



Gender Equality Charter

2025 Survey of GEC Signatories
Summary Report



2025 at a glance

About the survey

Conducted every two years since 2018.



137 current signatories

invited to complete the 2025 survey



128 organisations completed the survey

119 existing signatories and 9 new signatories

Totalling **25%** of the profession



75% were law firms

with the rest comprising in-house legal teams,
barristers sole, chambers, and sole practitioners

Charter commitments

1

Deliver
unconscious
bias training

2

Audit and
close gender
pay gaps

3

Offer and
encourage
flexible working

4

Review
organisational
practices

5

Adopt
equitable
briefing and
instruction

6

Increase equality
and inclusion in
senior legal roles

Progress against Charter commitments

1 Unconscious bias training



69%

had conducted training in the last two years. Up from 54% in 2023.

2 Gender pay audit

100%

of in-house legal teams had conducted pay audits



63%

of law firms conducted an audit, down from 72% in 2023



57%

of law firms found no gap or the gap was favourable to women



3 Flexible working arrangements

95% of law firms and in-house teams offer remote working.



17%

offer one day a week

29%

offer two days a week

13%

offer three days a week

2%

offer four days a week

36%

offer five days a week

4 Review organisational practices

Fewer organisations were reviewing key areas of practice for gender equality.



Review of retention and promotion dropped from 73% in 2023 to

51%

Review of recruitment dropped 77% in 2023 to

50%

Review of training and development dropped 61% in 2023 to

43%

5 Equitable briefing and instruction

Target: 50% of external instruction to go to women



Organisations adopting the target increased from 21% in 2023 to

37%



71%

of the 21 organisations tracking instruction were meeting or exceeding the target.

6 Equality and inclusion in senior legal roles

41%

of senior legal roles in law firms are held by women, up from 36% in 2023.

71%

of in-house general counsel roles are held by women.



Next steps

Engage with the profession on future efforts to advance gender equality.

Develop a new strategic direction and action plan, including how the Charter will evolve.



2025 Survey of GEC Signatories



Background and survey methodology

The New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa implemented the Gender Equality Charter (GEC) in 2018. The purpose of the Charter is to encourage legal workplaces (law firms, in-house legal teams, barristerial chambers, barristers, and sole practitioners) to make a public statement of their commitment to improving gender equality and inclusion. Since 2018, the Charter has been adopted by more than 170 legal workplaces across New Zealand.

One of the conditions of the Charter is that participants complete a baseline survey of gender equality-related activities at their workplace upon signing and complete follow-up surveys on a biennial basis. The survey includes questions assessing the degree to which signatories are fulfilling the six Charter commitments outlined below.

This summary report compares the results of the 2025 survey with previous surveys (2018, 2021, 2023), which enables the Law Society to gauge progress by participants towards the commitments under the Charter. The full survey results including analysis will be published in early 2026.

The Law Society has removed or reworded some questions from 2023 to improve the efficiency of the survey and the value of the data collected. In addition, some new questions have been added. This includes offering survey respondents the opportunity to consent to having their answers to a select number of questions published in the final report.

As of August 2025, 137 legal workplaces were considered active signatories to the GEC and were invited to participate in the survey. When the survey closed at the end of October 2025, 119 had completed the survey, for a response rate of 87%.

A further 15 organisations that had recently expressed interest in becoming Charter signatories were invited to complete their baseline survey; nine of those organisations completed the survey and, by doing so, became new Charter signatories.

The six commitments of the Gender Equality Charter

The Charter outlines six commitments that signatories are expected to meet to demonstrate their support for improving the retention and advancement of women lawyers in their organisation. The six commitments are:

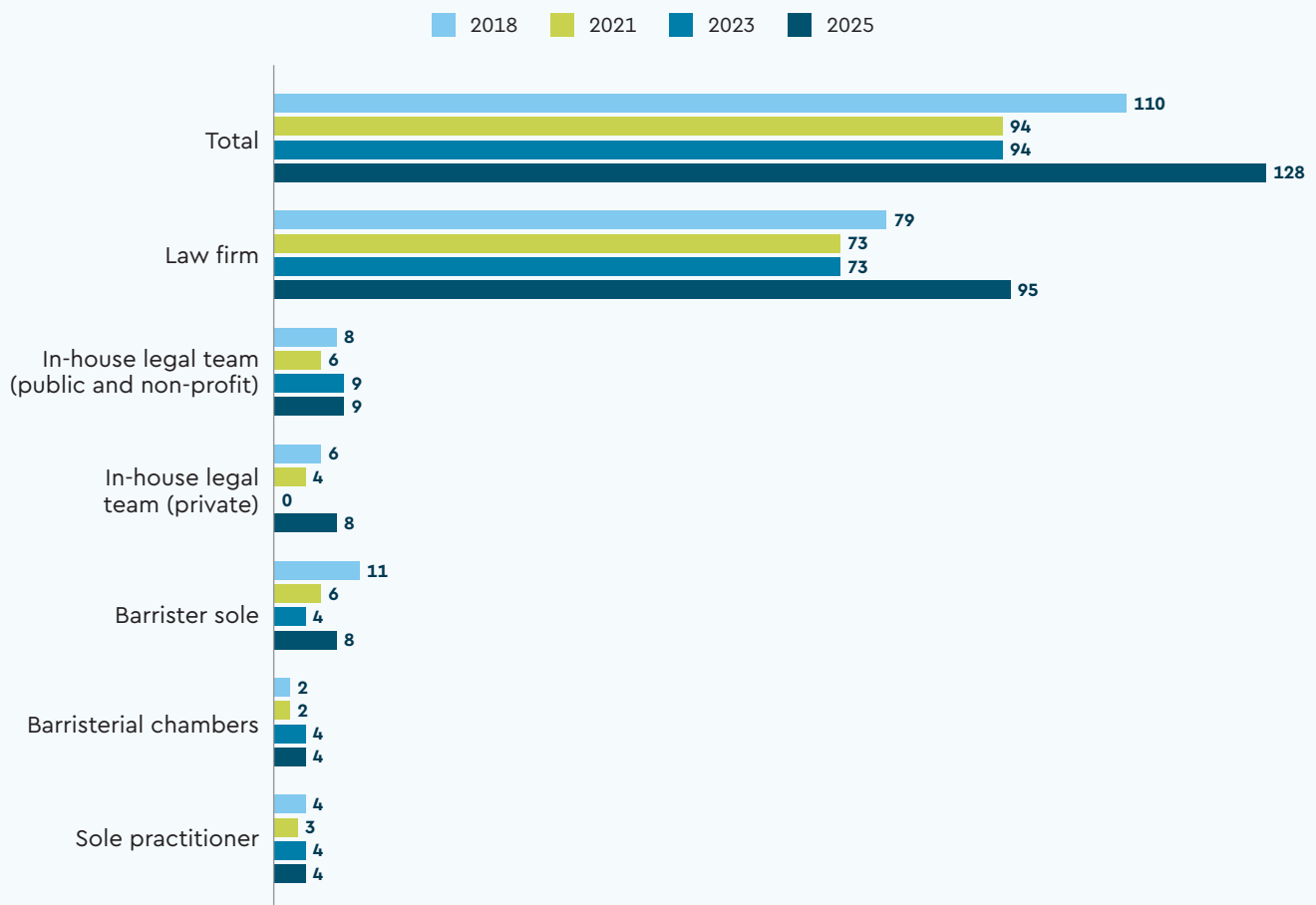
1. Implement unconscious bias training for all lawyers and key staff and take action to address identified bias.
2. Conduct annual gender pay audits and take action to close any gender pay gap.
3. Offer, encourage and support flexible working to assist all lawyers to balance professional and personal responsibilities.
4. Regularly review areas of their practice with a gender equality and inclusion lens e.g. recruitment, retention and promotion practices.
5. Adopt equitable briefing and instruction practices.
6. Actively work to increase gender equality and inclusion in senior legal roles.

