

# FEMALE LEADERS 'EXCELLENT NETWORKERS', BUT STRUGGLE TO CONVERT LEADS INTO BUSINESS CONTACTS IN PORTUGAL

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**Female leaders are experts at building relationships, good at providing support for their teams, as well as being great organisers and highly skilled at multitasking, attendees at an Iberian Lawyer InspiraLaw event in Lisbon heard.**

However, participants at the event – which included leading women lawyers from the Portuguese market – also said that, while women in the legal sector are talented networkers, they sometimes lack the ability to use networking skills to create “professional business contacts” due to cultural differences in Portugal. Attendees at the event, who were predominately women, also said that there was a tendency for some women lawyers to spend less time talking about business opportunities with their personal acquaintances.



Yet participants said that there are many “female business networks” in Portugal that can be helpful for women that want to develop business contacts, but they also remarked that it was important not to try to build a “girls’ club”, but an environment that is “comfortable for women to develop business relationships”.

Some women lawyers believe that “if they work a lot, someone will recognise their work and promote them”, one participant explained. However, it was argued that this approach is not always effective and some women lawyers need to “improve their self-promotion and their

communication, and also find a mentor that can help them to improve and focus on their ambitions”. One participant remarked that many women in leading positions had a male colleague who supported or mentored them. Now, those women who have reached the top feel they have a responsibility to try to promote female talent. However, attendees also speculated that there was

still some “social stigma” attached to ambitious women that want to pursue a career. One participant said women may, to an extent, be holding themselves back when it comes to career progression. Law firms in Portugal can do more to help women lawyers who are starting families, attendees said. Initiatives that were suggested included: maternity programmes that aim to keep mothers connected to their work; greater flexibility in allowing people to work from home; and empowering human resources departments to look at personalised solutions. Some attendees also argued that women “think more deeply” before making decisions or applying for promotion. “They want to make sure they will succeed before applying,” one participant remarked. “We need to make every woman as confident as the majority of men.”

**Event:** InspiraLaw - Searching for a gem? Talent has no gender

**Location:** Lisbon

**Panel:** Mafalda Garcia, head of legal, IBM; Mariana Norton, partner, Cuatrecasas; Paula Gomes Freire, partner, VdA; Serena Cabrita Neto, partner, PLMJ, Armando Rocha, vice dean school of law, Católica Global Law School; Moray McLaren, director, Lexington Consultants (event moderator)