2026 Future Ready Lawyer Survey Report

Building confidence in an AI era

Future Ready Lawyer

Wolters Kluwer

Navigating trust and harnessing innovation for better outcomes in the legal landscape

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Foreword

It's hard to believe that we've now done seven editions of the *Future Ready Lawyer Survey Report*. Each edition has been an earnest attempt to catch a snapshot of an industry in perpetual motion.

Corporate legal departments and law firms are weaving AI more intricately into their daily operations, all while contending with the ethical considerations, data privacy concerns, and the demand for evolving skillsets that follow closely behind. Many are also navigating a global environment marked by persistent regulatory complexity and geopolitical uncertainty.

Resilience and adaptability will be critical, especially as the industry responds to shifting client demands. Legal professionals will require new ways of working that allow them to move at the same pace as their industry, with solutions that combine advanced technology with unparalleled insight.

Wolters Kluwer has already begun building towards that future with its recent acquisition of Libra Technology GmbH and the rapid expansion throughout Europe. The combination of Libra's legal AI assistant technology with Wolters Kluwer's trusted, authoritative legal content will provide a powerful and secure all-in-one solution for legal research, drafting, review, and document analysis that sets a new benchmark for AI in legal practice.

Having now published these reports for more than half a decade, I can safely say that the future feels like it arrives a little bit faster each year. We want to make sure we're there with you to greet it when it arrives.

Martin O'Malley
CEO, Wolters Kluwer Legal & Regulatory

Opening statement

The accelerated adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and the increasing intricacies of regulatory frameworks are raising expectations for law firms and corporate legal departments determined to be “future-ready.”

As the 2026 *Future Ready Lawyer Survey* reveals, legal professionals worldwide are integrating AI more deeply into their daily operations, driving measurable improvements in efficiency, automation, and business growth.

Yet, the path ahead brings significant hurdles, including ethical considerations, data privacy concerns, and the need to upskill talent.

Other challenges persist as well. Survey participants highlight the increasing demand for technology to deliver results — including greater automation, enhanced legal research, and tangible business benefits.

This prompts important considerations regarding the influence of AI and other emerging technologies on established business models, such as the billable hour, as well as conventional strategies for talent acquisition and management.

All of this is unfolding against the backdrop of an increasingly complex regulatory environment.

The seventh annual *Future Ready Lawyer Survey Report* explores how the convergence of these trends is shaping the way today’s legal professionals work. It provides insights into where law firms and corporate legal departments see opportunity, anticipate obstacles, and confront the unknown. The insights collected here are designed to help legal professionals confidently navigate an era of perpetual change.

What's new: Key survey findings

AI adoption

The widespread adoption of artificial intelligence across the legal sector emerged as one of this report's most significant findings. Over 90% of legal professionals now utilize at least one AI tool in their daily work.

This surge reflects a growing reliance on technology to optimize legal processes and respond to evolving client expectations. AI has become a baseline tool for legal professionals, with usage spanning law firms, corporate legal departments, and business consulting practices.

Efficiency gains

AI integration delivers tangible efficiency improvements for legal professionals. More than 60% of respondents report weekly time savings of 6% to 20% resulting from AI usage. By automating routine tasks such as legal research, document review, and contract drafting, lawyers can dedicate more time to strategic, high-value work. The mean weekly time savings across all respondents surveyed is nearly 10%, underscoring the significant impact of AI on productivity.

Revenue growth

AI is not only enhancing productivity but also driving financial growth within the legal sector. Use of AI has tangible value — more than 60% of professionals experienced time savings of 6%–20% per week, while approximately 50% of respondents reported that revenue has increased at the same proportion. This underscores AI's growing role in unlocking new business opportunities and supporting organizational growth.

Barriers to adoption

Nevertheless, significant obstacles hinder broader AI adoption. Ethical concerns, data privacy issues, insufficient training, and resistance to change remain the main challenges cited by legal professionals. Cybersecurity is especially prominent, with 35% of respondents identifying it as a significant concern that must be addressed to ensure the safe and responsible use of AI in legal practice.

Rising demand for specialized expertise

The complexities of global business and geopolitical risks continue to reshape regulatory compliance challenges, driving increased demand for expertise in sanctions, export controls, international arbitration, and cross-border transactions.

In fact, 44% of survey participants report increased demand for these specialized practice areas, while 35% cite growing cybersecurity concerns, and 33% note regulatory scrutiny and compliance requirements. As legal professionals navigate these challenges, effective management and application of AI will be critical for future success.

