AILF INSIGHTS · BUILDING A FIRM

Women in Indian law firms: from entry to leadership

Women enter India's law schools and firms in large numbers, but fewer reach partnership. What firms can do to keep and promote their best lawyers.

Law school classrooms in India today are close to balanced between women and men, and women regularly top their classes. At the entry level of firms the picture is similar. At partnership and leadership it changes. The profession loses many of its most capable people between the fifth and fifteenth year of practice.

Where the losses occur

- The years in which partnership is decided often coincide with family responsibilities.
- Litigation practice involves long, unpredictable hours and travel.
- Informal networks that generate work have historically been male.
- Many courts and offices still lack basic facilities.
- Returning after a break is difficult, because no route back exists.

Why it matters to a firm

This is not only a question of fairness. A firm that loses trained senior associates loses its investment in them, its relationships with clients who trusted them and its future partners. Clients, especially large companies, increasingly ask firms about the composition of their teams.

What works

Transparent criteria. Publish what partnership requires. Vague standards favour those who resemble existing partners.

Flexible working, properly designed. Flexibility that silently ends a career is not flexibility. Define reduced-hours and remote arrangements with a continuing path to partnership.

Parental leave and return. Follow the law on maternity benefit, and go further with phased return and support for all parents.

Sponsorship. Senior partners should actively introduce women colleagues to clients and include them in important matters.

Safety and dignity. Comply fully with the law on prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace, with a functioning internal committee.

Fair allocation of work. Track who receives the significant matters.

Returner programmes. Offer a structured way back for lawyers who have taken a career break.

The wider profession

Representation on the Bench and in Bar bodies matters too, because young lawyers measure what is possible by what they can see. Every woman designated senior, elevated as a judge or elected to lead a Bar body widens the path for those who follow.

What an association can do

Collect and publish data, share model policies that small firms can adopt without cost, recognise firms that do this well, and ensure that women are visible as speakers and leaders at every event.

A profession that keeps its talent will serve its clients better. The firms that understand this first will have an advantage for a generation.

Association of Indian Law Firms · November 2026
Read online: https://indianlawfirmsassociation.com/women-in-indian-law-firms-leadership/

Keywords: women lawyers India, women partners law firms, gender diversity legal profession India, retention of women lawyers
Published by the Association of Indian Law Firms. General information only; not legal advice.