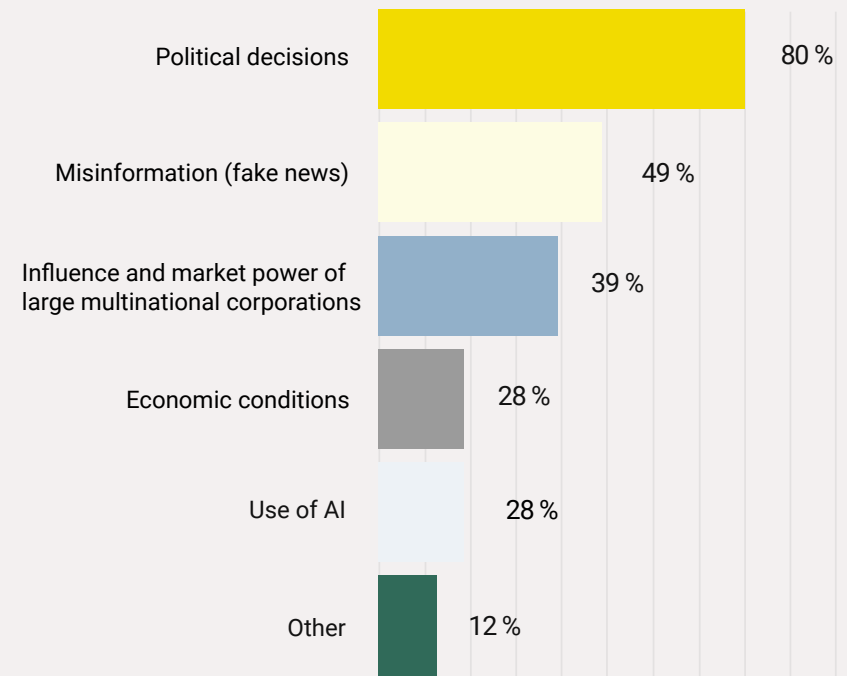
This points to a clear trend of perception: whether they see the current level as "under pressure" or not, many legal professionals believe that conditions have worsened.

What is the rule of law under pressure from?

Despite country differences, the sense of increasing pressure is widespread in all five countries



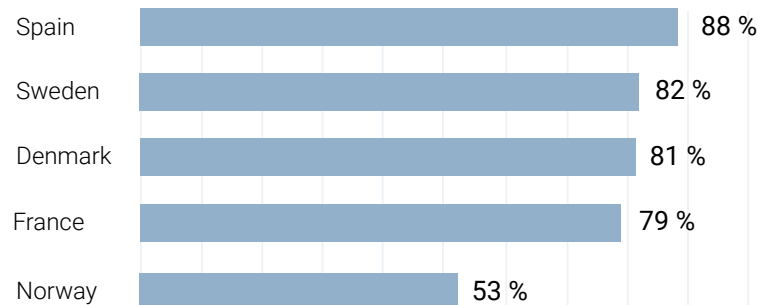
Among those who believe the rule of law is under pressure, the main sources of pressure are:



Political decisions as the primary driver

Political decisions are by far the most frequently recognised source of pressure. This indicates that legal professionals see the main threats as coming from within the political system (legislation, executive actions) and misinformation rather than from economic conditions and use of AI.

In all countries, political decisions rank highest, though with different intensities:



Misinformation and multinational corporations as structural risks

Almost half of the respondents mention misinformation, and nearly four in ten mention the power of large multinational corporations. Concerns about the rule of law are not only linked to state behavior but also media ecosystems and economic power structures.

The belief that misinformation is causing pressure on the rule of law is especially prominent in France, Norway and Sweden (57–59 %)

AI as an emerging risk factor

Interestingly, 28 % identify "Use of AI" as a driver of pressure on the rule of law. This proportion is particularly high in Norway (53 %) and relatively low in Spain (11 %). This suggests that in some countries, AI is already seen as a systemic factor of risk to rule of law, not only as a neutral technological tool.



“Everyone is being flooded with information where the distinction between what is real, fake, etc. is increasingly being erased. A critical approach is becoming a ‘scarce resource’, and independent thinking is being replaced by automation. This is frightening for legal certainty/the protection of legal rights.”

Female, age 50–59, Law Firm, Norway

Inside the Legal Mind

What is on the legal professionals' minds, considering why the rule of law is under pressure.



Respondents were asked to share if other things came to mind regarding concerns about rule of law. This is how they answered:

Systemic complexity, lack of resources and unequal access

This category appears in all five countries, but is particularly prominent in the Nordic responses (DK, NO, SE):

- Denmark: complex legislation, municipal practices, long case processing times, expensive legal representation and a lack of legal competence within public authorities.
- Norway and Sweden: high costs of bringing a case, insufficient resources in courts and public administration, automated self service solutions that undermine individual assessment, and limited ability for weaker parties to assert their rights.
- Spain and France: complexity and regulatory overload are also present, but more often directly linked to political abuse of power (e.g. governing by decree, disregard for legal constraints).



Information environment, media, organised crime and cultural tensions

Misinformation/media is mentioned in all countries, but with different emphases:

- Denmark/Norway/Sweden: fake news, social media, algorithms and targeted influence, as well as criticism of public service and journalistic quality.
- Spain/France: the role of media and social media in political campaigns, polarisation and pressure on the courts, sometimes explicitly tied to specific parties or high-profile cases.
- Organised crime and infiltration feature especially prominently in the Swedish and Norwegian comments (organised crime, gangs, infiltration of public authorities, threats against courts), and only sporadically in the other countries.
- Cultural/ideological conflicts (wokeism, extremism, nationalism) are mentioned primarily in Sweden and to some extent Norway, and in Spain/France more often framed as “extremism/fascism/ultra right”.

What needs to be done?

We asked the respondents what needed to be done to strengthen the rule of law.

The comments suggest that European legal professionals do not see rule of law as something that can be secured by a single reform. They call for a multi-faceted strategy:

- Re-anchoring separation of powers and judicial independence.
- Investing in, simplifying and opening up the justice system and administration.
- Rebuilding legal culture, public understanding and a fact-based information environment.



Inside the Legal Mind



Expert Opinion - Denmark



Keeping the rule of law at the heart of our democracy

By Andrew Hjuler Crichton, Secretary
General, Danish Bar & Law Society, Denmark

Rule of law is one of the pillars of a democratic society. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that principles of the rule of law are given leeway and become an established part of the way we organise society.

Legal professionals across the five European countries surveyed express growing concern for the rule of law. Although perceptions vary significantly from country to country, 72 % believe that the pressure on the rule of law has increased over the past three years. Political decisions, misinformation, corporate influence, and market power are seen as significant reasons for this. This is a figure that simply cannot be disregarded.

As legal professionals, we should be highly attentive to this trend. There is

a need for us, through our practice and given the central position we hold in society, to help support and ensure that the rule of law is upheld and defended. It remains a central pillar of the democratic society that we are all part of as citizens, businesses, and government.

I note that 47 % of respondents in Denmark answer “yes” to the question “Is the rule of law under pressure in your country?”. This is higher than the levels in both Sweden and Norway, countries with which we normally compare ourselves. At the same time, 63 % of Danish respondents believe that the pressure on the rule of law has increased over the past three years. This is something that we, as a legal profession, are very conscious of and want to help influence in a positive direction.

It is difficult to point out exactly why the rule of law is perceived to be more under pressure in Denmark than in the countries we compare ourselves with. However, several cases in Denmark have in recent years heightened awareness of the rule of law – also among the general public. These relate, in particular, to cases within the intelligence services and the tax sector, the issues of legal aid and access to justice as well as the handling of the COVID epidemic.

The issue of real access to justice also calls for attention. Across the five countries, 39 % assess that there is only to a small or very small extent equal access to courts and appeals bodies. Among respondents from law firms, the proportion is 49 %. This is significant because rights should not exist solely on paper – citizens and businesses must also have a genuine opportunity to assert them across the Kingdom of Denmark.

From a Danish perspective, we are also seeing that speed is a decisive factor in the political process. Regulation occurs at an ever-increasing pace, combined with high complexity. All other things being equal, this impacts

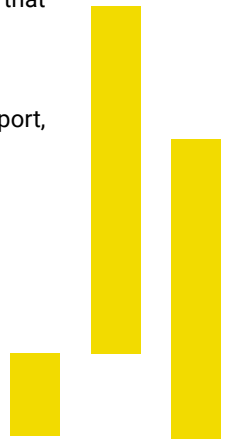
the quality of the legislation aimed at citizens and businesses. Furthermore, there has been a rapid growth in the volume of regulation. In other words, the general perception is that regulation is being used to a much greater extent than before.

This is also reflected in the Danish responses to the survey, where complex legislation, long processing times, expensive legal assistance, and a lack of legal competence among public authorities are highlighted as some of the challenges met.

I am highly focused on ensuring that we, as a profession, bring our solid expertise to the table, preferably as early as possible in the regulatory process, thereby helping to ensure that the rule of law is observed and that the quality of the rules and frameworks encountered by citizens and businesses is as high as possible.

More generally, I believe that if a society wants to strengthen the understanding of and compliance with the rule of law in the long term, it must engage the next generation in the matter. Therefore, one place to start is to ensure that the next generation – right from school age – is taught about the rule of law, so that it becomes an integrated part of how young people think and work. Our young people must carry with them an understanding of and familiarity with the fundamental principles of the rule of law, so that for them, too, it becomes a core pillar of a democratic society.

All in all, I see a shared task across democratic societies to support, strengthen, and safeguard the rule of law.



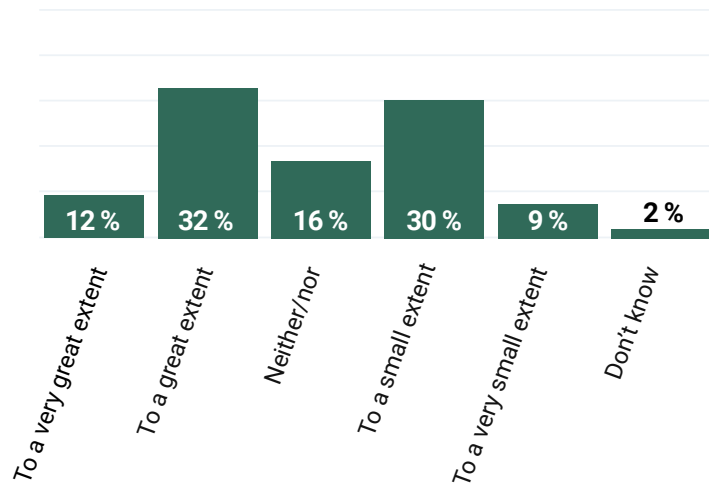
Access to Justice



Respondents were asked:

"To what extent do you think there is equal access to justice (real access to courts and appeals bodies) for all citizens?"

Across all countries:



44 %

believe that there is a great or very great extent of equal access to justice



39 %

believe there is only a small or very small extent. This indicates a fairly divided assessment.