92%
of legal professionals now use at least one AI tool

62%
report weekly time savings of 6–20% due to AI

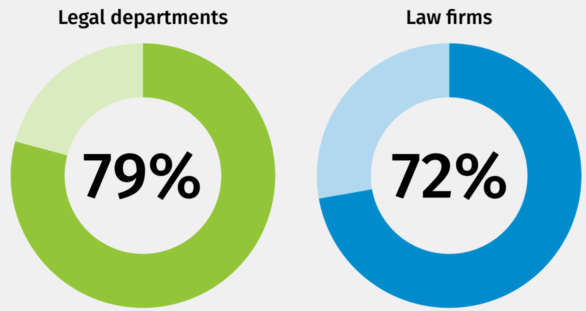
52%
saw revenue increases after adopting AI

46%
cite data privacy and cyber threats as top information security concerns

62%
expect AI-driven efficiencies to reduce billable hours

70%
view technological expertise as an important attribute when recruiting new talent

Expect an increase in their organization's investment in AI technology or expect investment to remain the same over the next three years



What's next: Trends shaping the legal industry over the next three years

1. Leadership expectations
Legal professionals identify meeting evolving leadership expectations as one of the most significant trends for the next three years, with 82% of respondents indicating it will have a substantial impact on their organizations. However, the degree to which law firms and corporate legal departments feel ready to address those expectations continues to vary across organizations, with 56% of respondents indicating that they were "somewhat prepared" and 26% identifying as "very prepared."

2. AI regulation
Global efforts to regulate AI are being watched closely throughout the legal sector. A majority (81%) of legal professionals believe that regulations governing the use and development of AI will be highly impactful. Despite acknowledging the significance of AI regulation, only 34% feel their organizations are very prepared to navigate emerging compliance requirements.

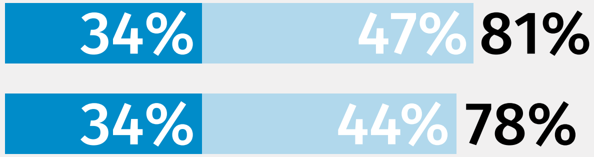
3. Information security and compliance
As AI becomes more embedded in legal workflows, strong information security and compliance programs are increasingly critical. The survey shows that 35% of respondents cite cybersecurity as a significant concern. However, few organizations feel very prepared to address those challenges, highlighting the need for stronger security challenges to ensure the safe and responsible use of AI tools.

4. Geopolitical and regulatory pressures
Geopolitical tensions and evolving regulations are driving demand for specialized legal expertise. Legal professionals report rising needs in sanctions, export controls, and cybersecurity, with 44% indicating a significant impact from increasing demand in international arbitration, data privacy, cross-border transactions, and regulatory compliance.

5. Organizational resilience and adaptability
Resilience is a standout theme in this year's findings, with 79% of respondents expressing confidence in their organization's ability to manage geopolitical and regulatory challenges.

This sentiment is shared amongst 78% of law firms and 80% of legal departments. This confidence reflects a growing emphasis on adaptability and proactive risk management in an increasingly dynamic environment.

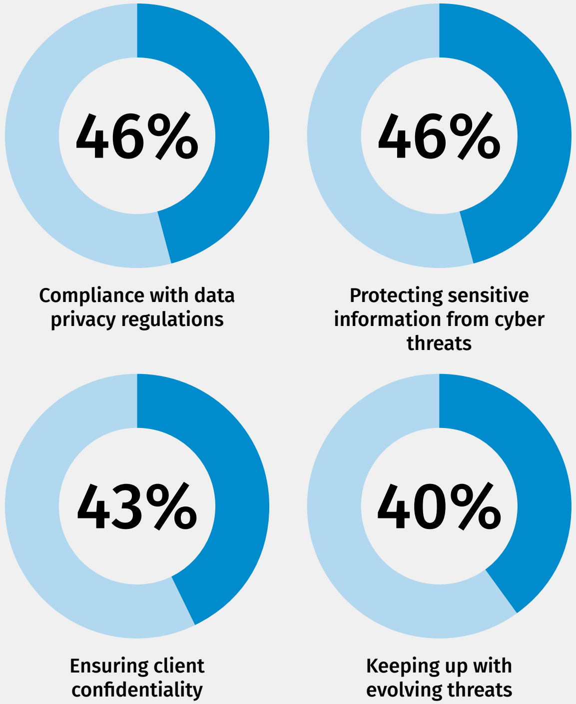
Developing regulations around the use and development of AI



47% of legal professionals see an impact with developing regulations around the use of AI, with **34%** expecting a significant impact.

While **78%** feel prepared to address this.

Highest information security challenges facing legal practices



AI innovation: The new standard for legal excellence

Key insights

- AI is redefining the legal profession, enabling lawyers to focus on higher-value work and strategic decision-making.
- Successful adoption of AI requires ongoing investment in training, ethical frameworks, and seamless integration into daily workflows.
- Legal organizations that embrace AI holistically are better positioned to deliver consistent, high-quality outcomes and build lasting client trust.

AI technologies have become deeply embedded in the legal sector, transforming how legal professionals approach their work. Over 90% of respondents report using at least one AI tool in their daily workflow, reflecting a dramatic shift from previous years when adoption was more limited.

