



Male Champions for Change Initiative white paper

International Bar Association Women
Lawyers' Committee

Lise Lotte Hjerrild
Chair, IBA Women Lawyers' Committee
Member, IBA Management Board

Neftali Garro
Communications Officer,
IBA Women Lawyers' Committee

The International Bar Association (IBA), established in 1947, is the world's leading international organisation of legal practitioners, bar associations, law societies, law firms and in-house legal teams. The IBA influences the development of international law reform and shapes the future of the legal profession throughout the world. It has a membership of more than 80,000 lawyers, 190 bar associations and law societies and 200 group member law firms, spanning over 170 countries. The IBA is headquartered in London, with offices in São Paulo, Seoul, The Hague and Washington, DC.

© 2023

International Bar Association
Chancery House, 53–64 Chancery Lane
London WC2A 1QS, United Kingdom
www.ibanet.org

All reasonable efforts have been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this report. The International Bar Association accepts no responsibility for reliance on its content. This report does not constitute legal advice. Material contained in this report may be quoted or reprinted, provided credit is given to the International Bar Association.

Introduction

The International Bar Association (IBA) Women Lawyers' Committee (WLC) aspires to empower its more than 2,000 highly valued members from all over the world to engage, network and share knowledge.

The WLC aims to level the playing field in the legal profession and inspire leaders to work to achieve gender equity. Its committee officers create awareness tools to help the profession achieve this goal, while at the same time facilitating an efficient global network for women lawyers to connect and develop business and expertise.

The WLC welcomes members of all genders, encourages all perspectives and remains a Committee dedicated to the cause of women lawyers. In this respect, the WLC recognises and seeks to enhance the role of male champions for change as catalysts for the goals described above. This document summarises why this is important and what the WLC proposes specifically regarding the 'Male Champions for Change' Initiative.

Male Champions for Change – why?

The role of women lawyers as leaders in the IBA WLC is natural. It is incumbent upon women lawyers themselves to take the lead in promoting the WLC's goals as stated above. Nonetheless, the reality in many jurisdictions is that male lawyers are still at the forefront of the legal profession; they hold many of the leadership positions at commercial law firms and in public practice. This is, precisely, a reflection of the lack of gender equity in the senior echelons of the legal profession. Thus, to expedite the processes that will lead to positive change, the role of male leaders cannot be understated.

*'Most leaders in the legal sector currently (and historically) are men who can play a significant role in achieving greater gender balance. Many male leaders from across the sector, including in-house and private practice, are committed to act and lead by example, by speaking up and holding people acting their stereotypical views accountable and encouraging others to do the same. It is also essential to have visible role models, both men and women, from across all levels of the business to encourage changes in practices and to challenge bias.'*¹

Extract from the Law Society of England and Wales, 'Advocating for Change – International Women in Law Report'

Engaging male leaders in promoting gender equity is a best practice in this field.² There are many examples of initiatives and specific practices that can be promoted to enhance the role of these male champions in reaching the stated objectives,³ which should be compiled and encouraged by the WLC as part of its ongoing work.

1 The Law Society of England and Wales, 'Advocating for Change – International Women in Law Report', June 2019 www.lawsocietyorg.uk accessed 17 October 2023 p 46.

2 The Law Society of England and Wales, 'Influencing for Impact: The Need for Gender Equality in the Legal Profession', March 2019 www.lawsocietyorg.uk accessed 17 October 2023 p 23. See also the Law Society of England and Wales, 'Women in Leadership in Law – Blueprint for Gender Balance' www.lawsocietyorg.uk accessed 17 October 2023 p 1.

3 See, eg, Law Society of England and Wales, 'Male Champions for Change Toolkit', 2018 www.lawsocietyorg.uk accessed 17 October 2023 p 3.

To sum up, male advocacy in this field is key:

‘The advocacy of men in gender-diversity can help to build conviction that what is good for women will be equally beneficial to men as it will result in more inclusive, healthy, and supportive workplaces. This will ultimately result in the evolution of businesses, corporate cultures and performance models which are more efficient, sustainable and in line with the expectations of today’s society (and clients).

*Recognizing that the majority of leaders in the legal profession currently are, and have historically been, men, we also believe that male business leaders have a significant role to play in achieving gender balance’.*⁴

Extract from the Law Society of England and Wales ‘Male Champions for Change Toolkit’

Summary of the proposal for the IBA WLC

The Male Champions for Change Initiative consists of creating a ‘WLC Male Champions for Change Ambassador Corps’, comprised of initially ten but up to 20 Ambassadors, all being highly recognised male law firm and legal sector leaders from around the globe with a proven track record of promoting the goal of achieving gender equity in the legal profession. The Ambassador Corps will consist of IBA members who will also need to be members of the WLC. The Corps will consult on a permanent basis with the WLC and have the following functions:

- to serve as a **sounding board** for the WLC’s Officers on its programmes and initiatives, providing insight, advice and best practices from the viewpoint of male law firm and legal sector leaders; to do so, the Ambassador Corps will meet twice a year online or in person (where possible) with WLC Officers to discuss the committee’s Terms of Reference, and to set specific objectives and goals to further the initiative;
- to act as ‘**ambassadors**’ in promoting change in the legal profession, as needed, and where needed;
- to participate as **speakers and moderators** in seminars, IBA sessions and roundtables on gender equity issues as male advocates for gender equity in the legal profession;
- specifically, to participate as **facilitators and moderators of periodic Male Champions for Change Roundtables** organised by the WLC, such as those referred to in the resources cited in this document, and in doing so promote best practices, such as those outlined in the Law Society of England and Wales ‘Male Champions for Change Toolkit’ (2018) and similar resources;
- to serve as a **pool of future WLC male officers**, as the need arises (though it is intended that the wide majority of IBA WLC officers will always be women, it is possible that additional male officers will be needed from time to time; hence, the Male Champions for Change Ambassador Corps will help to source qualified male candidates for any such officer positions, when the need arises); and
- all **other specific functions** as the WLC may determine from time to time.

4 *Ibid.*



the global voice of
the legal profession®

International Bar Association
Chancery House, 53–64 Chancery Lane
London WC2A 1QS, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)20 7842 0090
Fax: +44 (0)20 7842 0091
www.ibanet.org