Country differences

- Sweden stands out with the most positive experience: **22 %** “to a very great extent” and **47 %** “to a great extent” (**69 %** combined).
- Norway and France are notably critical:
 - Norway: **49 %** “to a small extent” and **16 %** “to a very small extent” (**65 %** combined).
 - France: **45 %** “to a small extent” and **17 %** “to a very small extent” (**62 %** combined).
- Denmark and Spain are in an intermediate position.

These differences may reflect differences in legal aid schemes, court fees, geographical access to courts, and administrative barriers.

Segment differences

- Police, courts and prosecution services show the most positive assessment: **22 %** “very great extent” and **46 %** “great extent” (**68 %** combined). Only **18 %** say “small” or “very small extent”.
- Law firms are more critical: **36 %** “small extent” and **13 %** “very small extent” (**49 %** combined).
- Public sector and NGOs fall in between.

This difference suggests that those working within justice institutions see access as more equal than those working as external advisers or advocates for clients. It raises the question of whether there is an “insider” versus “outsider” perception gap.



In my opinion, people with fewer resources face greater difficulties accessing justice. Although legal aid and access to a court-appointed lawyer exist, in my experience, they don't receive adequate legal advice or assistance (lack of information, disinterest in the case, etc.). This may also be due to the fact that court-appointed lawyers are overwhelmed with work, their salaries are meager, and they are paid late.

Female, age 50–59, Lawyer, Public sector, Spain

Inside the Legal Mind

What is on the legal professionals' minds, considering why access to justice is under pressure.



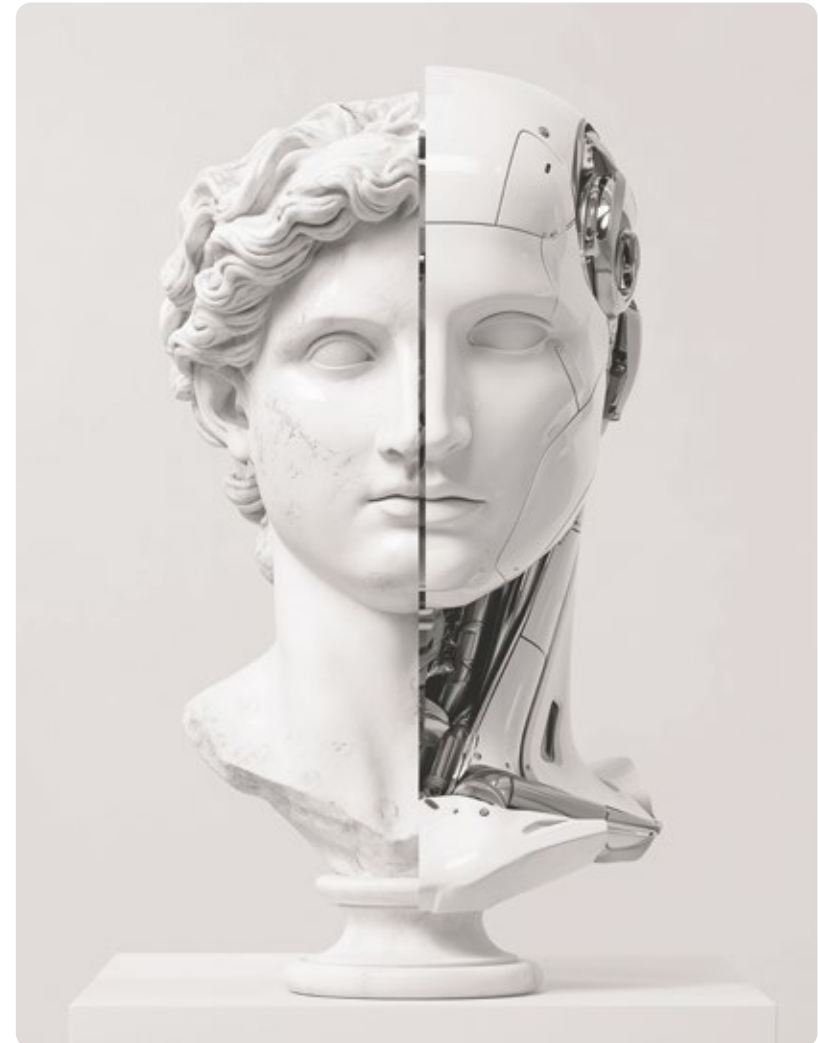
Respondents were asked to share if other things came to mind regarding concerns about access to justice. This is how they answered:

Economic barriers and cost asymmetry

By far the most frequently mentioned barrier is the financial aspect:

- Individuals and SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) cannot afford legal advice or to bring/defend a case.
- Legal aid is described as under-funded or too narrowly accessible, leaving the middle class in particular “too rich” for legal aid but “too poor” to litigate.
- The imbalance of resources between the state/public bodies and private parties is a recurring theme: public authorities can spend far more on legal representation and procedures than a citizen or small company.
- Several comments note that even winning parties receive inadequate cost reimbursement, meaning that only wealthy individuals or capital-strong companies can afford to pursue their rights through the courts.

Combined, the economic barriers are seen as the single largest and most systemic obstacle.



System complexity, delays and limited practical accessibility

A second, strong theme concerns how the system is designed and operates:



Complex, unstable and technical law makes it difficult for ordinary people to understand their rights or how strong their cases are.



Some point to the lack of a clear and user-friendly entry portal for those who don't "speak the system", who then vent on social media instead of using formal remedies.



Long processing times and delays are repeatedly described as making justice too late – and therefore not real justice.



Access to appeal bodies and complaint mechanisms is often only realistic for those who already have a lawyer in their network; for small-value disputes, there is no economically viable way to get professional help.



The procedural burden is experienced as overwhelming: long written submissions, formal requirements, and a system that in practice leaves very little room for oral hearings or direct dialogue

In short, even where rights exist on paper, complexity, lack of speed and procedural design make the system practically inaccessible or unattractive for many.

Inside the Legal Mind

Social inequality, discrimination and knowledge gaps

A third category concerns groups of people who manage – and do not manage - to use the system:

- Social and economic inequality shape the level of accessibility: those with higher income, education, networks and system literacy are much better placed to assert their rights, while disadvantaged groups often self-censor (“auto censure”) or do not even attempt to engage.
- Several comments point to discrimination and bias: migrants, or otherwise marginalised groups are seen as more likely to be the subjects of suspicion, charged or convicted, and less likely to be believed.
- A lack of legal knowledge and education – both among the public and sometimes within authorities – is highlighted as a barrier: people do not know their rights, the procedures, or how to assess whether they have a viable case.
- For children and other particularly vulnerable groups, reduced levels of fees and time constraints mean that lawyers cannot realistically provide full representation (meeting the child, reading all files, explaining appeal options), making their access to justice ‘illusory’ in practice.

This cluster shows that access to justice is not only about money and procedure, but also about social status, discrimination and information – and that these factors interact: those with least resources, least knowledge and least trust in institutions are precisely those for whom the system is hardest to access.

Expert Opinion - France



Access to justice in France: several levers for action identified

By Pierre Berlioz, professor at Université Paris Cité

The findings of the survey are unequivocal and, unfortunately, unsurprising: access to justice is an issue in France. This is a reality that is difficult to dispute, even though professionals working within the police, prosecution services and courts appear less inclined to acknowledge it. This is understandable: they work every day to ensure that access to justice is effective for all.

From an outside perspective, however, and this would undoubtedly be even more apparent if court users themselves were surveyed, the reality is clear: much remains to be done before equal access to justice becomes a reality for everyone.



One of the particularly valuable contributions of the survey lies in identifying the barriers to such access.

Cost is, of course, a key issue, encompassing both direct and indirect costs. To ensure genuine access to justice, legal expenses insurance could be made mandatory in certain areas, particularly for certain legal transactions, while its availability could be extended more broadly, for example in family law matters.

A fundamental overhaul of the legal aid system is also necessary. As the introduction of regulated fees is not an option, since lawyers are not public and ministerial officers, Bar associations could be entrusted with a role in establishing contractual arrangements, not along the lines of the health-care sector, but rather based on the model of public purchasing groups.

In many cases, another potentially prohibitive indirect cost is that of expert evidence. A public judicial expert service could be established, notably to enable expert fees to be advanced where expert evidence is necessary for the resolution of a dispute.

The complexity of the system is undoubtedly another barrier. In civil matters in particular, procedural rules should do more to facilitate access to the courts and the progression of cases through the judicial system.

More broadly, the very image of the justice system, often perceived as intimidating, can itself act as a deterrent. This perception needs to be dispelled so that everyone can see the justice system for what it is: a solution to a problem, rather than what they fear it may become, an additional difficulty arising from that problem.

Finally, the survey rightly highlights the lack of legal knowledge and legal education. France is characterised by a paradox: law is pervasive, yet it is not truly part of our culture. One fact both illustrates and helps explain this: unlike our history, literature and other core subjects, law is not taught in schools.

Alongside moral and civic education, it is essential to provide a basic grounding in legal culture. The aim is not to turn every student into a legal practitioner, but simply to ensure that all future citizens acquire a basic understanding of the law and of the institutions and professionals involved in its operation.

Chapter 2

AI's entry into the Legal Scene





AI's entry into the Legal Scene

In this chapter, we examine European lawyers' perceptions of the consequences of using AI for legal work. How does AI affect the quality of legal work, and how does it affect European citizens and trust in the legal system?

60 %

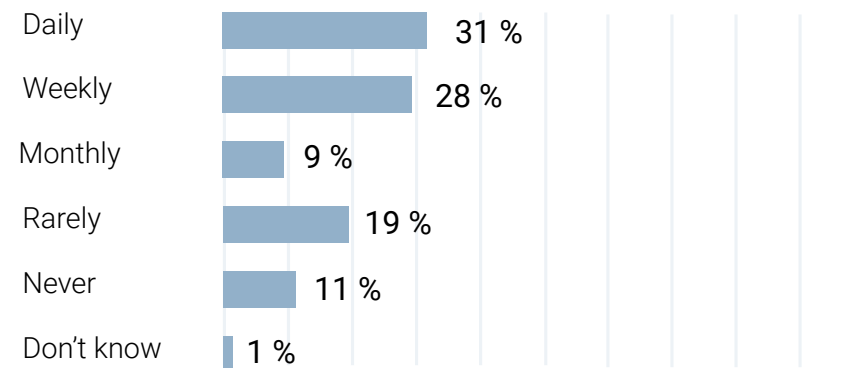
use AI at least weekly, which is considered a high adoption rate for a relatively new technology

Current usage of AI



Respondents were asked:

"How often do you use AI solutions in your legal work?"



Country differences:

- Norway has the highest share of daily AI users: **48 %**
- France and Spain: around one third use AI daily (**33 %** and **31 %**).
- Denmark and Sweden: **25 %** daily.



Norway appears to be an early adopter, which is relevant for interpreting Norwegian attitudes towards AI in later questions.



“Generally, for basic situations (where information is readily available and the cases are not highly technical), AI can be a useful tool for simplifying legal concepts. However, in complex cases, misinterpretations are extremely common and misreadings of the law are systematic, which is a real problem for a lawyer who finds themselves at odds with their client, who, in turn, mistakes AI for absolute truth.”