The value of AI solutions in the legal sector is evident in both productivity and financial outcomes. According to the survey, 62% of respondents report time savings that fall between 6% and 20% of their work week thanks to AI tools.

This increased efficiency translates directly into financial gains, with 52% of legal professionals surveyed attributing a 6%–20% increase in revenue to their use of AI.

Looking ahead, 60% expect their organization's investment in AI technology to increase over the next three years. AI is most used for legal research and analysis, developing legal arguments, drafting contracts, and reviewing documents.

These tools are automating routine processes and enabling legal professionals to focus on higher-value strategic work. Satisfaction with AI tool performance is high, with four-in-five survey participants agreeing that AI tools meet their expectations.

Luminary insight

"Although it is not unusual for clients to pay 'performance premiums' for certain work, that may become more common if AI can help clients obtain answers more quickly, giving them greater time to plan, pivot, etc."

Joy Heath Rush
CEO of the International Legal Technology Association (ILTA)

Law firms' and legal departments' revenue increases from the adoption of AI tools

52%
of survey participants say their organizations have seen additional revenue since adopting AI

10%
state that it is too early to tell if there has been an effect on revenue within their organization

However, legal professionals recognize the complexities associated with AI adoption. The top challenges to further AI implementation are ethical concerns related to AI and data privacy (39%), inadequate training (39%), and resistance to change (35%). Advanced cybersecurity and privacy-enhancing technologies are expected to be highly relevant over the next three years as organizations seek to protect sensitive information and maintain client trust.

As AI continues to evolve, legal organizations must prioritize ongoing training, ethical guidelines, and seamless workflow integration. Effectively leveraging AI while managing risks will be key for future-ready legal teams.

The five top challenges to AI adoption

	Legal departments	Law firms
1. Ethical concerns related to AI and data privacy	37%	41%
2. Inadequate training and resources for implementing AI	39%	39%
3. Difficulty integrating AI with existing processes	39%	35%
4. Resistance to change from legal professionals	38%	34%
5. Lack of understanding AI	30%	31%

Luminary insight

"The legal profession is likely to become increasingly multidisciplinary, welcoming data scientists and AI specialists alongside traditional professionals, thereby enriching the capabilities of law firms and creating new career paths."

Licia Garotti
Equity Partner and Head of Intellectual Property & TechLaw Practice at PedersoliGattai

Verdict

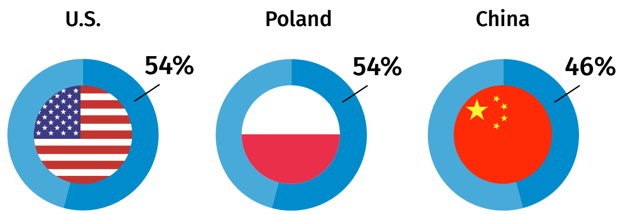
Measurable gains in efficiency and revenue suggest that AI is making its impact felt on the practice of law. However, organizations determined to maximize their investments must be prepared to address AI holistically.

This includes robust cybersecurity measures, ethical frameworks, and ongoing training to encourage and support employee use. Effectively managing AI-powered solutions mitigates risk and ensures that technology complements, not replaces, the professional judgment and expertise of lawyers.