Profile of 2025 survey respondents

A total of 128 legal workplaces completed the survey – an increase from 94 in both 2023 and 2021. 119 of this year's responses were from existing Charter signatories. The other nine organisations that completed the survey were those that had recently expressed interest in becoming Charter signatories. The total number of lawyers working in these organisations accounts for approximately 25% of the lawyers in New Zealand.

The profile of workplace types in the 2025 survey is very similar to that established in prior surveys, with 75% of the responses coming from law firms and the remaining 25% spread among in-house legal teams, barristers, sole practitioners, and barristerial chambers.

NUMBER OF TOTAL SURVEY RESPONSES BY ORGANISATION TYPE



Summary of findings

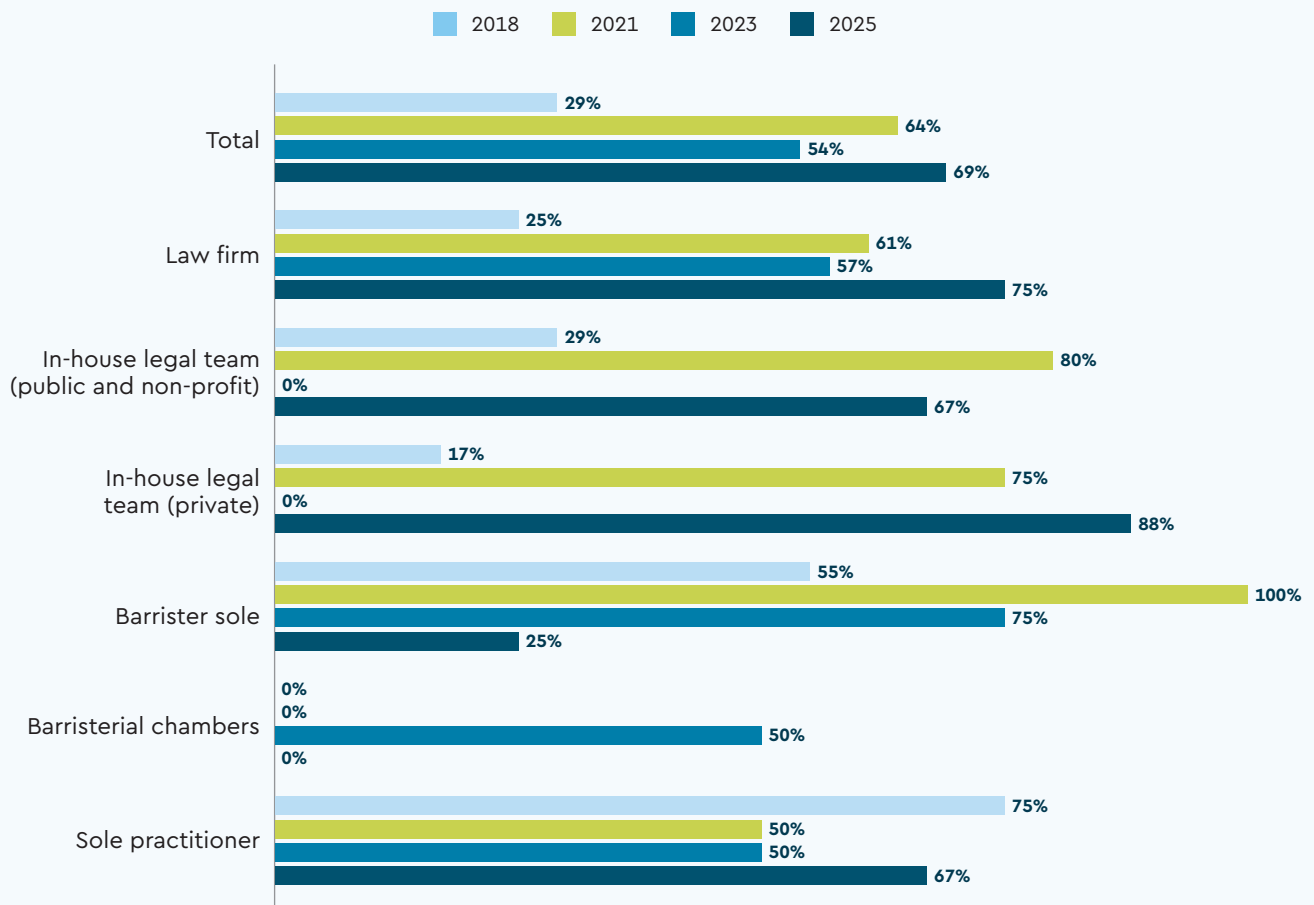


Charter Commitment 1

Implement unconscious bias training for all lawyers and key staff and take action to address identified bias