Female, age 23–30, Law Firm, France

AI and trust in the justice system



Respondents were asked:

"In what way do you think AI will affect trust in the justice system?"

Positively No effect Negatively Don't know

18 %

13 %

40 %

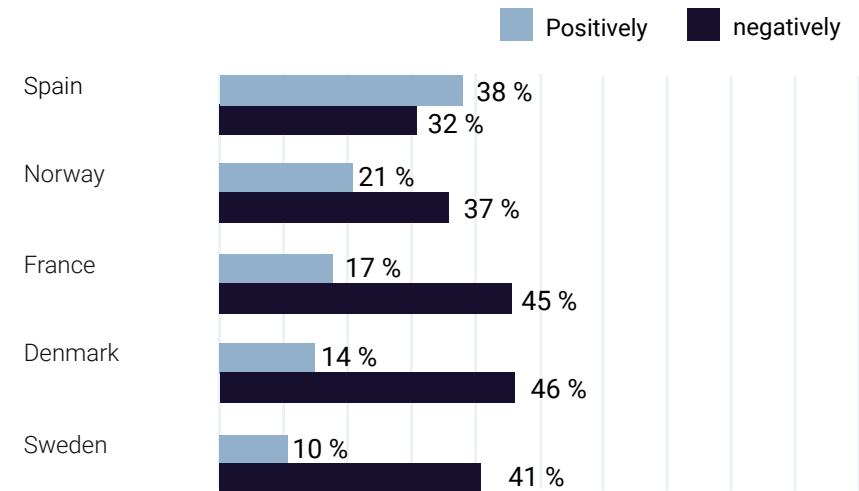
28 %



Legal professionals are more than twice as likely to expect a negative rather than positive impact on trust in the justice system.

Country differences

Spain is the only country that is more optimistic: 38 % expect a positive effect on trust.



One interpretation is that in Spain – where perceived pressure on the rule of law is very high – AI is seen more as a potential remedy or improvement.



“Legal professionals suffer from credibility doubts when citizens place more trust in AI, such as ChatGPT, than in the opinion of experts in the field. Ideally, we would have an AI specialized in law, drawing its sources solely from case law and doctrinal references, because its opinions would be more accurate. But with general AIs, like the one mentioned, we do not know what their sources are, and their opinions are sometimes inaccurate.”

Female, age 40–49, public sector (court, prosecution), Spain

AI and the quality of legal advice



Respondents were asked:

"How do you think the use of AI influences the quality of legal advice?"

Positively No effect Negatively Don't know

49 %

12 %

22 %

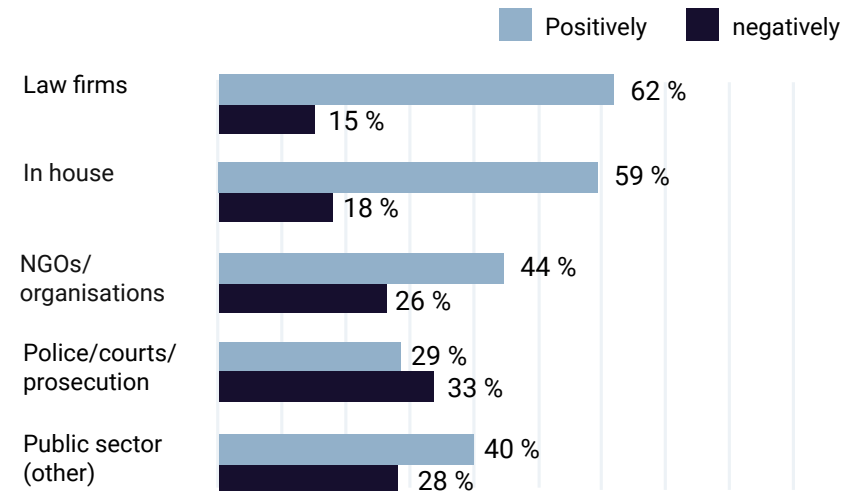
17 %



AI is more often perceived as improving the quality of legal advice rather than harming it. However, this conflicts with the perceived negative effect on trust in the justice system.

Segment differences

Perceived impact of AI on quality varies widely by type of workplace:



In the private sector, AI is predominantly viewed as a quality-enhancing tool. For legal institutions (police, courts, prosecution) there is greater concern that AI might decrease quality or introduce risks that are incompatible with due process and legal certainty.



AI puts great pressure on legal institutions, which must devote significant resources to sorting and trying to understand AI-generated material.

Male, age 23–29, Public Sector
(police, courts, prosecution), Sweden



For a decision to have authority and legitimacy, and for the parties to be able to have confidence in the decision, it is a prerequisite that the decision is made by a caseworker who has understood the case, understood whether it is sufficiently informed, and who can formulate the decision and its reasoning based on that understanding. Here lies a major problem if, due to laziness or ignorance (for example as a result of using AI during one's education), one lapses into the use of AI.

Male, age 50–59, Public sector
(police, courts, prosecution), Denmark



Relationship between trust and quality

It is interesting to cross-analyse the responses on AI's impact on trust in the legal system and the effect on the quality of legal advice. Among those who think AI will affect trust positively, **87 %** think AI positively influences the quality of legal advice.

Among those who think AI will negatively affect trust, only **33 %** think AI improves quality, while **39 %** think it worsens quality.

Among those who think AI will have no effect on trust, **54 %** think it improves quality and **25 %** say it has no effect on quality.

This reveals clear attitude clusters:



AI optimists: See both improved quality and improved trust.



AI pragmatists: Expect better quality but no effect on institutional trust.



AI sceptics: Expect both lower quality and reduced trust.

This has implications for communication and policy: arguments about quality improvement alone may not convince those primarily concerned with fairness, transparency, and accountability.

AI governance and ethical frameworks



Respondents were asked:

"Have you or your employer established guidelines or ethical frameworks for the use of AI in a legal context?"

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

53 %

39 %

8 %



Given that **60 %** of respondents use AI at least weekly, it is significant that nearly two in five do so without clear guidelines.

In house: ~ **61 %** Yes – the highest share, indicating strong emphasis on AI governance.

Law firms: ~ **54 %** Yes.

Police/courts/prosecution: ~ **47 %** Yes, with a relatively high share of "Don't know" (**17 %**).

Public sector: ~ **51 %** Yes.

This suggests that private companies and law firms may be ahead in formalising AI guidelines, likely driven by compliance and risk management considerations, while some public institutions are still catching up.

AI, legal certainty and client access to law

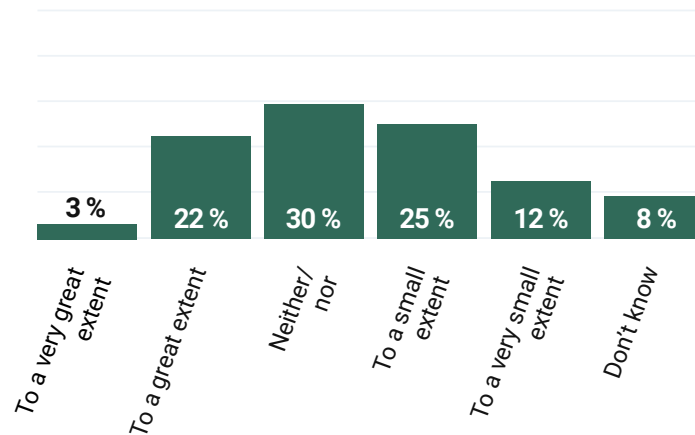
Does AI strengthen legal certainty?



Respondents were asked:

“Do you think citizens’ and companies’ access to law via AI strengthens their legal certainty?”

Across all countries:



Only about one quarter (25 %) believe that AI clearly strengthens legal certainty, while 37 % believe it does so only to a small or very small extent. Many are neutral or unsure.

Country differences are evident: Norway is relatively optimistic (37 % “great/very great extent”), whereas Spain has a significant share responding “to a very small extent” (24 %).

Is client access to legal information via AI an advantage or disadvantage for legal professionals?



The respondents were asked:

"Is it an advantage or a disadvantage for you in your profession that clients have easier access to legal information via AI, e.g., ChatGPT?"

Across all respondents:

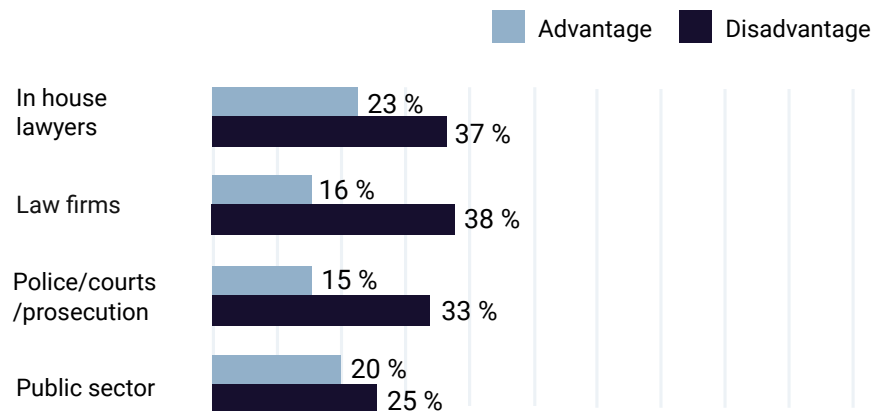
Advantage Neither/nor Disadvantage Don't know



More legal professionals see client access to AI as a disadvantage than as an advantage.

Segment differences matter:

In house lawyers are relatively more positive than the other segments, even though the majority also here are negative.



Concerns likely include misinformation, overconfidence among clients and additional time spent correcting AI-generated mistakes. At the same time, a large "neutral" group suggests a mix of benefits and drawbacks in practice.



Clients/potential clients carry out their own research using AI and receive incorrect results regarding their prospects of success or the applicable legal conditions. This incorrect starting point often undermines the relationship with the client from the outset, as they are reluctant to accept that the AI is giving wrong answers.

Female, age 30–39, Law Firm, Sweden

Expert Opinion - Spain



Beyond the hype: AI becomes operational in Spain's legal industry

By Moisés Barrio Andrés, Legal Counsel of the Council of State. Advisor to various States and the European Union on digital regulation. Professor of Digital Law.

The situation of the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the Spanish legal sector in 2026 is characterized by accelerated but asymmetrical adoption, with notable advances in both private law and the Administration of Justice, accompanied by increasingly precise regulation and professional ethics.

Spain ranks among the most active European countries in the integration of AI in the legal profession, although significant gaps persist between large law firms, boutique firms, in-house legal departments and the Public Administration. According to data from the General Council of Spanish Lawyers (CGAE), approximately 58.9 % of practitioners report using AI tools in their daily work. Use is more intense in medium-sized and large firms (more than 50-58 % of those with more than 20 lawyers were already using generative AI in 2025), while sole practitioners and boutique lawyers are advancing more slowly.