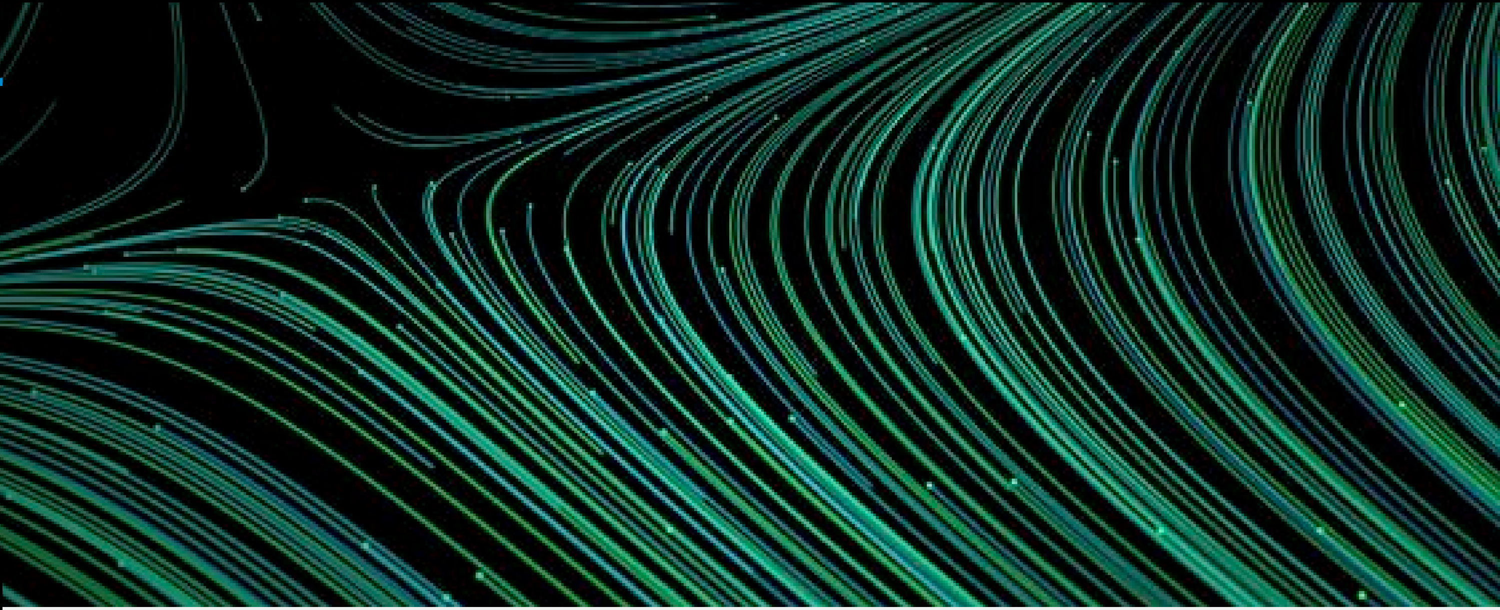
The future-ready legal organization will not be defined solely by technology. Instead, law firms and corporate legal departments that uphold ethical practice, demonstrate resilience in the face of change, and commit to the ongoing development of their people will be best positioned to thrive in the evolving legal landscape.

Country facts

Countries where respondents view ethical concerns related to AI and data privacy as a top concern



Evolving business models and service delivery



Key insights

- The legal industry is transforming, with new business models emerging to meet evolving client expectations.
- Agility and openness to innovation are essential for organizations seeking to adapt service delivery and pricing strategies.
- Collaboration with alternative legal service providers is changing how routine tasks are managed, driving efficiency and flexibility.

AI is fundamentally reshaping the legal industry, driving a transformation in traditional business models and prompting significant shifts in how, where, and by whom specific tasks are performed.

The survey indicates that over half (51%) of all respondents anticipate that work such as legal research, document automation, and contract drafting will be increasingly reallocated to alternative legal service providers (ALSPs).

This trend is especially pronounced among law firms (49%) and corporate legal departments (53%), reflecting a broad consensus that AI is accelerating the outsourcing of routine work.

Top tasks impacted by AI and reallocated to ALSPs

	Legal departments	Law firms
1. Legal research and analysis	53%	49%
2. Document automation	43%	50%
3. Contract drafting and review	40%	44%
4. Intellectual property management	41%	34%
5. Discovery	24%	30%

Legal professionals are expressing growing confidence in their organizations' ability to adapt business practices, service offerings, workflows, and pricing models in response to AI-driven efficiencies.

Notably, 61% of respondents feel their firms are prepared to make these adjustments, and more than half of law firms (52%) claim that their revenue has increased by 6–20% following the adoption of AI.

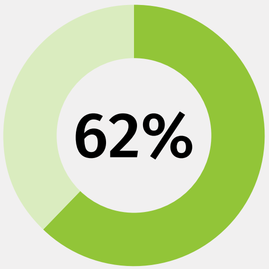
Within this group, 19% report revenue growth of 11–20%, while 30% report gains of 6–10%. This underscores the tangible financial benefits that AI adoption is delivering across the sector.

However, the impact of AI on staffing, traditional service delivery models, and client engagement strategies remains less certain. While organizations are optimistic about their ability to adapt, many legal professionals acknowledge that the transition will require ongoing innovation and agility.

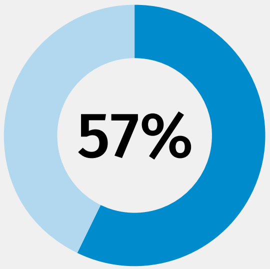
For example, 62% of legal department respondents believe that AI-driven efficiencies will significantly reduce the prevalence of the billable hour, paving the way for alternative pricing models and greater cost transparency.

Reduction in the prevalence of the billable hour as a result of AI-driven efficiencies

Legal departments



Law firms



As the legal industry continues to evolve, law firms and corporate legal departments must remain agile, balancing the changing needs of clients with the realities of a shifting market. Innovation strategies will need to address not only technological advancements but also the cultural and operational changes required for sustained success.

Luminary insight

"As ALSPs capture routine work — research, document automation, contract drafting — traditional firms face a stark choice: evolve or become obsolete. Perhaps not immediately and not everywhere at the same time, but the challenge cannot be postponed for much longer."