The purpose of this training is to help lawyers understand their own unconscious bias and employ strategies to minimise it in the workplace. In the 2025 survey, 69% of existing Charter signatories indicated that their workplace had conducted unconscious bias training for key staff involved in the recruitment, retention and promotion of lawyers in their workplace in the past two years. This is an increase from 54% reported in the 2023 survey.

PERCENTAGE OF EXISTING ORGANISATIONS CONDUCTING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING FOR KEY STAFF



A new question was added in 2025 to inquire about the percentage of all lawyers – not just key staff – in organisations that received unconscious bias training. That percentage was lower, with 45% of organisations indicating that all or most of their lawyers had received the training.

Organisations conducting unconscious bias training used a variety of approaches, with some using more than one format:

- 65% used a pre-recorded webinar, video or online training module.
- 30% used an external provider to deliver a live training session.
- 13% used an internal staff member to deliver a live training session.

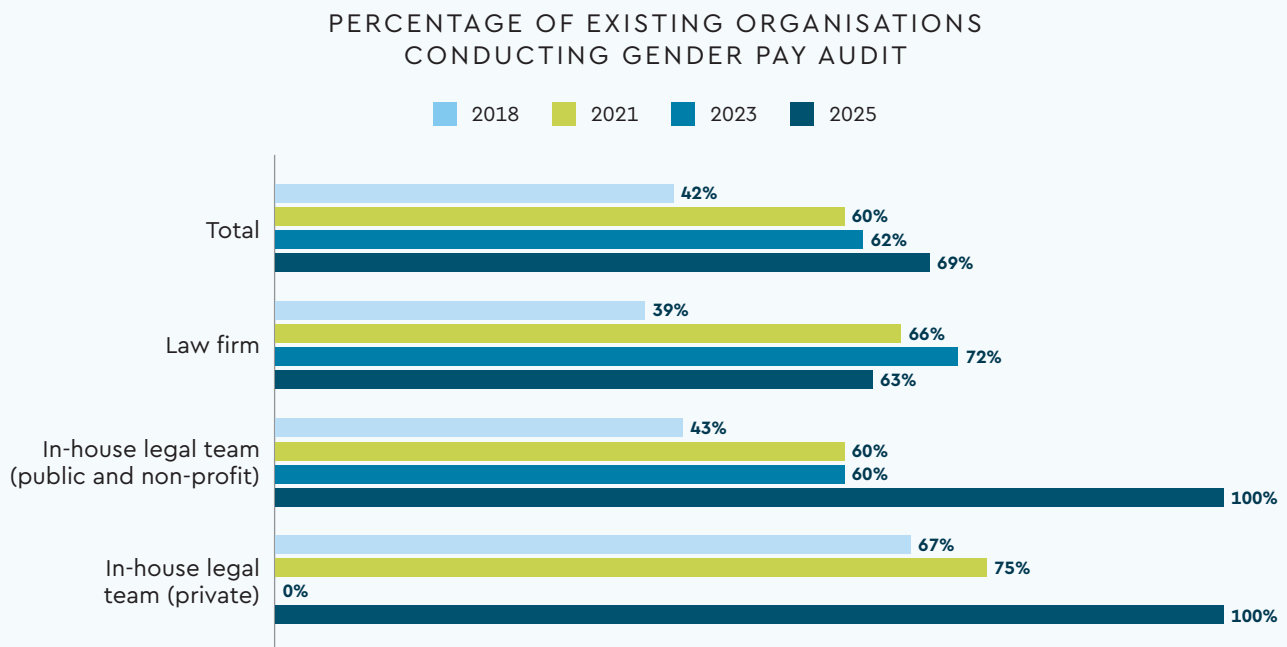
When asked about other actions they were taking to address unconscious bias, respondents' answers included:

- recruitment and hiring practices such as blind recruitment (e.g., redacted CVs) or use of external recruiters, diverse interview panels, gender-balanced shortlists, and standardised interview questions
- regular pay gap audits, bias checks in salary and promotion decisions, and equity reviews to monitor and address disparities in compensation
- structured performance reviews and transparent promotion criteria to reduce subjectivity; established career frameworks and promotion pathways to reduce reliance on informal networks
- work allocation reviews to ensure fair distribution of opportunities
- formal diversity and inclusion (D&I) policies that explicitly address unconscious bias; dedicated D&I committees, advisors, or partner-level leadership groups; regular policy reviews with a D&I lens, with some using external input
- use of engagement surveys, culture audits, and regular reporting to leadership to track progress; diversity goals in performance objectives for staff and leaders.

Charter Commitment 2

Conduct annual gender pay audits and take action to close any gender pay gap

A gender pay audit is the process of assessing whether an organisation has a gender pay gap, identifying the causes of those gaps, and planning how to close them. Because barrister soles and sole practitioners are essentially single-employee organisations and barristerial chambers do not control the compensation of its chamber members, the Law Society only reports data on this commitment for law firms and organisations with in-house legal teams.