The overall digital maturity of law firms stands at 5.3 out of 10 (third edition of the EI Confidential-LOIS report, 2026), the highest figure recorded to date, although substantial room for improvement remains.

Principal consolidated uses

- Intelligent search and analysis of case law and legislation (especially CENDOJ - Judicial Documentation Center - and databases of the leading providers of legal information tools).
- Summary of judgments and lengthy documents.
- Drafting of pleadings, contracts, and briefs.
- Review of counterparties' contracts and documentary due diligence.
- Extraction of obligations, deadlines and risks.
- Internal assistants (Q&A) on legislation and initial client intake.

Time savings are estimated at 40 % to 80 % in document and research tasks, which is accelerating the shift away from the hourly billing towards value-based fee arrangements.

Most widely used tools

The Spanish market is divided into:

- Legal publishing platforms with an AI layer.
- Native Spanish solutions from start-ups.
- International tools.

Large firms develop or integrate their own or customized solutions, while many small firms and self-employed lawyers combine generic tools with specialized ones.

Administration of Justice

The Ministry of the Presidency, Justice and Relations with the Courts is leading an ambitious deployment that has its starting point in the Justice 2030 Plan, and which includes:

- Tools such as ADIA (anonymization and automatic summarization of court documents).
- Delfos (natural-language AI search engine over judicial documents).
- Deployment of Copilot in safe environments for judges and prosecutors (about 26,000 licenses).
- Robotization of order for payment procedures (more than 275,000 automated processes and great savings in hours).
- Smart features in the Justice Folder (summaries and translation into plain language).

Spain thus presents itself as one of the European leaders in the digital transformation of justice through AI.

It also has a specific judicial regulation. Instruction 2/2026, of 28 January, of the Plenary of the General Council of the Judiciary (CGPJ), on the use of artificial intelligence systems in the exercise of judicial activity, establishes that AI can only be used as a support instrument, never to replace judicial decision-making, the assessment of facts or evidence, or the application of the law. Only systems authorized by the competent Administrations in matters of Justice or the CGPJ itself are permitted, subject to effective human oversight, traceability, confidentiality and bias prevention. A judge has already been sanctioned (a fine of €1,000) for improper use of ChatGPT.

Regulatory framework

- Draft organic law for the good use and governance of Artificial Intelligence (approved by the Council of Ministers in May 2026 and in the parliamentary process). It develops the provisions that the AI Act entrusts to the Member States.
- In 2023, the main supervisory authority, the Spanish Agency for the Supervision of Artificial Intelligence (AESIA), was created.



Expert Opinion - Spain - continued

Deontological framework for the legal profession

In 2025, the Advisory Council on Innovation, Legal Practice and Digital Justice (CAIA) of the General Council of Spanish Lawyers (CGAE) was established. Its purpose is to lead the digitalization of Justice and of the Legal Profession from the standpoint of the bar, with a rights-based, ethical, inclusive and people-centred perspective. Among its principal objectives are to foster debate on technology and law, support the digital transformation of the profession, strengthen cybersecurity in professional practice, participate in legislative and organisational reforms, and promote public-private and international alliances.

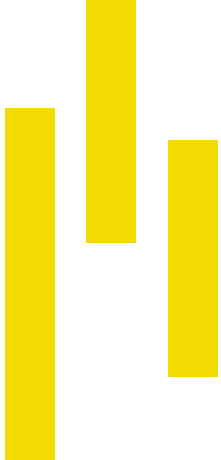
In 2026, the Plenary of the CGAE has approved Interpretative Circular 3/2026, of 10 April, which regulates the preparation, signature and delivery of legal documents generated with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence. The measure seeks to clarify practitioners' obligations in the event of errors arising from the use of these tools. Among the document's recommendations, the Council advises that lawyers have an in-depth knowledge of AI tools, refrain from using outputs without complete review, and always cross-check against reliable legal sources. The circular also emphasizes the importance of traceability: documenting when and for what purpose AI has been used makes it possible to justify decisions and allocate responsibility.

Also in May 2026, the Decalogue of principles for the safe and responsible use of Artificial Intelligence systems in legal practice was published and prepared by the aforementioned Advisory Council on Innovation and Advocacy (CAIA) of the Spanish Legal Profession. This document sets out the principles that guide the responsible, ethical and deontological use of artificial intelligence in the Spanish legal practice. Among the basic rules is that AI can never replace human control, that the practitioner retains full responsibility for their work and that the client must know when automated tools are involved. It also insists on avoiding bias, protecting fundamental rights and using reliable and up-to-date systems.

Conclusion

In summary, AI is already an operational reality in the Spanish legal sector, especially for efficiency and document analysis tasks. Its deployment is more mature in legal publishers, large law firms and certain judicial projects, while the Administration and small firms advance at different speeds. Current emphasis is on responsible, traceable and human-controlled use, in line with the European framework and Spanish deontological rules.

The evolution of legal AI tools is leaving behind the phase of "chatbots that answer questions" and entering a more mature stage: systems that manage complete workflows, integrate into the tools already used by the lawyer and operate with greater autonomy under human supervision. The clearest leap is the shift from isolated prompts to agents who plan, research, analyze, draft and review in a chained manner. In Spain, providers of legal information tools such as Aranzadi LA LEY are applying the concept of legal project management: AI structures a case from the beginning, divides the work into tasks, links documents and generates drafts ready for review. The starting point ceases to be "a query" and becomes "the file".

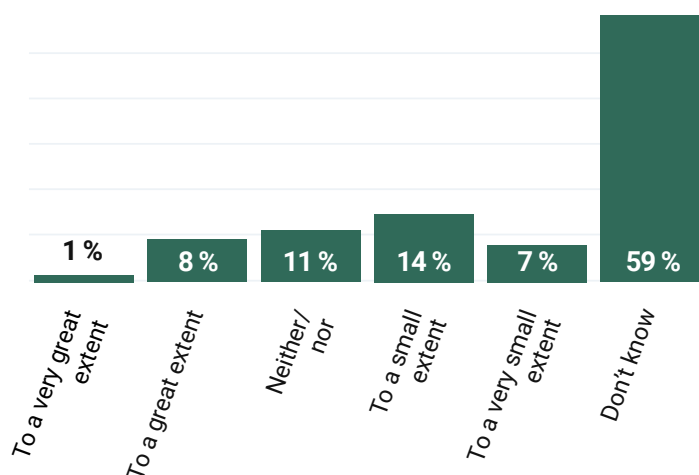


Are Legal Education Institutions keeping up?



The respondents were asked:

"Considering AI developments: Do you think legal education institutions' offerings/programmes are keeping up?"

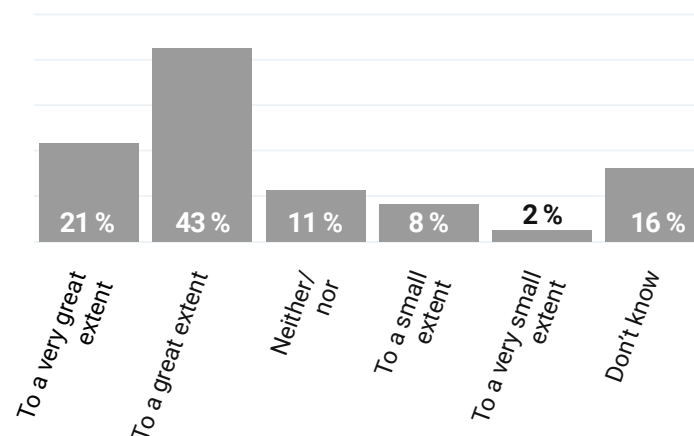


Those who have a clear opinion are more critical than positive; however, the high "Don't know" rate (**59 %**) shows that many practising legal professionals are not closely familiar with current curricula.



The respondents were asked:

"Is there a risk of insufficient legal competencies among younger lawyers due to the use of AI?"



Risk of insufficient legal competencies among younger lawyers due to AI

Altogether, **64 %** see a great or very great risk that AI may undermine the development of core legal competencies among younger lawyers. This concern is shared across most countries, though at different levels:

- **Spain** and **France** show the highest share of "great extent and very great extent" (**74** and **73 %**).
- **Norway** is not concerned to the same degree (**51 %**).



***“I am concerned that
lawyers’ skills are being
degraded because we
delegate legal analysis
to AI”***

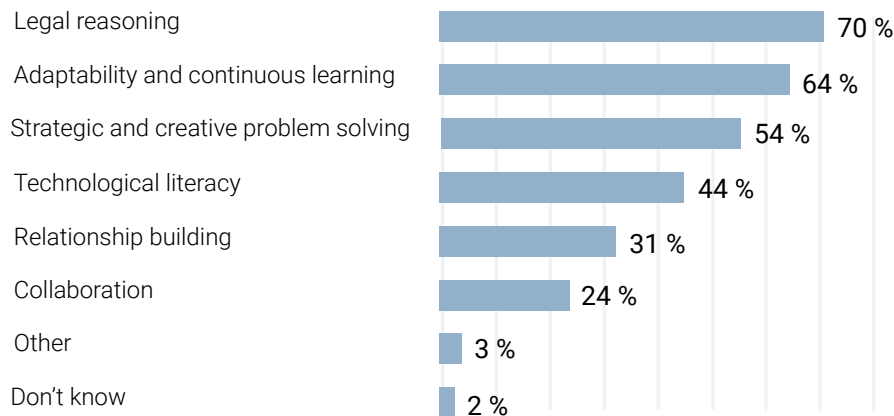
Female, age 40–49, court, police or
prosecutor’s office, Denmark

AI makes legal reasoning more important, not less important.



The respondents were asked:

"Considering AI developments, which competencies will be the most important for legal professionals in the future?" (multiple choice)



The pattern is clear:

AI is not seen as replacing fundamental legal reasoning; on the contrary, legal reasoning is ranked highest. At the same time, adaptability and creative problem-solving are also seen as crucial enablers in a changing environment.



We asked the respondents if there were any competencies they wanted to add to our list. Many mentioned judgment, knowledge, and humanity, with the following argumentation:



Critical Thinking & Independent Judgment

- Critically evaluating AI-generated output
- Source verification
- Thinking independently rather than blindly trusting AI
- Analytical ability
- Recognising errors, hallucinations, and distortions in AI responses



Solid Legal Knowledge & Professional Expertise

- Deep domain knowledge as a basis for quality-checking AI
- Legal methodology and principles
- Knowing enough to recognise when AI "goes wrong"
- Specialist vs. generalist expertise



Human & Communication Skills

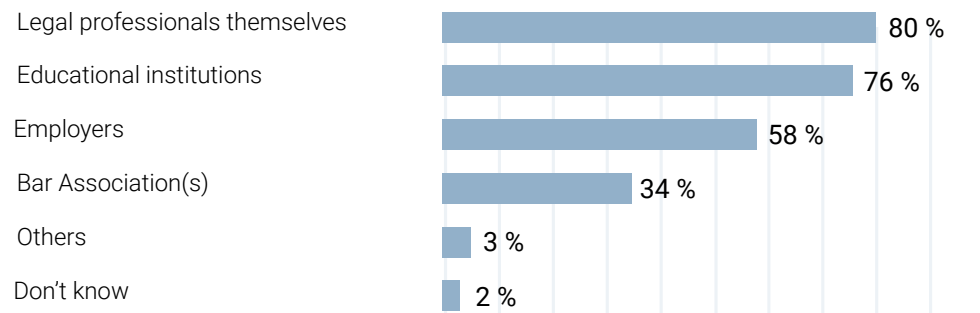
- Empathy, ethics, and moral responsibility
- Client relations and personalised counsel
- Argumentation and presentation
- Pedagogical ability — explaining results clearly
- The human element in mediation and conflict resolution

Responsibility for future competencies



The respondents were asked:

"Who is responsible for ensuring that legal professionals have the right competencies in the future?" (multiple choice)



The responsibility is seen as shared, with the strongest emphasis on individual responsibility and educational institutions. Employers also play a noticeable role, particularly in practice-oriented skills and continuing education.