Licia Garotti
Equity Partner and Head of Intellectual Property & TechLaw Practice at PedersoliGattai

Verdict

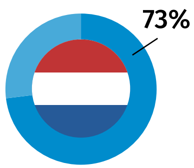
AI is driving a profound shift in legal business models, accelerating the outsourcing of routine tasks and encouraging the adoption of new pricing strategies. Firms and legal departments that exhibit a willingness to reexamine traditional workflows and invest in continuous learning will place themselves in a strong position to deliver client value in new, creative ways.

Agility and innovation are the watchwords of the future.

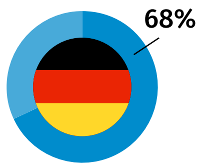
Country facts

Countries where respondents expect AI-driven efficiencies to have an impact on the prevalence of the billable hour

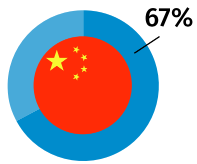
The Netherlands



Germany



China



Technology, talent, and organizational culture

Key insights

- Technological expertise is now a core competency, influencing talent strategies and organizational priorities across the legal sector.
- Fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability is critical for attracting and retaining top legal professionals.
- Strong values and a commitment to professional development empower legal teams to thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

Technological expertise is rapidly becoming a cornerstone of legal practice, signaling a shift from traditional legal skills to technical capabilities.

However, when asked to identify the primary advocate of AI adoption inside their organization, 42% of respondents identified IT departments, followed by corporate leadership (34%) and senior partners (27%). This suggests increased collaboration between technical and legal teams in shaping the future of legal organizations.

Innovation is critical in attracting and retaining top legal talent. Survey data shows that 69% of respondents value professional development opportunities, and 66% highlight investment in cutting-edge legal technologies as key factors in drawing and keeping skilled professionals.

Notably, 75% of legal departments view technological expertise as extremely important or important, compared to 66% of law firms. This shift is influencing talent strategies, training programs, and organizational priorities, as legal teams seek to build future-ready capabilities.

Luminary insight

"Human oversight remains essential: AI outputs must be reviewed through sound legal reasoning and ethical judgment by a human in — or at least on — the loop."

Professor Frauke Rostalski
Chair of Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure Law, Philosophy of Law and Comparative Law at the Faculty of Law at the University of Cologne

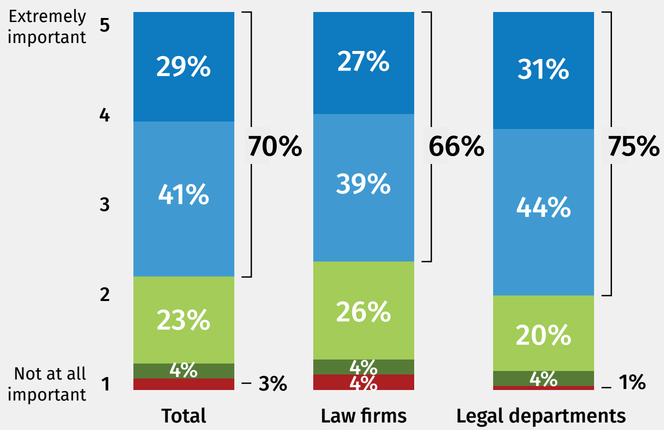
Law firms and corporate legal departments have also made progress in retaining key contributors, with 70% of legal professionals agreeing their organizations offer a healthy work-life balance, along with a strong company culture and core values.

Staffing is not the only facet of the legal market that's evolving. The balance of power between law firms and corporate legal departments is shifting as well, with 54% of respondents anticipating that law firms will leverage improved efficiency to service more clients or drive more competitive pricing.

However, corporate legal departments are not at a disadvantage, as 46% of legal professionals expect in-house teams to gain increased power and rely less on external law firms, while 41% believe that access to sophisticated tools will help bring law firms and legal departments closer in capabilities.

As IT departments continue to drive change, legal organizations must foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptability. Balancing technology adoption with talent development and organizational culture will be essential for sustained success.

Importance of technological expertise amongst legal professionals



Luminary insight

"The most valuable talent today are those who possess both legal experience and technological expertise... Organizations may establish legal-technology clubs or study groups internally, appointing the most passionate young professionals as leaders..."

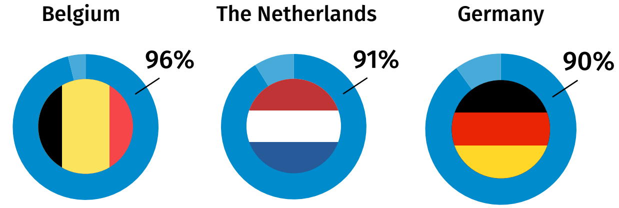
WEI Xin
Founder and Managing Partner of RICC & Co.

Verdict

Technological expertise now drives legal talent strategies and culture. Legal organizations that focus on technical skills, continuous learning, and strong values are best positioned to thrive. Agility, innovation, and growth define future-ready teams, empowering professionals to adapt and deliver value in a changing legal landscape.