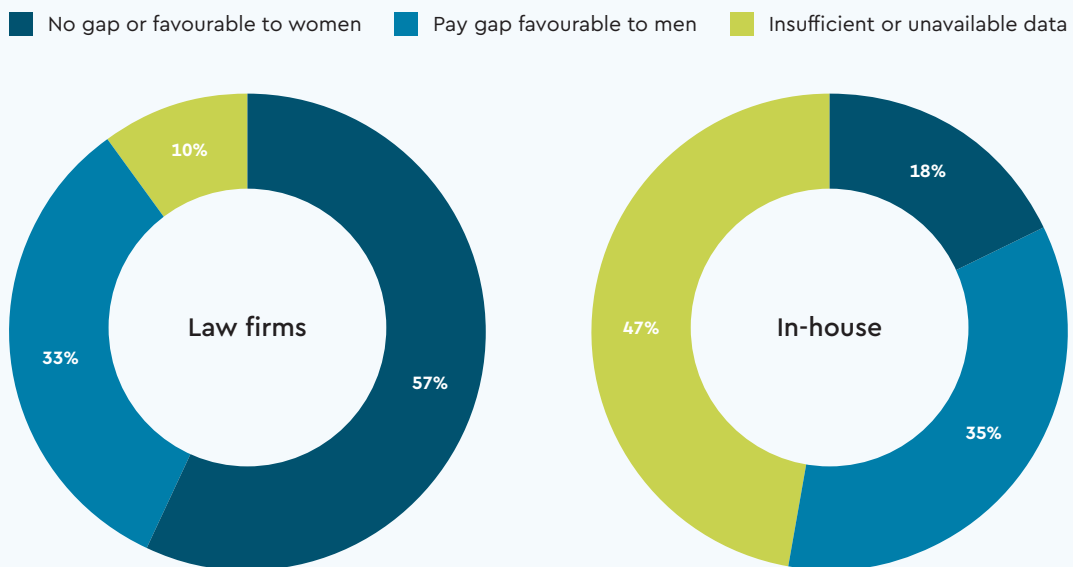
The incidence of gender pay audits conducted by all Charter law firms and in-house legal teams rose from 62% in 2023 to 69% in 2025 – with 100% of in-house legal teams performing them. Among law firms the percentage conducting an audit dropped from 72% to 63%.

The most cited reasons for not doing an audit included:

- having too few employees or a homogeneous (e.g. all women) workforce, making an audit problematic or unnecessary
- conducting informal reviews during annual salary assessments to compare pay across roles and levels without a formal audit
- relying on market rates or industry salary guides to set pay
- citing lack of awareness that conducting an audit was a requirement or indicating plans to do an audit in the future.

Of the 55 law firms that conducted a gender pay audit for salaried lawyers, 57% indicated that there was no gap or that it was favourable to women. Many in-house teams reported challenges with calculating the pay gap for salaried lawyers due to insufficient or unavailable data that could be disaggregated specific to those positions in their organisations.

RESULTS OF GENDER PAY AUDIT FOR SALARIED LAWYERS



For those law firms and in-house legal teams that completed a gender pay audit:

- 23% published the results on their website
- 11% shared the results on the PayGap Insights register as part of the Mind the Gap campaign (www.paygapinsightshub.nz)
- 11% did not publish the results externally but did share them internally.

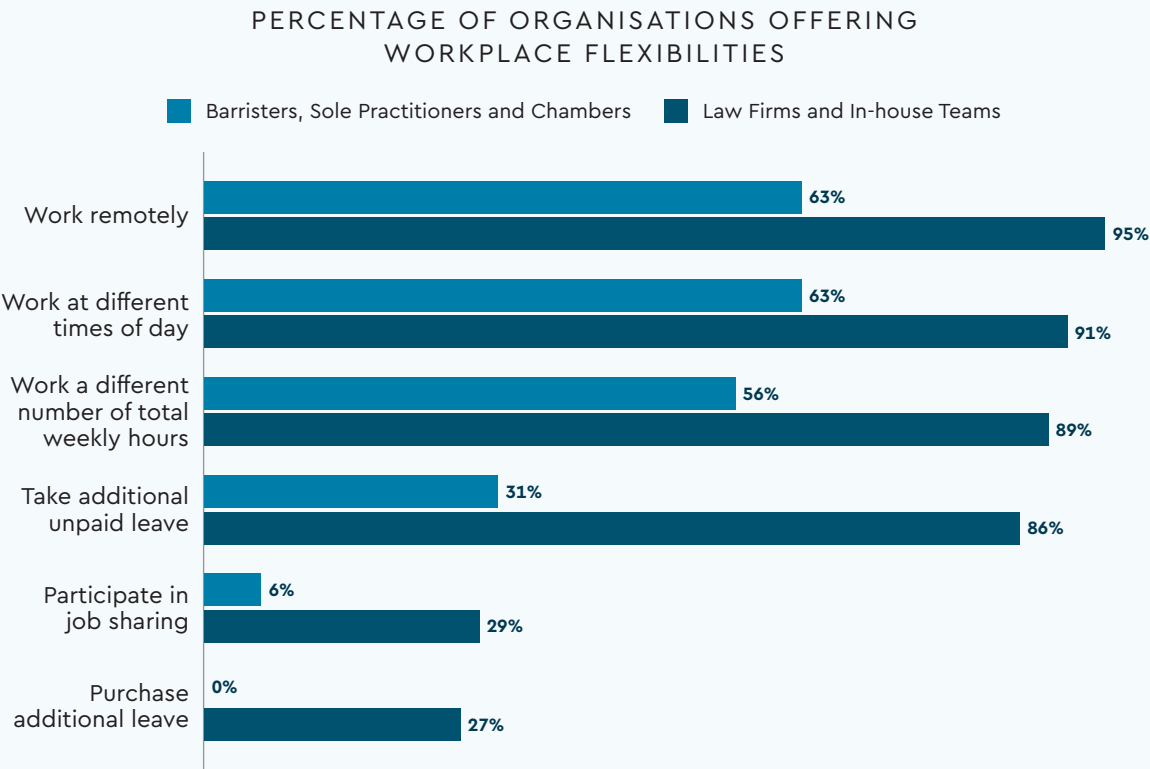
The survey also asked about organisations' awareness and use of the new [Gender Pay Gap Toolkit](#) launched last year by the Ministry for Women. Of those who conducted pay audits:

- 29% reported using the toolkit
- 31% indicated that they were aware of the toolkit but did not use it
- 40% indicated that they were not aware of the toolkit.