“The legal profession deserves a MIR (system for accessing medical specialization), as in Germany, both for entry into the civil service and for the legal profession or the judiciary”.

Female, age 40–49, Public Sector, Spain

Inside the Legal Mind

What is on the legal professionals' minds, considering concerns about AI in legal work.

Across all the free-text answers, legal professionals' biggest concerns about AI in legal work fall into three closely connected categories.



Respondents were asked to share if other things came to mind regarding concerns about the use of AI. This is how they answered:

1. Incorrect, invented and over-simplified answers – treated as if they were true

The strongest and most repeated concern is that AI produces wrong, incomplete or invented legal information, which is then believed and acted on:

- AI hallucinates: it invents statutes, case law and principles that do not exist, mixes jurisdictions, uses outdated law and misapplies legal concepts.
- Answers look fluent and authoritative but lack nuance and are often factually or legally wrong; they do not reflect the complexity of real cases.
- Clients and citizens – and some inexperienced professionals – tend to trust AI answers too much, assuming they are correct because they are well-formulated and come from a “smart system”.

As a result, practitioners see more clients and self-represented parties with unrealistic expectations, flawed arguments and AI-generated documents that create extra workload and may undermine legal certainty rather than strengthen it.



Inside the Legal Mind

2. Over-reliance, loss of critical judgement and de-skilling

The second major concern is how people use AI, not just what it is technically able to do:

- Legal professionals may become intellectually “lazy”: they let AI do the initial analysis and drafting, and stop training their own legal method, argumentation and writing skills.
- There is widespread fear of a gradual erosion of core legal competencies – critical reading of sources, contextual interpretation, professional judgement and the ability to handle complex, discretionary questions.
- Both clients and citizens, and some professionals risk a Dunning–Kruger effect: AI’s confident tone gives them a false sense of expertise, leading them to challenge or ignore qualified legal advice.

In short, many respondents worry that if AI is used as a substitute rather than a tool, it will weaken the profession’s intellectual foundations over time.

Inside the Legal Mind

3. System-level risks: confidentiality, opacity and volume overload

A third cluster of concerns is more structural and systemic:

- Confidentiality and data protection: there is anxiety about sensitive client- or case data being entered into general-purpose AI tools, with unclear storage, training and reuse of that information.
- Lack of transparency and accountability: when AI is used inside authorities or courts, respondents fear decision-making where neither reasons nor underlying data can be properly examined, and where responsibility for errors becomes blurred.
- Volume and noise: AI makes it very cheap to produce long and complex texts. Practitioners already see:
 - Over-long AI-generated complaints and submissions from self-represented parties.
 - More “noise” in case files with little added legal value.
 - Increased pressure on courts and agencies to process, sift and correct AI-driven misunderstandings.

The common threat is that, unless AI is kept clearly in the role of decision support under human control, it may overload institutions, reduce transparency, and weaken both trust and protection of rights.

Overall, legal professionals are not opposed to AI as such. Many highlight its potential for faster research and “first drafts”. The core concern is that fallible but convincing AI outputs will be used uncritically by people without the legal skills to check them, leading to misinformation, weaker professional competence and extra strain on the justice system.



Expert Opinion - Sweden



By Henrik Wallin, business performance coach, mental trainer and speaker at Force Studio.

When I read the report, Inside the Legal Mind, I see a clear paradox. Legal professionals identify legal reasoning, adaptability and strategic problem-solving as some of the most important competencies for the future. At the same time, I regularly meet many legal professionals who have long struggled to find time for learning, reflection and professional development.

AI creates a need to strengthen human capabilities even further, while the transition itself risks reducing the space available to develop and apply them. The question, therefore, is not only which competencies the AI era requires, but what is needed to enable people to actually develop them.

A I's competency paradox – The more technology can do, the more is required of the lawyer

Legal reasoning is becoming more important, not less

Respondents rank legal reasoning as the most important competency for the future. This is followed by adaptability and continuous learning, as well as strategic and creative problem-solving. Technical competence ranks further down the list.

This aligns closely with my own view. AI does not reduce the need for legal expertise – quite the opposite. As AI generates increasing volumes of content and answers, the lawyer's ability to assess, question and evaluate the output becomes even more important.

This is particularly evident in respondents' open-ended answers. Critical thinking, independent judgement, source verification and the ability to identify errors or hallucinations in AI-generated answers are recurring themes. Respondents also highlight the need for deep legal knowledge to be able to assess when an AI-generated answer is incorrect. For me, this raises a question that frequently comes up in my work with

clients:

How do people maintain and develop the competencies needed to critically assess and verify the final output when they are no longer practising those skills to the same extent throughout the work process?

Continuous learning requires time

It does not surprise me that adaptability and continuous learning rank highly by the respondents. AI is developing rapidly, and what we learn today will need to be supplemented tomorrow.

The challenge is time.

Many lawyers I meet say that they already struggle to find time for professional development. They recognise the need to learn, but when that learning is supposed to happen is less clear.

It is easy to place the responsibility on the individual. The report shows that legal professionals themselves also recognise this responsibility: 80 % say that legal professionals are responsible for ensuring the right competencies for the future. But the responsibility extends beyond the individual. Educational institutions rank almost as highly, at 76 %, while 58 % point to employers.

My conclusion is that continuous learning cannot simply be squeezed in alongside, or on top, of daily work. If organisations want employees who can adapt to rapid technological development, they also need to create the time and space for them to do so.

When more material requires more scrutiny

Respondents also express concerns about incorrect or fabricated AI-generated answers, overre-

liance on technology and a gradual weakening of critical judgement.

Increased use of AI may therefore also increase the need for verification. This is often described as the Verification Value Paradox: when the time saved by AI risks being offset by the time required to verify its output. I believe the study points to a similar pattern at an institutional level. AI's ability to produce large volumes of text is already increasing the amount of information that courts and public authorities need to sort, review and, where necessary, correct.

This creates an interesting tension when viewed alongside the report's findings on future competencies. Strategic and creative problem-solving is highlighted as one of the capabilities that will become increasingly important. Yet the more information that needs to be reviewed and verified, the more time and mental capacity may be diverted away from precisely this kind of work.

When AI frees up time by handling parts of the work, do we use that time to develop the competencies that are becoming even more important – or do we simply fill it with more work?

Technical competence is also about self-confidence

There is another dimension that the report does not examine directly, but which I encounter in my work: a form of technology-related stress that is becoming increasingly relevant with AI.

People enter this technological transition from very different starting points. Some find learning new tools stimulating. Others doubt their ability to learn or feel uncertain about whether they are using the technology correctly.

It is therefore not only a question of technical competence, but also of confidence in one's own ability to use the technology. Do I believe I can learn this? Do I know when I am using the tool correctly? And do I trust my own judgement when AI gives me an answer?

Giving people access to AI is not the same as creating the conditions for them to feel confident using it.

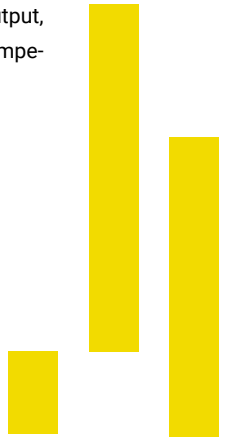
Future competencies need room to develop

For me, this is at the heart of AI's competency paradox: the better AI becomes, the more important human capabilities such as legal judgement, critical thinking, adaptability and strategic problem-solving may become.

But that also means creating the conditions for these capabilities to develop.

The AI transition is about more than learning to use new tools. It must also be about making time for learning, creating space for reflection, establishing clear frameworks and enabling people to maintain control over the quality of their own work.

Otherwise, we risk creating a vicious circle: the more time we spend verifying AI-generated output, the less time remains to develop the very competencies that effective verification requires.



Chapter 3

Motivation, Working Life and Career Structures





Motivation, Working Life and Career Structures

This chapter explores what motivates legal professionals, how stable they are in their current positions, and how they experience career structures in the sector. With the extended data, a short subsection on perceptions of gender equality and the expected impact of pay transparency has also been included.

What motivates legal professionals?

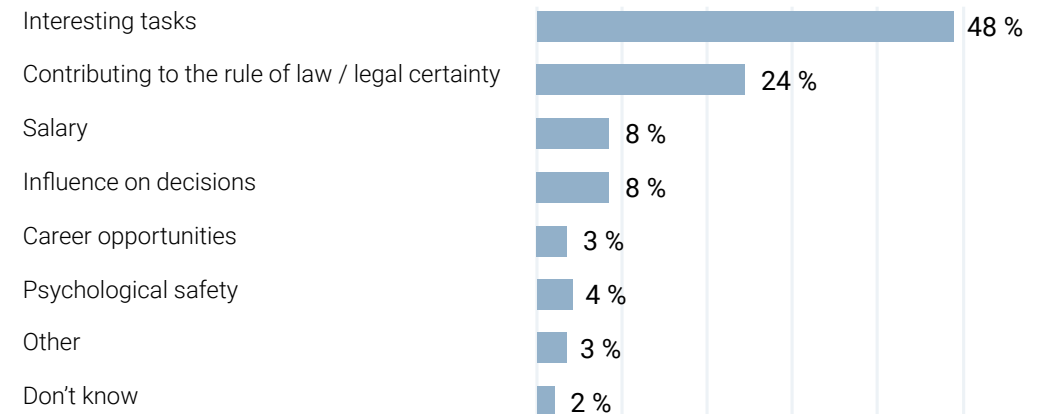
When asked what motivates respondents most in their job (single choice), legal professionals primarily point to intrinsic factors and the opportunity to contribute to the rule of law.



The respondents were asked:

"What motivates you most in your job?" (Single choice)

Across all respondents



What motivates legal professionals?

Two patterns stand out:

Intrinsic motivation dominates: almost half of the respondents are primarily motivated by “interesting tasks”.

Normative motivation is strong: nearly one in four is primarily driven by contributing to rule of law and legal certainty.

There are notable differences across segments and countries: for example, those working in police, courts and prosecution services are more likely to select “Contributing to the rule of law / legal certainty”, whereas lawyers in private practice and in-house roles more often select “interesting tasks” or “salary”.