Country facts

Countries where respondents agree that AI has impacted their day-to-day work and talent strategies



Information security: Safeguarding trust

Key insights

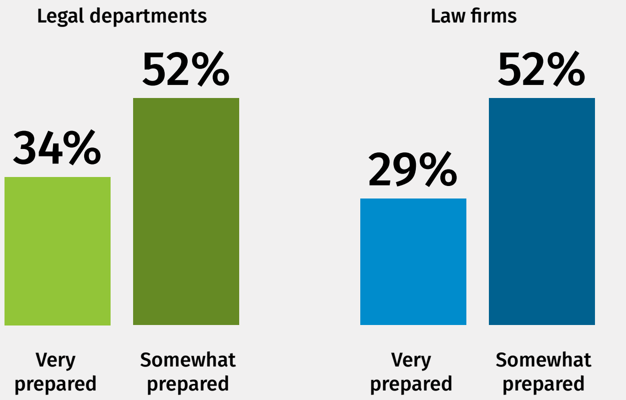
- → Information security is a persistent challenge, requiring vigilance and proactive risk management in the face of evolving threats.
- → Building a resilient security framework depends on ongoing investment in technology, staff training, and collaboration with experts.
- → Legal organizations that prioritize client confidentiality and regulatory compliance strengthen trust and safeguard their reputation.

Information security has evolved from an operational concern to an ever-present risk in the legal industry. The rise of remote work, cloud data storage, and AI implementation has expanded areas of vulnerability for legal organizations, while compliance requirements have grown increasingly complex and stringent.

According to the survey, 46% of legal professionals cite data privacy compliance and protecting sensitive information from cyber threats as top concerns, while 43% highlight ensuring client confidentiality.

Managing growing information security challenges is also seen as one of the most impactful trends for the next three years, with 80% of respondents expecting significant or some impact. Yet, only 31% of organizations overall feel very prepared to address these challenges, underscoring the need for stronger security strategies.

Legal organizations' readiness to address managing growing information security challenges



Remote work has increased exposure to cyber threats, with 37% of respondents identifying remote work security as a significant challenge. Cloud-based storage introduces new risks, while AI adoption adds further complexity; 39% of legal professionals report ethical concerns related to AI and data privacy, and 36% struggle to integrate AI into existing systems.

Organizations are responding by hiring technologically skilled professionals and prioritizing staff training in information security best practices. According to the survey, 55% of law firms and corporate legal departments use multi-factor authentication, 50% utilize encrypted communication tools, and 49% conduct regular security audits to safeguard client information.

Additionally, 42% of organizations restrict remote access or cloud-based services by policy, and 55% collaborate with external IT and cybersecurity experts to stay up to date with regulations.

Continuous education is also a priority, with 58% of respondents indicating a need for more cybersecurity training, 54% valuing collaboration with IT and cybersecurity experts, and 51% seeking advanced cybersecurity tools and resources. Regular staff training, collaboration, and investment in technology are now essential strategies for mitigating risks and maintaining trust.

As information security becomes increasingly complex, legal organizations must remain vigilant and proactive. Investing in technology, ongoing training, and cross-functional collaboration will be critical for maintaining trust and meeting the demands of clients and regulators. The ability to anticipate and respond to emerging threats will define the resilience of future-ready legal teams.

Staying up to date with information security regulations and best practices

	Legal departments	Law firms
Collaborating with external IT professionals and cybersecurity experts	58%	54%
Attending training sessions and webinars	48%	51%
Employing internal cyber security professionals	50%	44%
Subscribing to industry newsletters and updates	42%	41%

Luminary insight

"Law firms should realize that there is practically no lawyer left who does not use AI. If they do not get secure tools, they will have 'shadow AI' and situations that are dangerous in terms of ethics and reputation."

Tomasz Zalewski
Partner at Zalewski Legal

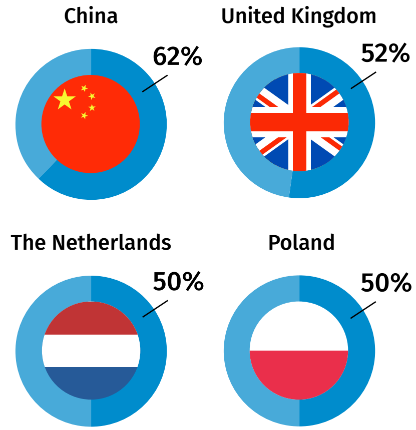
Verdict

Security and compliance are no longer optional; they require ongoing investment in technology, training, and collaboration with IT experts. Legal organizations that prioritize robust security frameworks, foster a culture of continuous learning, and proactively address emerging risks will be best positioned to maintain client trust and regulatory confidence.

In a world where digital threats are constantly evolving, the future-ready legal team is defined by its vigilance, adaptability, and commitment to safeguarding the integrity of its practice.