Charter Commitment 3

Offer, encourage and support flexible working to assist all lawyers to balance professional and personal responsibilities

The survey questions around workplace flexibilities were revised for 2025. First, organisations were asked to indicate which of six flexibilities they offered. Most law firms and in-house legal teams provide the opportunity to work remotely, work at different times of day, work a different number of total weekly hours, and take additional unpaid leave. Far fewer offer job-sharing or the opportunity to purchase additional leave.



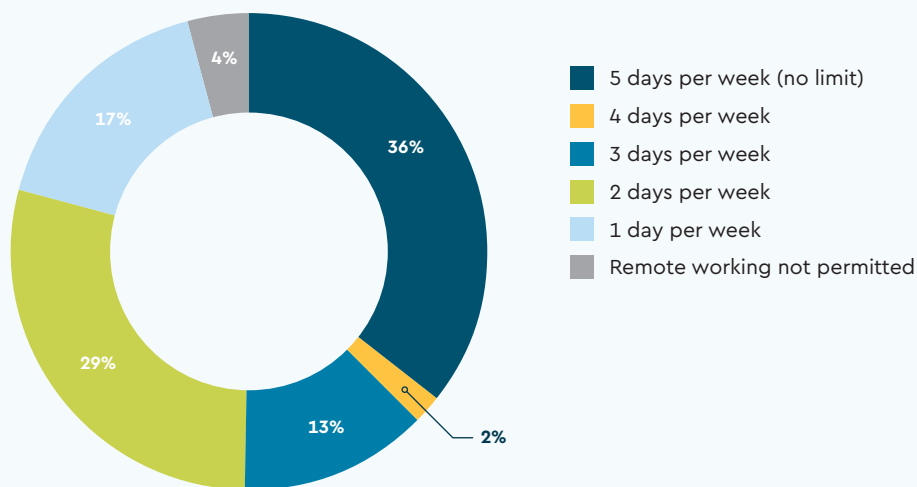
Note: Barrister soles and sole practitioners are essentially single-employee organisations, and barristerial chambers do not control the compensation or benefits of its chamber members. Therefore, we have disaggregated the data for those organisations from the data for law firms and in-house legal teams.

For the first time, the survey asked for more details about the maximum number of days permitted for remote working. More than a third of law firms and in-house legal teams had no limit, while 50% limited it to two or fewer days.

Charter signatories report they support staff to take advantage of flexibilities by:

- explicitly encouraging staff to attend family commitments without penalty; having options like school-hour roles, keeping-in-touch hours during parental leave, and offering part-time arrangements
- having leaders and partners role-model flexible working by openly sharing their own use of flexibility (including men around childcare)
- focusing on outcomes rather than office presence; reinforcing flexibility through regular conversations, quarterly reviews, annual check-ins, and open dialogue about workplace culture
- linking flexibility to wellbeing initiatives such as mental health resources, ergonomic support, and work-life balance programmes.

MAXIMUM NUMBER OF REMOTE WORKING DAYS PER WEEK
OFFERED BY LAW FIRMS AND IN-HOUSE LEGAL TEAMS



Charter Commitment 4

Regularly review areas of their practice with a gender equality and inclusion lens

This commitment focuses on organisations taking the time to periodically reflect on areas of their practice to understand whether these support and encourage gender equality and inclusion.

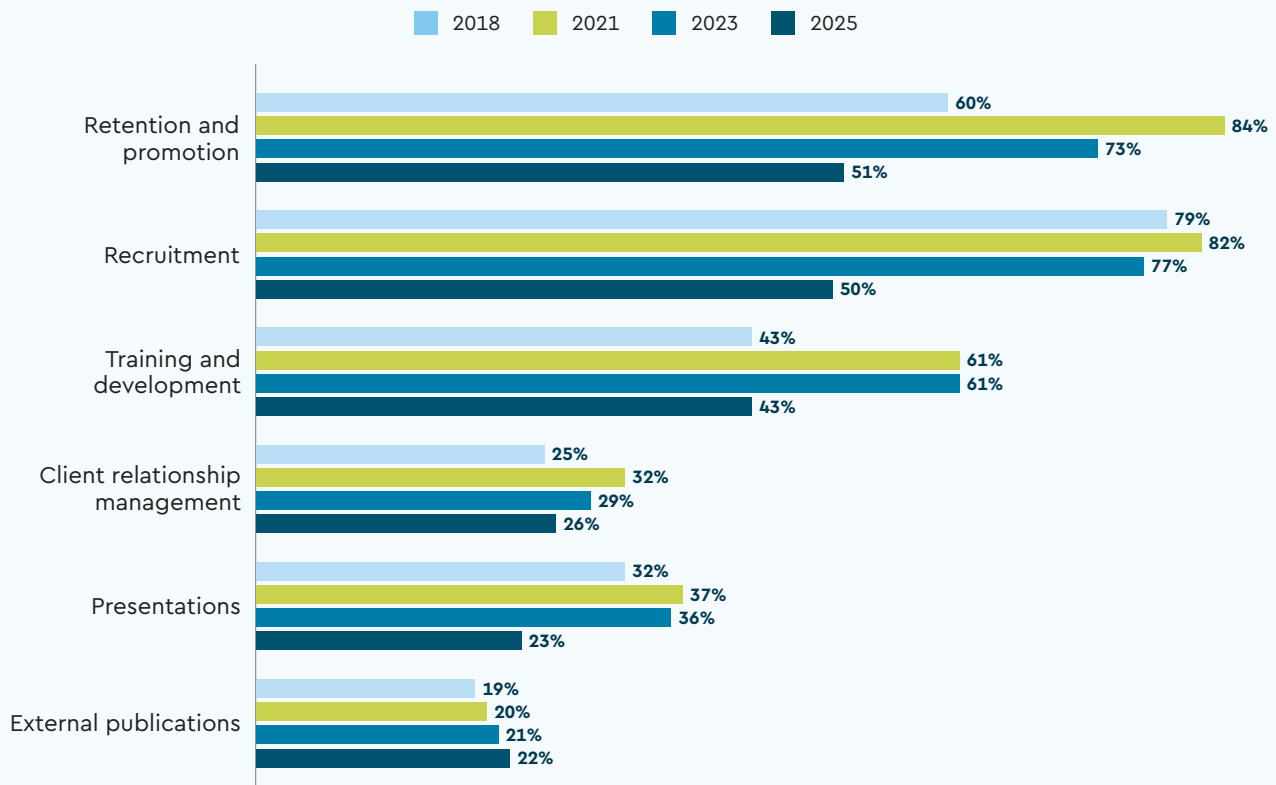
Areas of practice to review include:

- recruitment, retention, promotion policies and practices
- training and development activities
- management of client relationships, including tendering for new work
- presentations at internal and external events
- contributions to external publications.

There was a decline in the percentage of organisations conducting these reviews compared to previous years.

Despite the lower percentages of organisations formally conducting reviews of the organisational areas, many cited other strategies that they are pursuing to ensure gender equality in those areas. A summary of these is provided on Page 17.

PERCENTAGE OF GEC LAW FIRMS AND IN-HOUSE TEAMS
CONDUCTING REVIEWS IN KEY PRACTICE AREAS



Summary of strategies to ensure gender equality

Recruitment

- Convene gender-diverse interview panels
- Ensure gender balance on candidate shortlists
- Track and report the application-to-hire ratios by gender
- Enhance the diversity of talent pipeline via connections with universities, sponsorship of women in law groups

Retention and promotion

- Track and report promotion and retention rates by gender/ethnicity
- Establish transparent promotion criteria to reduce bias
- Convene gender-balanced groups for making promotion decisions
- Provide mentoring/sponsorship programmes for women
- Conduct promotion reviews to include staff on parental leave
- Create tailored return-to-work arrangements

External publications

- Co-author articles etc with junior/mid-level lawyers
- Monitor the gender mix of contributors to publications
- Highlight achievements of women and other underrepresented voices in publications

Presentations

- Track and report data on the gender balance of speakers
- Ask external event organisers about panel diversity before agreeing to participate
- Invest in presentation training for staff; link external presentations to individual development plans

Client relationship management

- Require women barristers be included in client recommendation lists
- Allocate client meetings, events, and business development opportunities with a gender balance

Training and development

- Establish family-friendly scheduling of training so staff with caregiving responsibilities can participate
- Create women-focused training, leadership programmes, networking support, and mentoring schemes
- Track and report on training participation data by gender

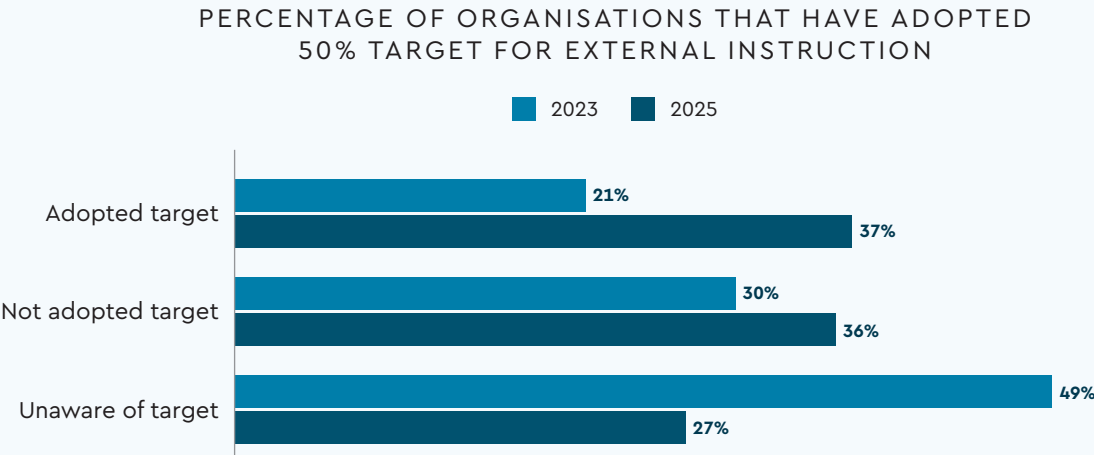
Charter Commitment 5

Adopt equitable briefing and instruction practices

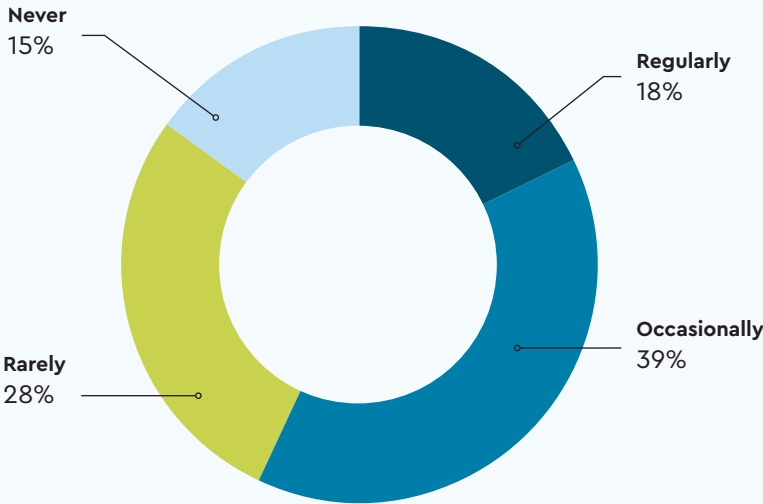
This Charter commitment was revised in 2022 to better motivate organisations to ensure that women lawyers receive a fair allocation of work and lead roles in significant engagements and instructions in all areas of work.