Gender differences are visible but not significant:



Men are somewhat more likely to be motivated by salary (**10 %**) than women (**6 %**).



Women are more likely to be motivated by contributing to rule of law/legal certainty (**26 %**) than men (**22 %**).

Overall, the motivational profile confirms that legal professionals see themselves both as knowledge workers and as guardians of the justice system.

Job mobility: intentions to leave and reasons



The respondents were asked:

"Have you considered leaving your current workplace within the past 6 months?"

Yes

No

Don't know

37 %

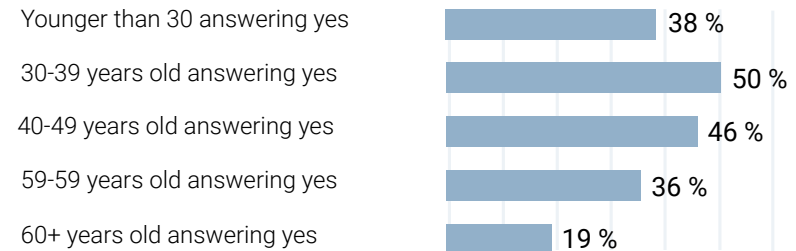
60 %

3 %



More than one in three legal professionals have recently considered leaving their current job, indicating significant potential turnover.

By age group, intentions to leave vary markedly:



Job-change intentions peak in the 30–39 age group and remain high among those in their 40s, while they are lower among the youngest and significantly lower among those over 59. This suggests:

- A mid-career segment, who might experience a need for more work-life balance (30–49).
- A younger cohort (under 30) that is already as mobile as the average, and considerably more mobile than the oldest group.

By segment, the intentions to leave their current jobs are highest among in-house lawyers and those in organisations/NGOs, and somewhat lower among police/courts/prosecution and public sector employees.

There are also differences in motivation. Among respondents primarily motivated by salary, **54 %** have considered leaving in the past six months; among those motivated by interesting tasks, **33 %** have considered leaving, and among those motivated by rule of law/legal certainty, **35 %** have done so. This indicates that:

Extrinsically motivated profiles (salary-driven) are most likely to be in motion.

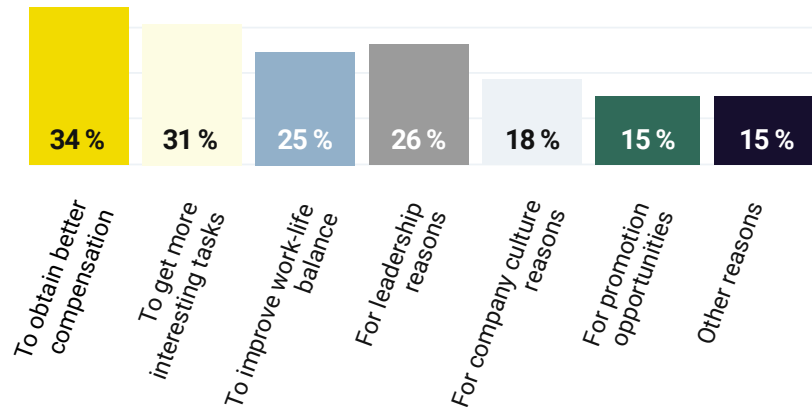
Intrinsic and normative motivators are associated with moderately higher stability, but not with immobility.



By age, younger and mid-career professionals are more likely to cite better compensation, more interesting tasks and promotion opportunities as reasons for considering a move, whereas older respondents are relatively more influenced by leadership issues and, in some cases, work-life balance.

Reasons for considering leaving

Among those who have considered leaving, the main reasons are:



This pattern confirms that:

- Pay, task content and work-life balance are central drivers of mobility.
- Leadership quality and organisational culture also play a significant role.
- Promotion and career development are particularly important for some groups.

What is on the legal professionals' minds, considering the reasons for leaving their current job.

Among those who have considered leaving their current workplace, the two dominant reasons are: high workload, stress and deteriorating working conditions and a strong desire for change and better fit in terms of career development, task content, geography and work–life balance.



Respondents were asked to share if other things came to mind regarding why they considered leaving their job. This is how they answered:

1. Workload, stress and deteriorating working conditions

A large share of comments points to mental strain and unsustainable working conditions as the primary driver:

Many describe their work as mentally draining, with high pressure, burnout, depression, stress and harassment (from clients, colleagues or within the organisation).

There is strong frustration with what is perceived as worsening institutional frameworks: understaffing, excessive administrative and fiscal burdens, constant reorganisations, micro-management and procedures that are experienced as a sign of mistrust from management.

Several mention low pay and lack of recognition relative to responsibility and workload.

Some explicitly link their frustration to a sense that rule of law is being undermined in practice (weak institutions, poor-quality decisions, political interference), making their daily work feel less meaningful.



Inside the Legal Mind

2. Desire for change, better fit and life balance

The second major driver is a positive wish to move towards something better, rather than only away from something bad:

Career change and development: respondents talk about wanting to “try something new”, start their own firm, move into another legal area or leave law altogether for a different field that fits their interests and values better; others simply feel they have been in the same type of role for too long or that their current tasks are not sufficiently interesting or legally challenging.

Geography and everyday life: many mention long commuting times and a desire to move closer to home or family, or to another region or country. They want more time for life outside work and a better work–life balance.

Security and autonomy: some are on temporary contracts, face downsizing or see their tasks disappearing, and therefore look for more secure roles. Others want more autonomy and control over their time and workload by, for example, becoming self-employed.

Expert Opinion - Norway

A profession with purpose

By Merete Smith, Secretary General of the Norwegian Bar Association

One of the clearest findings in this survey is that legal professionals are driven by purpose as much as by the work itself: interesting tasks come first, followed by contributing to the rule of law and legal certainty. The challenge for the profession is to create working lives and career structures that allow that sense of purpose to endure.

For many legal professionals, work is about more than a career. Almost one in four respondents say that contributing to the rule of law and legal certainty is their main source of motivation. That matters at a time when the rule of law cannot be taken for granted. A majority believe it is under pressure, and nearly three quarters say that pressure has increased. Political decisions, misinformation, and AI are among the challenges identified in the report.

Safeguarding the rule of law is a responsibility shared across the profession. Defence lawyers, counsel for victims and lawyers providing legal aid all help ensure that rights can be exercised and state power challenged.



Photo: Yina Chan

Gender and equality in career structures

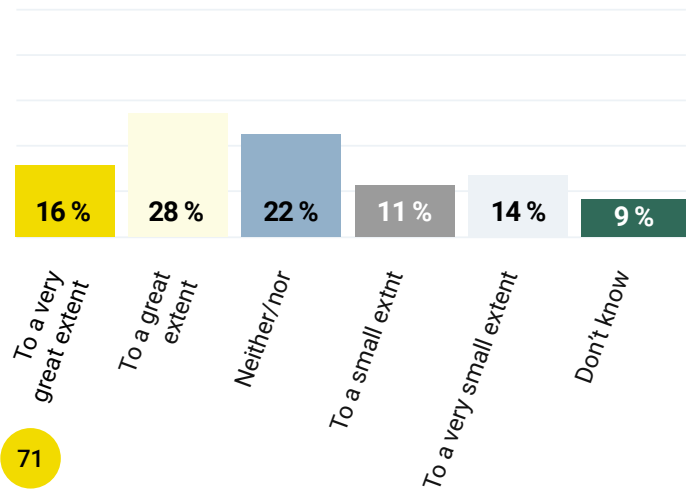
While the main focus of this report is rule of law, AI, motivation and competencies, the survey also included two questions directly related to gender equality in the legal sector. These questions offer important context for understanding working life and career structures.

Is it harder for women to reach top positions?



The respondents were asked:
“Do you think it is harder for women than for men to reach top positions within the legal sector?”

Across all respondents:



In total, **44 %** believe that it is harder for women than for men to reach top positions to a “great” or “very great” extent, while **25 %** believe this only to a small or very small extent. The remainder (**22 %**) are neutral and **9 %** unsure.

The perception of gendered barriers is thus widespread, though not unanimous.

Gender differences

Perceptions differ by gender (Q34):

to a very great extent to a great extent to a small or very small extent

Among women:

25 % 38 % 10 %

to a very great extent to a great extent to a small or very small extent

Among men:

6 % 17 % 41 %

Female legal professionals overwhelmingly experience significant barriers for women to reach top positions, whereas male colleagues are much more divided and far more likely to perceive barriers as small. This divergence is itself important for understanding organisational discussions about equality: men and women do not see the starting point in the same way.

63 %

women see substantial
barriers in total



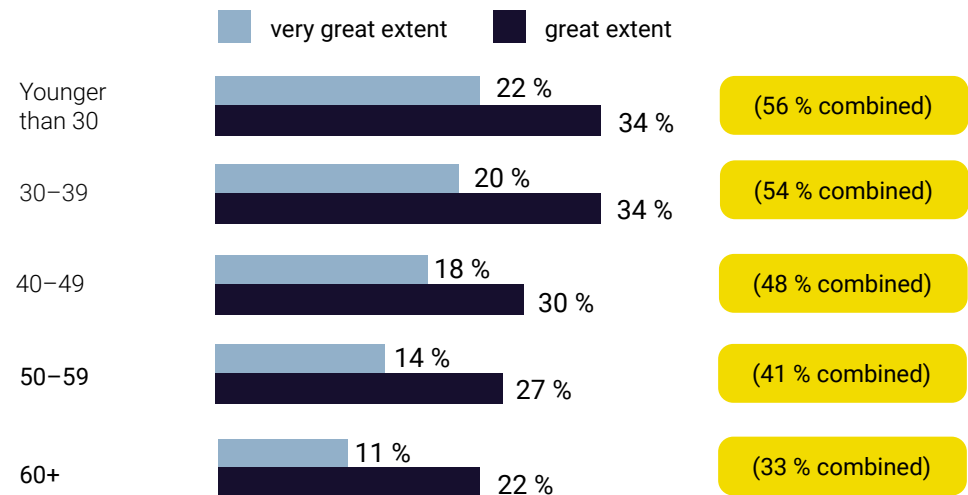
23 %

men see substantial
barriers in total

Age differences



Age also matters when it comes to the following question:
“Do you think it is harder for women than for men to reach top
positions within the legal sector?”



Younger and mid-career respondents are more likely than older ones to perceive substantial barriers for women’s advancement.



In other words: The perception that it is harder for women to reach top positions is strongest among **younger and female** legal professionals.

What is on the legal professionals' minds, considering equality in the legal industry

Three consistent messages stand out about equality in the legal sector



Respondents were asked to share if other things came to mind regarding this topic. This is how they answered:

1. Strong disagreement on whether there is a problem

Respondents are deeply divided:

A large group insists the legal sector is no more (or even less) unequal than others. They point to:

- Many women in law studies and in the profession.
- Their own experience of having many female managers, judges or colleagues.
- The view that career outcomes mainly reflect individual choices (e.g. work–life balance, sector choice, willingness to work very long hours), not discrimination.