Country facts

Countries where respondents view compliance with data privacy regulations as a top information security challenge



Closing argument

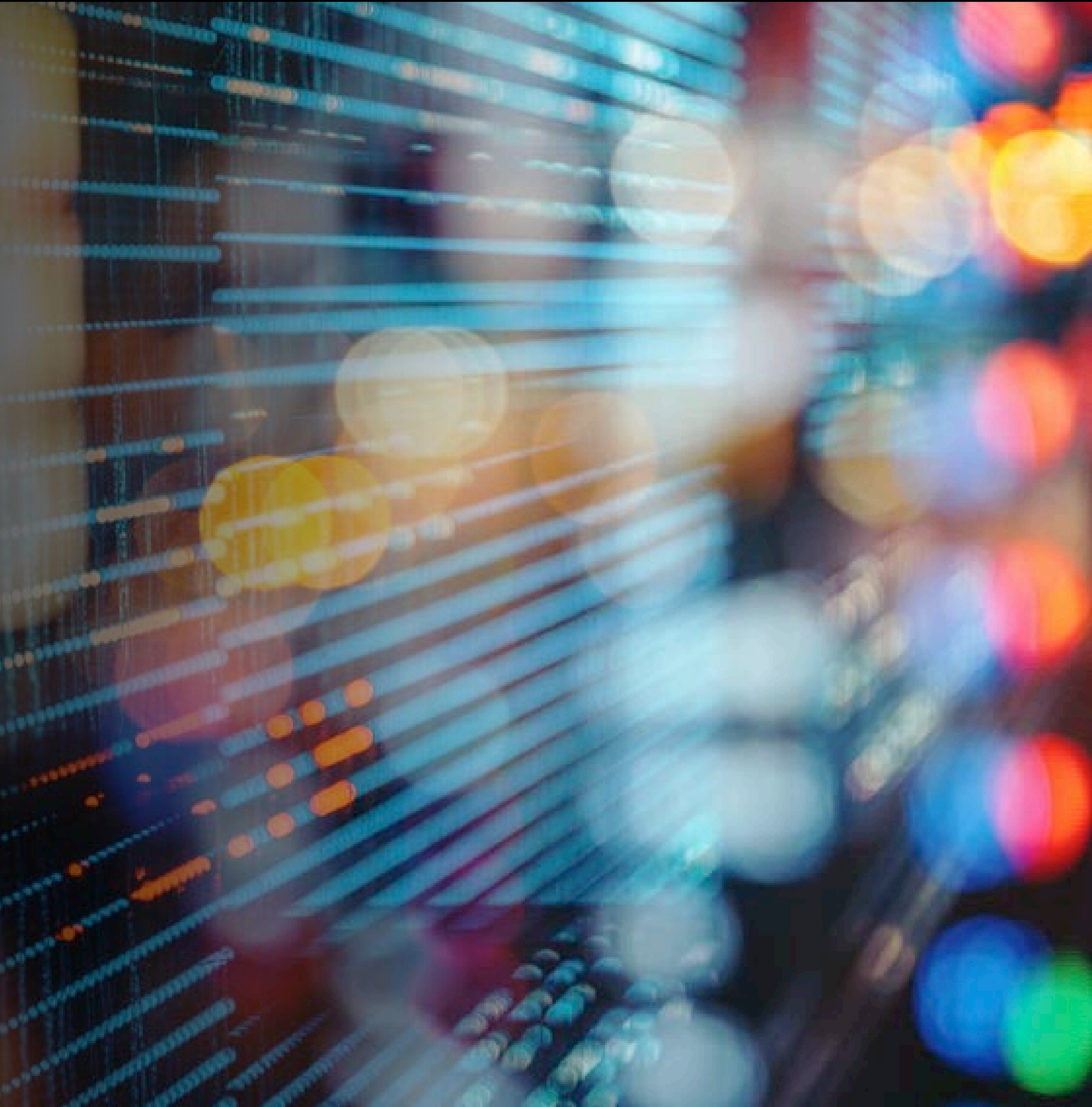
The question of whether legal professionals are truly "future-ready" remains as relevant and compelling as ever.

The *2026 Future Ready Lawyer Survey* reveals an industry in motion, as legal professionals embrace technological innovation and adapt to evolving business models and regulations. AI is being leveraged for efficiency and growth, yet challenges persist in ethics, security, and talent management.

The resilience and adaptability of legal organizations stand out, with those investing in continuous learning and strong compliance frameworks best equipped to succeed. Becoming future-ready is an ongoing journey, requiring vigilance and openness to change.

This year's survey offers valuable guidance for legal teams seeking to lead the way. By fostering a culture of innovation, prioritizing ethical practice, and empowering talent, organizations can confidently navigate disruption and seize the opportunities ahead.

The future belongs to those who are prepared to adapt, evolve, and shape the next chapter of the legal profession.



