

TITULO: International Women's Day Q&A series: Macarena Laso				
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Imagen 1/2

International Women's Day Q&A series: Macarena Laso

Lily Squires
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Macarena Laso

To celebrate International Women's Day this week, Latin Lawyer speaks to prominent female partners in Latin America about gender equality issues in the local legal market. In the second interview of our five-part series, we talk to Macarena Laso, managing partner at Chilean firm Morales & Besa.

Laso has spent all of her legal career at Morales & Besa. She joined the partnership in 2015 after five years of part-time work that she took to raise her children. As she was made partner, Laso also became co-head of the firm's corporate and M&A department.

In April last year, Laso was **elected** managing partner – the first-ever woman lawyer to lead Morales & Besa. She is only one of a handful of women in charge of Latin American firms.

When elected to the position, Laso outlined three areas that are key to staying at the forefront of the Chilean legal market: continuous improvement in technology, well-being and adjustment of staff following the covid-19 pandemic and continuing to increase efficiency.

Is the legal industry in Chile doing enough to support gender equality in the workplace?

During the last years, the exposure and support given to women have been growing exponentially. For example, we have seen how firms in our country have begun to appoint more women as partner or given them more space to achieve leadership positions in this profession, which historically have been held by men.

At Morales & Besa, we have focused on constructing equitable teams with a leadership of the best professionals, regardless of whether they are men or women. We have always encouraged inclusion in our teams and the leadership of those teams are currently very balanced between women and men.

What initiatives are important for law firms to take to help women lawyers rise to higher legal positions?

We [Morales & Besa] are significantly ahead in including female lawyers in the partnership compared to other Chilean firms that are similar to us in size and practice area focus. We currently have four female partners – Myriam Barahona, María José Henríquez, Andrea Díaz and myself – out of the firm's 13 partners. I am proud to be part of a firm with this openness, which is changing the paradigms of women in Chilean law firms.

I think it is crucial to design flexible working models that allow people to balance their professional and private lives. For example, we have a firm structure that allows our lawyers to combine their work with motherhood. At Morales & Besa, we also have a mentoring programme and we had established a home office programme already before the pandemic.

From my experience, I have always had the flexibility to develop my professional career at my own pace. Especially when my children were young, I had fewer working hours than other lawyers at Morales & Besa, which allowed me to reconcile my professional development with the challenges I had with my children's education. At the same time, once they grew up, I had all the support of the firm to handle more significant responsibilities according to my experience and return to a regular workload, becoming a partner in 2015.

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Imagen 2/2

How can clients help the legal industry to achieve gender equality?

We still have discrimination against women in this profession. On a couple of occasions at the beginning of my career, I had counterparts who treated my advice differently to the same advice or opinion given by a man. This meant that I made a greater effort in my role as interlocutor. Fortunately, this is now less and less frequent and there have been cultural changes in the profession that have led to more inclusion of women. Those changes are here to stay.

Do you expect gender equality in the partnerships of Latin American law firms to improve in the coming years?

Today it is more common to find women in positions of responsibility, such as prosecutors, running businesses or partners in law firms, a trend that will undoubtedly continue to grow as the cultural paradigm changes. Yet, despite significant progress, there is still much to do.

Many regional and local firms state they are doing everything possible to end gender discrimination by including more women in the legal profession. However, the reality is often different because, in practice, they do not consider authentic flexible work schemes that allow lawyers to reconcile their family life with work. Hence, it is essential to be consistent and realistic with what is said and what is done.

Our firm formed a diversity committee in 2018. Since its creation, we have encouraged these values within and beyond our organisation, and we will continue in this line.

This is one of five interviews with prominent female Latin American lawyers. Click [here](#) to read about yesterday's interview with Claudia Barrero, partner at Philippi Prietocarrizosa Ferrero DU & Uría (Colombia)

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Lily Squires

Author | News Reporter

Lily.Squires@latinlawyer.com

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