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# Law Firm Diversity Efforts Spurring Progress, Report Finds

By **Justin Wise**

Law360 (October 26, 2020, 10:33 PM EDT) -- Voluntary and regulatory efforts to improve diversity and be transparent about the gender and racial makeup of law firms in the U.S. and U.K. are acting as a "catalyst for improvement," according to a new report released by management consultancy Jomati Consultants LLP.

As part of a 38-page report on how law firms can support corporate clients, the London-based organization concluded the industry cannot be "complacent about its own record on societal issues."

For example, part of the report addresses persisting problems in gender and racial diversity in the legal industry worldwide. It cites regulations enforced in England and Wales, as well as efforts launched by groups such as Diversity Lab and the 30% Club, as ways gender and racial equity can be effectively addressed.

"Globally, the sector is plagued by diversity challenges," the report said. "Thankfully, there are now clear signs that some jurisdictions are now making determined efforts to improve their professions' diversity record, either on a voluntary (US) or regulatory (England and Wales) basis."

In England and Wales, a regulator requires all legal practices to submit diversity data on areas including age, disability, race and gender about their workforces. Practices are also urged to publish these statistics on their websites.

While the regulations are not perfect, Jomati said that the requirements show that it's possible to produce comprehensive diversity metrics about the legal sector. Survey response rates are generally about 80%, including on questions about more sensitive personal information, Jomati said.

"And most importantly, collecting diversity data allows pan-sector diversity areas to be identified and — ideally — tackled," the report said, citing an analysis that found law firms in the region had a disproportionate tendency to hire employees who went to a "fee paying school" and had parents with a college education. In response, a collection of 23 U.K.-based firms launched a program to help improve the socioeconomic diversity of those entering the legal profession. Jomati said more than 60 firms are now involved and that it gives work experience to about 700 students per year.

As for voluntary approaches, the report highlights how groups like the 30% Club — which aims for women to make up at least 30% of a company's board and C-suite level staff globally — and the legal sector-focused Diversity Lab have helped put pressure on organizations to improve diversity at their highest ranks.

The Diversity Lab in 2017 launched the Mansfield Rule, which offered certifications to law firms that demonstrated an effort to "affirmatively consider at least 30% women, lawyers of color, LGBTQ+ lawyers, and lawyers with disabilities" for leadership and senior positions.

More than 100 U.S. law firms, including Baker McKenzie and Davis Wright Tremaine LLP, are **taking part** in its latest yearlong certification program. Data from the most recent certification process found that about 80% of participating law firms reported that their lateral partner hirings were more diverse.

The 30% Club is proving to have similar effects for some legal practices in the U.K., Jomati said, pointing to 30% member firm CMS's disclosure that 40% of its global promotions were women in 2020.

Still, with men making up about 75% of partners inside large U.K. law firms, gender imbalance in the region remains a "stand-out challenge," the organization said.

In the U.S., breakdowns of racial and gender diversity at the top of the legal sector indicate little movement in the last few years. About 22% of equity partners were women at the end of 2019, up from 19% in 2014, according to figures from a **Law360 survey** of more than 300 major law firms. Meanwhile, just 16% of partner promotions that year were given to attorneys of color.

The coronavirus pandemic has only **heightened concerns** about pathways for growth for racial minorities and women in the profession.

In addition to the efforts of the 30% Club and the Diversity Lab, other diversity-focused initiatives are getting off the ground. The Leadership Council on Legal Diversity last week **launched a campaign** calling on its more than 300 members to take action to make the industry more inclusive. Leaders have pledged to implement bias training and track mobility of underrepresented lawyers, among other things.

Diversity problems aren't isolated to the U.S. and U.K. The Jomati report listed multiple countries with issues with gender bias, for example. It did note that many efforts already exist for resolving these issues, they just need to be more widely adopted.

--Additional reporting by Anna Sanders. Editing by Brian Baresch.

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