An equally large group argues that equality is clearly not achieved:

- Men remain over-represented in top positions (partners, managing partners, senior judges, general counsel), despite women being a majority among students and often in lower and mid-level roles.
- There are still unexplained pay gaps, and “old boys’ networks” that favor men in recruitment, promotion and client access.
- Several mention harassment, sexist culture and being taken less seriously as women.

There is also a smaller but vocal subset group - who feel men are now disadvantaged (e.g. heavy feminisation of the profession, quotas, fewer male students). For them, the “equality problem” is now about men’s under-representation and opportunities.

2. Structures and culture, not formal rules, are seen as the core issue

Among those who believe there is a real equality challenge, the emphasis is on structures and culture rather than formal rights:

Work model and career structure

- Partnership tracks and senior roles (especially in large law firms) are built around very long hours, constant availability and strong focus on billable time/income.
- This model is seen as much easier to combine with traditional male roles (less primary caregiving) and much harder for those who take more responsibility for children, pregnancy, parental leave and care work – still mostly women.

Life-course and care responsibilities

- Pregnancy, maternity leave and childcare create “career breaks” and lost momentum at exactly the years when networks, visibility and major cases are built. Even short absences or reduced hours can have long-term effects on pay, promotion and partnership prospects.
- Many describe a “third shift”: women disproportionately carry unpaid care and household work, which limits their capacity to match the extreme work expectations in parts of the sector.

Biases and informal practices

- Recurrent references to “men hiring men”, informal male networks, client preferences for male lawyers in high-stakes mandates, and subtle but persistent bias in how potential and performance are judged.
- Several women describe different expectations: men seen as “stable” and “rational”, women as “emotional” or “less committed”; women having to “prove” themselves more and being judged harder on both competence and appearance.



At the same time, some respondents stress that personal choices and preferences also play a role: many women (and an increasing number of men) simply do not want a life built around 60–80-hour weeks. But they argue that this is exactly why the current model produces unequal outcomes.

Inside the Legal Mind

3. Equality looks very different across segments and countries

Finally, the comments show that “the legal sector” is not one reality:

By segment

- Equality is often perceived as less problematic in the public sector, courts and in-house roles, where working hours are more predictable and formal HR frameworks are stronger.
- The biggest perceived problems are in large commercial law firms and some private-sector environments (including in Spain and France), where work culture is described as conservative, profit-driven, competitive and still strongly shaped by male norms.
- Some note that certain areas (e.g. social law, family law, public sector roles) have become heavily feminised and relatively lower paid, while “hard law” and high-margin business work remain male-dominated.

By country

- Nordic and French/Danish comments often stress work–life balance and care responsibilities as structural barriers for women in top positions, despite strong female presence overall.
- Spanish comments show a split: many insist there is now broad gender equality in access and everyday work, while others highlight slow progress in leadership positions and comment on persistent machismo or patriarchal culture.
- Across countries, there are also voices worried about over-feminisation of the profession (too few men entering law) and what this may mean for balance and legitimacy in the long run.

In sum, the answers show that equality in the legal sector is not a marginal or resolved issue. It is experienced very differently, but many legal professionals see:

- clear numerical imbalances at the top despite female majorities at the bottom,
- a career model that rewards extreme availability and still interacts with gendered care roles, and
- strong emotions on both sides – some convinced women still face structural barriers, others convinced the debate has gone too far and now disadvantages men.

Expert Opinion - Denmark



We must not only attract lawyers. We must give reasons to stay – or return.

By Lise Lotte Hjerrild, Senior Partner at HortenDahl and member of IBA Management Board

Every day, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, in-house counsels and other legal professionals help businesses navigate complexity, protect individual rights and uphold the rule of law. For many of us that sense of purpose is one of the reasons we chose the legal profession in the first place. The European Legal Profession Survey 2026 suggests that this remains true across the profession today.

Nearly half of respondents identify interesting tasks as their strongest source of motivation and almost one in four cite the opportunity to contribute to legal certainty and the rule of law. That is encouraging. At the same time, other findings are harder to ignore. More than one-third of legal professionals have considered leaving their current employer within the past six months.

Dissatisfaction rarely has a single cause. While compensation matters, the survey points to

workload, leadership, work-life balance, culture and development opportunities as significant drivers of mobility. Many of the factors influencing whether people stay or leave cannot be addressed through financial incentives alone.

Creating Sustainable Careers

Our talent retention challenge is therefore also about the environment in which people work: whether they have access to meaningful assignments, can see a future for themselves in the organisation, experience empowering leadership and have sufficient flexibility to combine professional ambition with life outside the office.

In short, it is about creating sustainable careers.

The qualitative comments in the report are particularly striking. Respondents describe increasing workloads, staffing pressures and rising levels of stress. Several mention burnout, while others describe working conditions so demanding that they have begun to lose their sense of purpose. That is the finding that stayed with me most strongly, because if meaningful work is one of the reasons people choose this profession, losing that sense of purpose goes to the heart of our ability to retain them.

Legal work has never been easy as it is often at the end of the “food chain”. Difficult matters, client demands, sudden workloads, tight deadlines and periods of intense work pressure are part of the profession. But chronic overload should not be.

Rethinking Career Progression

The challenge of creating sustainable careers is not limited to workload and well-being. The report also raises important questions about who progresses within the profession and under what conditions.

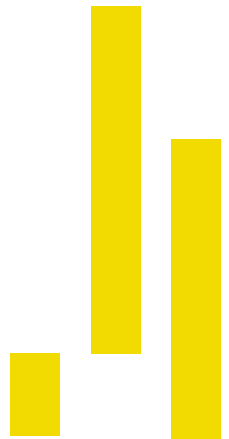
Many legal professionals believe women continue to face greater barriers to reaching senior positions. Equally striking is the gap between how women and men perceive the issue. A clear majority of female respondents see significant barriers, while male respondents are far more divided.

The important point is not whether everyone agrees on the causes, but that people experience our profession differently. Any serious attempt at progress must start by recognising that fact.

Much of the debate is not about formal rights or policies, but about culture and career structures: billable hours, constant availability, caregiving responsibilities and access to informal networks.

There is no useful way of reducing these questions to either structures or individual choices; both clearly play a role. Perception is and has always been reality! We employers have a responsibility to create equitable opportunities and challenge outdated assumptions, while individuals should be encouraged, guided and aided to pursue their ambitions and step forward when opportunities arise.

At HortenDahl (one of the largest Danish law firms), we work actively with mentoring and sponsorship programmes, leadership development initiatives and professional development tools intended to help employees pursue their ambitions. Those initiatives matter. But we are also conscious that sustainable careers are not created through programmes alone. They must be supported by the structures, culture and day-to-day behaviours that shape people’s experience of working life.



Expert Opinion - Denmark - continued

In my team, I do my utmost to ensure that we keep an open, reasonable and constructive dialogue with clients to create optimal working conditions. Of course, we appreciate the urgency of client matters and view their success as a team effort. However, we are all human beings with personal lives and a need for sleep which we all have an interest in creating space for. This practice has procured a very long-lasting team and client relationships built on mutual understanding, trust and respect. I also believe that creating sustainable careers requires us as employers to think differently about career progression.

Over time, I have become less convinced that career progression needs to follow a particular path. We are often too quick to confuse pace with ambition. Not everyone wants the same things at the same point in life. Some accelerate their careers early. Others choose, or need, to slow down because of family responsibilities or different priorities. Some discover their appetite for leadership later than expected.

None of those choices should automatically determine what opportunities are available five or ten years later.

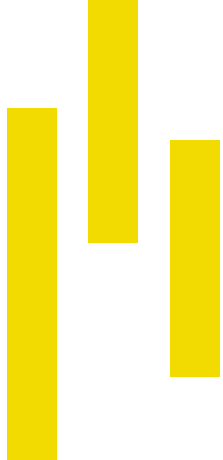
If we want diverse leadership teams and sustainable workplaces, we should be careful about assuming that the future partner, practice leader or executive will necessarily be the person who followed the fastest, most conventional route. Talent does not always develop according to a set timeline. And in that context, leaving the profession for a while could create a different skill set and provide valuable insights.

Create Reasons to Stay or Return

My own career is a reminder that professional development rarely follows a predetermined script. Looking back, the choices I made early on could easily have led me in a very different direction.

Immediately after I was admitted to the Danish Bar, I spent a year abroad studying for my LL.M. and upon returning, I wanted to go in-house. Instead, I ended up pursuing a career in one law firm and changed to another in order to raise a family along the way. I advanced internally in the latter firm and externally in clients' and international non-profit organisations. And I love every part of my job. However, as a mother of two young adults and with many young colleagues, I fully appreciate that younger generations might consider differentiating their CVs. A linear career path may not be right for everyone and thus retention is not the only measure of success.

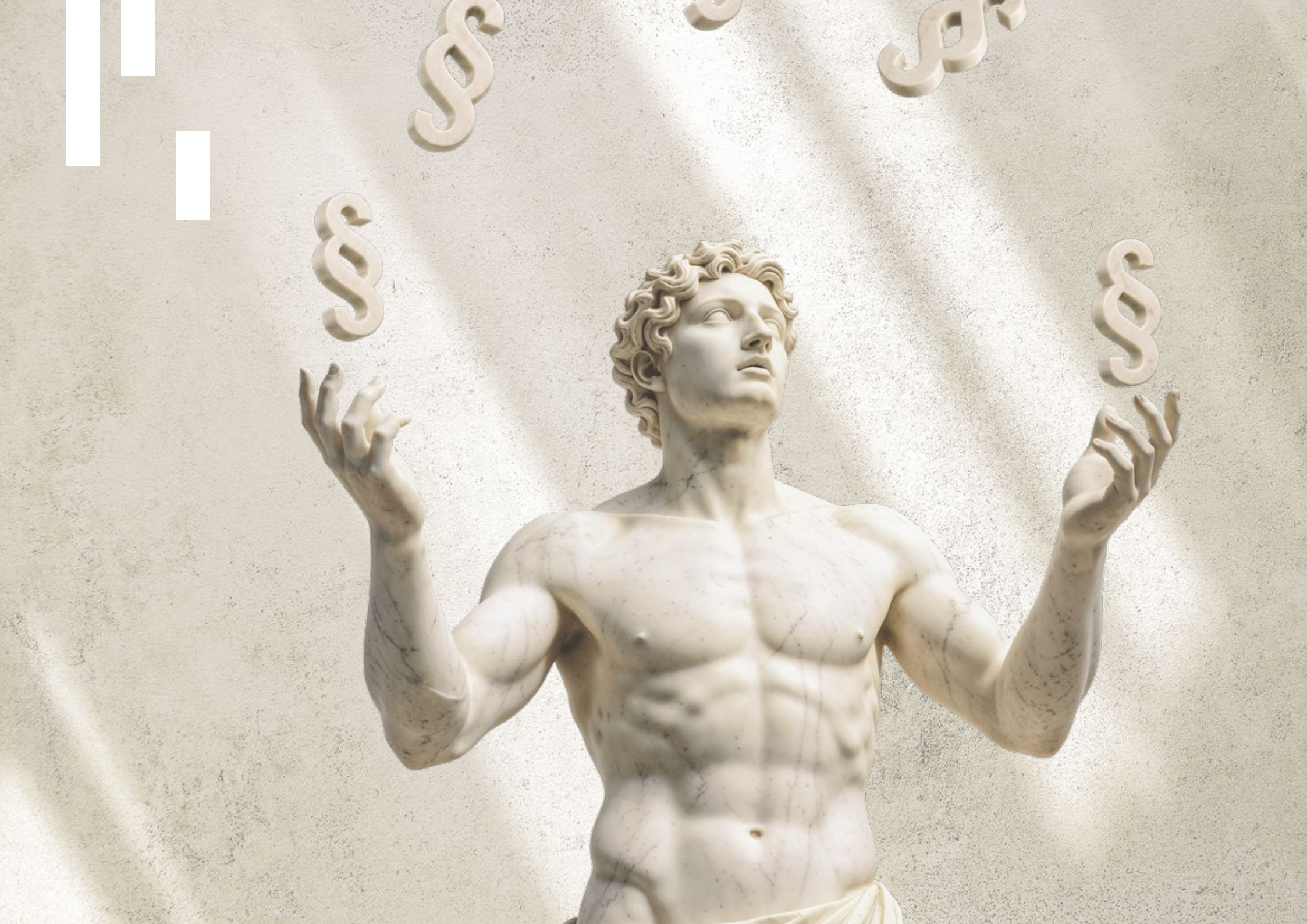
I believe that in the legal profession, we should encourage people to follow their own paths at their own pace and embrace it by making sure that those who enter – or re-enter – our profession learn a lot and are treated as the invaluable assets they are in a people's business at every life stage. It is our responsibility as leaders to ensure that our professionals are given the individual challenges and support needed in daring to dream of, actively pursuing and co-creating a sustainable career that is not necessarily linear.