The revision, made in collaboration with the New Zealand Bar Association Ngā Ahorangi Motuhake o te Ture, encourages signatories to adopt a voluntary target that women lawyers receive at least 50% of external instructions for all significant matters.

The percentage of organisations adopting the 50% target has increased from 21% in 2023 to 37% in 2025. Awareness of the 50% target increased from 51% in 2023 to 73% in 2025. There is still more to be done to further increase awareness and adoption of this target.



DISTRIBUTION OF ORGANISATIONS BY FREQUENCY OF EXTERNAL INSTRUCTION



In the 2025 survey, the Law Society added a new question to understand how frequently each GEC organisation instructs external lawyers. 57% indicated that they regularly or occasionally instruct.

Of those that “regularly” or “occasionally” instruct external lawyers, 34% report that they internally track data related to the amount of instruction by gender. Almost all track this information using the number of cases instructed rather than the dollar value of the fees from those cases as the basis for monitoring their gender balance.

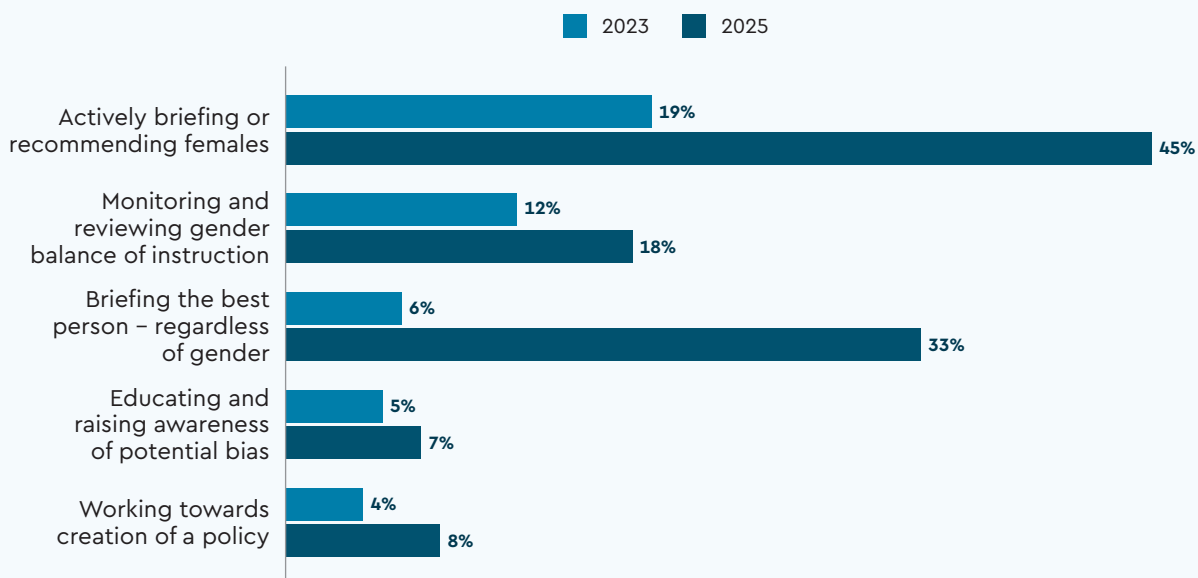
Of the 21 organisations that track their external instruction data, 71% reported that the percentage of their instruction going to women was at least 50%.

An additional nine organisations that do not formally track the data estimate that at least 50% of their external instruction goes to women.

These survey responses demonstrate that more work can be done to motivate and support organisations in establishing a consistent practice of tracking their instruction data so that they can regularly assess and report on the gender balance of that work.

In addition to adopting a 50% target policy and tracking their data, organisations shared other practices that they use as part of their instruction efforts.

PERCENTAGE OF ORGANISATIONS IMPLEMENTING EQUITABLE BRIEFING AND INSTRUCTION PRACTICES



Charter Commitment 6

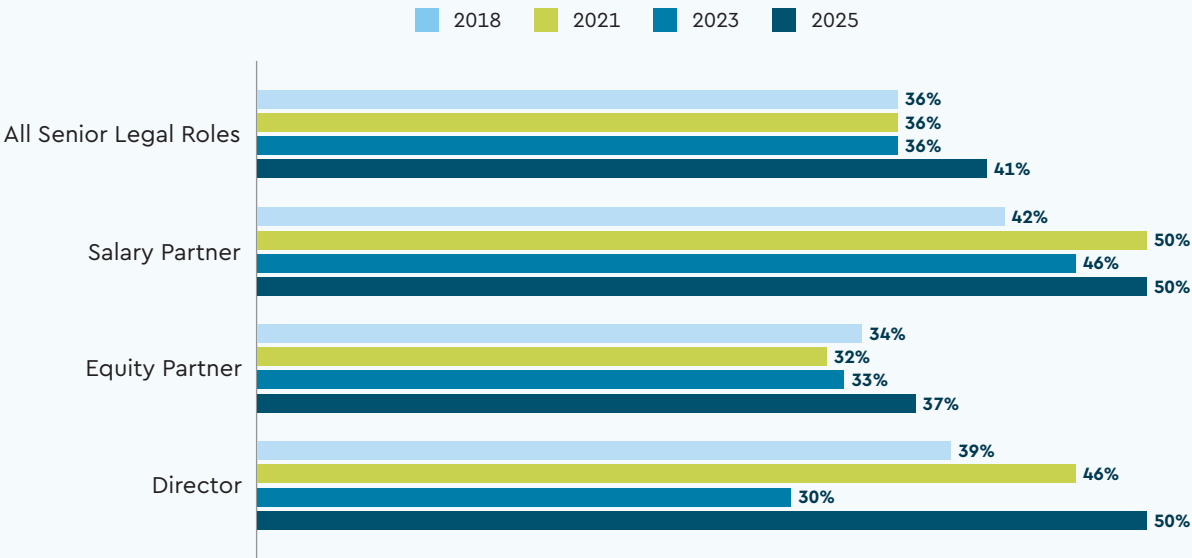
Actively work to increase gender equality and inclusion in senior legal roles

According to the 2025 survey, 41% of the senior legal roles at law firms are held by women. This is an increase from 36% in the 2018, 2021 and 2023 surveys. Among new Charter signatories, the percentage of senior legal roles held by women was 63%. Despite this progress, the percentage of women equity partners remains below 40%.