Chapter 4

The Next Generation of Legal Professionals







The Next Generation of Legal Professionals

In this chapter we look at where the younger generation of legal professionals differs from the majority. The chapter systematically examines these differences and identifies where the generational perspective adds new insight to the report's themes.

Respondents aged under 30 represent 9 % of the sample.

On many questions they resemble the rest of the profession, but on a number of dimensions they stand out. This section highlights only those areas where differences are substantial.

Rule of law: Same level of concern, different threat picture

On the core questions about whether the rule of law is under pressure and whether this pressure has increased, younger respondents answer almost like everyone else: around half say the rule of law is under pressure and roughly seven in ten say that pressure has increased over the past three years. Here, generational differences are modest.

Where the younger group does stand out is in what they see as driving pressure:

They are more likely than average to point to misinformation (**62 % vs. 49 % overall**) and economic conditions (**39 % vs. 28 % overall**) as sources of pressure on the rule of law.

Political decisions remain the main driver for all age groups, but the younger generation puts more weight on the information environment and economic factors than older colleagues do.

AI: Heavy users, critical realists

The under-30 group is clearly more deeply integrated with AI than the rest of the profession.

67 % of under 30s use AI at least weekly, compared to **59 %** in the total sample. They are more likely to use AI daily (**38 % vs. 31 %**) and less likely to use it rarely (**13 % vs. 19 %**).

Despite this high usage, their attitudes are not more naive or uncritical:

- Under 30s are more likely than average to see clients' AI use as a disadvantage (**45 % vs. 34 %** overall), and less likely to call it an advantage (**15 % vs. 19 %**).
- A majority of under 30s (**58 %**) say there is a great or very great risk that AI leads to insufficient legal competencies among younger lawyers. While this is slightly lower than in the total group (**64 %**), younger respondents are also more willing to say the risk is small or very small (**18 % vs. 10 %**) and less often answer "don't know" (**9 % vs. 16 %**).



Overall, the younger generation combines high AI usage with critical realism: they see concrete risks for skills and are clearly dissatisfied with how legal education is responding.



Motivation and mobility: More career- and pay-oriented, highly mobile

On motivation, younger respondents share the profession's emphasis on interesting tasks, but with a more pronounced focus on career and pay:

- Under 30s are much more likely to say their main motivation is career opportunities (**14 %** vs. **3 %** overall) and salary (**14 %** vs. **8 %**).
- They are less likely than older colleagues to name contributing to the rule of law/legal certainty as their primary motivator (**15 %** vs. **24 %** overall).

Gender and equality in careers

The younger generation is also more likely to perceive gender-based barriers in the profession:

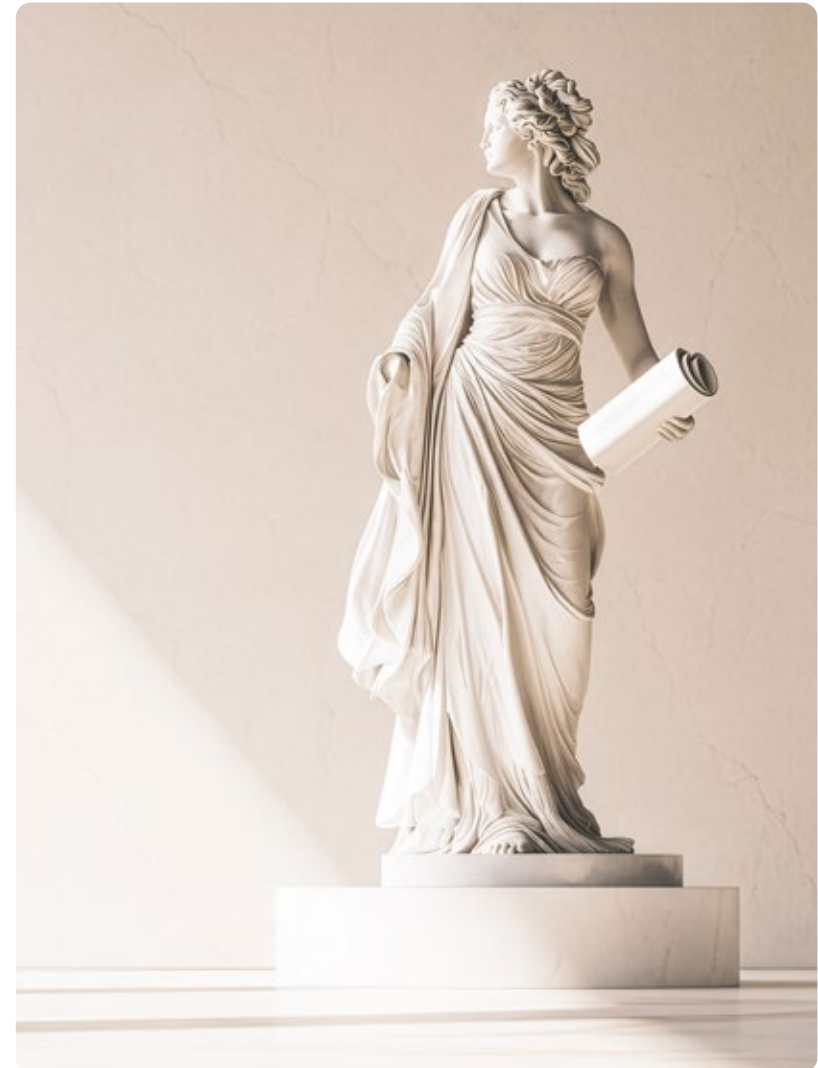
56 % of under 30s believe it is harder for women than for men to reach top positions to a great or very great extent, compared with **44 %** in the total sample and only **33 %** among those over age 59.

Summary: Where the younger generation differs

In sum, the under-30 group differs from older cohorts on a limited but important set of points:

- They emphasise misinformation and economic conditions more as threats to the rule of law.
- They are heavier users of AI, yet more critical of client AI use and clearly concerned about skills and the pace of educational adaptation.
- They are more motivated by career and salary and show high mobility, especially when development, tasks and culture do not match expectations.
- They are more likely to perceive significant barriers for women to reach top positions in the legal sector.

All other areas where their answers do not differ meaningfully from the overall sample can be handled in the main thematic chapters without specific generational focus.



Expert Opinion - France



What do young legal professionals expect from the evolving legal professions in Europe?

By Michel Séjean, Professor of Law, Co-Director of the Master's Program in Digital Activities Law at Université Sorbonne Paris Nord

One might have expected a portrait of a clear generational divide. In reality, the chapter devoted to respondents under the age of 30 reveals a shift in perspective rather than a rupture. At first glance, their level of concern for the rule of law is broadly comparable to that of older cohorts. A closer examination, however, shows that the sources of this concern differ significantly between generations. Younger respondents are more likely to identify disinformation (62 % versus 49 %) and economic conditions (39 % versus 28 %) as major threats than political decisions per se. This may reflect a generation that has come of age in an environment character-

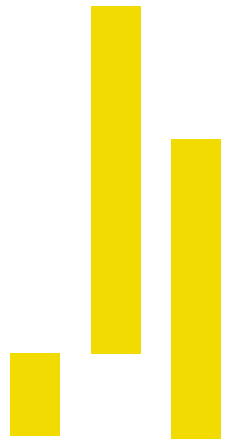
ised by information overload and persistent economic uncertainty, leading it to perceive threats to the rule of law as diffuse and systemic rather than attributable to clearly identifiable actors.

Perhaps the most striking finding of the survey concerns artificial intelligence. Respondents under 30 are by far the most frequent users of AI (67 % report using it at least weekly), yet they are also the most sceptical about granting clients direct access to these tools (45 % view such access as a drawback, compared with 34 % across the full sample). Far from being contradictory, this combination reflects the critical distance that comes with hands-on experience: those who use AI on a daily basis are also the most familiar with its shortcomings—hallucinations, polished yet unreliable outputs, and other well-documented limitations. While their concern about the erosion of professional skills among junior lawyers is only slightly below the overall average, it is coupled with clear dissatisfaction regarding the ability of higher education institutions to keep pace with technological change. This is perhaps the survey's most actionable finding for universities: the generation most heavily "augmented" by AI is also the one most explicitly calling for stronger training in legal reasoning and critical thinking, rather than mere technical familiarity with AI tools.

With regard to work motivation, the picture is more conventionally generational. Career progression and remuneration carry significantly greater weight among respondents under 30 (14 % each, compared with 3 % and 8 %, respectively, for the overall sample), while contributing to the rule of law is comparatively less prominent (15 % versus 24 %). Combined with their higher propensity for professional mobility, this motivational profile

challenges the simplistic narrative that younger professionals are driven primarily by a search for "interesting work". Instead, intrinsic commitment coexists with strong expectations of financial recognition and meaningful career prospects, raising important questions for the talent retention strategies of both law firms and public institutions.

Finally, younger respondents' greater sensitivity to gender-related barriers (56 %, compared with 33 % among respondents aged over 59) appears to reflect not so much an objective worsening of inequality as a shift in normative expectations. Practices that were once tolerated or rendered invisible are now increasingly recognised and identified as structural barriers.



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