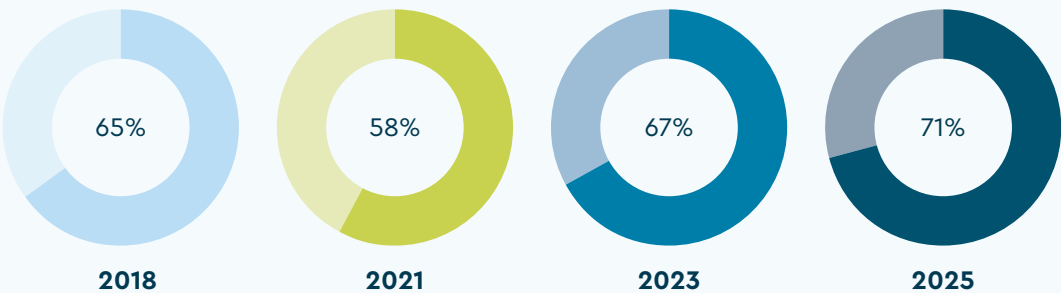
Forty-four per cent of law firms reported that they have at least half of their senior legal roles filled by women; this is up from 20% in the 2023 survey.

For Charter organisations with in-house legal teams, 71% reported that their general counsel or chief legal officer position is currently held by a woman, which is an increase from the 67% reported in the 2023 survey.

PERCENTAGE OF SENIOR LEGAL ROLES IN LAW FIRMS HELD BY WOMEN



PERCENTAGE OF GENERAL COUNSEL/CHIEF LEGAL OFFICERS WHO ARE WOMEN IN IN-HOUSE ORGANISATIONS



Opportunities to positively impact diversity and inclusion

Survey respondents were also asked to provide thoughts on what the Law Society could do to best improve all aspects of diversity, equality and inclusion in the legal profession. Their responses are grouped into common themes below.

Data, transparency and accountability

- Collect and publish regular diversity, gender equality, and pay equity data to help firms benchmark progress.
- Introduce consistent measurement tools and criteria so firms report on comparable metrics.
- Require publication of gender pay gaps and compulsory reporting on diversity outcomes.
- Increase accountability for signatories to the Gender Equality Charter by publishing their survey answers or making gender targets compulsory.

Training, resources and best practice

- Provide updated unconscious bias training (including refreshers and modernised modules).
- Offer D&I-focused CPD opportunities (covering gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+, disability, and cultural diversity).
- Share sample policies, toolkits, and case studies to help firms adopt inclusive recruitment, retention, and promotion practices.
- Expand mentoring and sponsorship programmes, particularly for women, Māori, Pasifika, and other under-represented groups.

Support for career progression and flexibility

- Encourage firms to adopt flexible working practices to support retention of women and parents.
- Provide guidance on return-to-work pathways after parental leave, including flexible CPD and practising certificate requirements.
- Promote initiatives that normalise men taking parental leave to balance cultural expectations.
- Challenge firms to address barriers such as the expectation that equity partners must work full-time.

Representation and visibility

- Increase visibility of diverse lawyers in publications, events, and leadership forums.
- Publish profiles of successful women and diverse lawyers to inspire others.
- Encourage equitable briefing practices so female barristers and solicitors are given fair opportunities in significant cases.
- Partner with universities to provide scholarships and pathways for Māori, Pasifika, refugee-background, disabled, and low socio-economic students.

Culture change and advocacy

- Continue to champion gender equality publicly and “fly the flag” for diversity.
- Provide forums, events, and networking opportunities that highlight bias-free hiring and leadership practices.
- Challenge traditional models of law practice that contribute to burnout and attrition, particularly for women.
- Encourage firms to adopt UN Women’s Empowerment Principles and broaden the Charter to include ethnicity and LGBTQ+ representation.



Transparency of gender equality performance

The 2025 survey also included new questions related to transparency and reporting on how well Charter signatories are fulfilling their commitments.

Only 16% indicated that they currently, or plan to, publish information on their website related to their performance against the Charter commitments.

Charter signatories were also asked to consent to their responses to a select number of questions being published as part of the full survey report. The percentage consenting varied by question.

After excluding instances where a question was not applicable (such as a women-only firm doing a pay gap audit), the results were:

Survey question	% Consenting
Did you complete a gender pay audit?	57%
What was the calculated gender pay gap?	40%
Have you adopted the voluntary 50% instruction target?	52%
What is the percentage of external instruction by gender?	34%
What is the percentage of senior legal roles by gender (law firms)	61%

The organisation-specific data on these five questions will be published as part of the full survey report, including analysis, to be released early in 2026.

Next steps

In 2026, the Law Society will engage with the profession to gather input on how we can improve the outcomes around gender equality and diversity and inclusion more broadly. This effort will include an all-of-profession survey, stakeholder workshops, and targeted interviews with leaders of key organisations.

The objective is to produce a clear, compelling vision of where we want to go as well as a strategic plan with measurable goals, an action plan with achievable timelines, and clear accountabilities for implementation. While facilitated by the Law Society, the plan will include opportunities for members of the profession and other organisations to advance and encourage key elements of the change effort.

As part of the plan, we anticipate that the Charter itself will need to evolve so that it can remain an important and effective tool for motivating legal organisations to improve their gender equality outcomes.

DECEMBER 2025