Luminary insights

Industry thought leaders from Europe, China, and the United States share insights on AI, new business models, culture, and security, revealing how these forces are transforming the legal industry's future direction and resilience.

Q ***With over 90% of legal professionals now using at least one AI tool and nearly half reporting revenue increases, where do you envision AI having the largest impact on the business model of legal services over the next five years?***

Joy Heath Rush: I attended a conference recently where there was a panel of GCs discussing the impact of AI on their outside counsel work. Some certainly want their bills lowered. However, others are happy to pay the same — or more — for faster results and better outcomes. Although it is not unusual for clients to pay "performance premiums" for certain work, that may become more common if AI can help clients obtain answers more quickly, giving them greater time to plan, pivot, etc.

Licia Garotti: Over the next five years, AI is likely to significantly transform the provision of legal services and the measurement of value. This should not necessarily be seen as "irreparable damage" to the profession, but rather as a lever for creating exciting opportunities. Instead of replacing lawyers, AI tools that demonstrate a significant increase in productivity (think document review) allow lawyers to move from routine work to high-value strategic advice: the "80/20 reversal," where lawyers spend 80% of their time analyzing rather than gathering information; provided that, with no exception, human supervision is always in place.

This evolution favors quality over quantity, enabling law firms to deliver better results to clients while maintaining sustainable business models. The legal profession is likely to become increasingly multidisciplinary, welcoming data scientists and AI specialists alongside traditional professionals, thereby enriching the capabilities of law firms and creating new career paths. The competitive advantage will most likely come from proprietary or highly customized AI systems trained/fine-tuned on granular data and targeted skills, rather than simply the number of hours worked. Above all, clients expect and welcome this transformation, viewing AI not as a cost-cutting tool but as a means to achieve faster, higher-quality legal services, which validates rather than threatens the fundamental value proposition of the profession.

Q ***As AI improves speed and cost-efficiency, how are client expectations evolving — and how should legal organizations respond to maintain trust and competitive advantage?***

WEI Xin: Law firms' efforts to project a positive image of embracing new technologies externally may become associated with clients imposing more demanding expectations. The more a firm emphasizes the broad application of AI tools, the more it may naturally prompt clients to further require higher service efficiency, reduced billable hours, and greater substantive involvement from senior lawyers. However, law firms cannot respond to these heightened expectations by rejecting new technologies or taking a conservative, exclusionary stance toward AI, because clients already assume that the legal services industry should embrace AI. A common phenomenon today is that clients compare the answers provided by general-purpose large models on legal questions with the responses given by lawyers. The authority of lawyers is being challenged, and you are compelled to spend time explaining to clients why certain suggestions proposed by AI should not be adopted in practice, and why the lawyer's solution has already fully considered those options.

In the face of rising client expectations, law firms must accept and understand this shift. You must redesign your workflows and delivery models, accelerate your response times, and at the same time, ensure that your written work and answers feel more "human" and more customized.

Meet the luminaries

Licia Garotti
Licia Garotti is Partner at PedersoliGattai Law Firm, heading the Technology Law and Intellectual Property department and co-leading the Fintech group. She advises on tech-driven and IP matters, with expertise in AI, cybersecurity, blockchain, and web 3.0. Licia is a frequent speaker, published author, and co-author of Responsible AI: A Global Policy Framework. Ranked among Italy's 50 most inspiring women in law, she's actively engaged in ESG projects and social innovation.

Dyane O'Leary
Professor Dyane O'Leary is a professor of legal writing and directs Suffolk Law's Legal Innovation & Technology (LIT) Center and LIT Concentration, recognized as the nation's top legal tech program by *National Jurist* and a *Bloomberg* Top 10 Law School Innovator. Author of *Legal Innovation & Technology: A Practical Skills Guide for the Modern Lawyer* (West Academic, 2022), Professor O'Leary focuses on technology competence in legal practice, Generative AI, legal research tools, document automation, and cybersecurity.

Joy Heath Rush
Joy Heath Rush serves as the Chief Executive Officer of The International Legal Technology Association (ILTA), an organization dedicated to providing educational and networking resources for nearly 25,000 legal professionals and technologists worldwide. In her role, she manages ILTA's operations, a global network of volunteer leaders, and a professional team of over 35 staff members.

Luminary insights

Q ***How quickly do you expect to see traditional business models such as the billable hour shift in the face of AI-driven innovation?***

Tomasz Zalewski: I do not believe that hourly rates are the biggest problem when it comes to the use of AI. Hourly rates will remain a way of measuring the effectiveness of lawyers internally, but the method of billing will probably continue to drift towards fixed budgets, especially since AI allows us to predict much more accurately what the flat fee for a given job should be, based on our own data and experience.

AI gives law firms the tools to better estimate the amount of work involved, analyze historical projects and price services more accurately. This naturally leads to greater confidence in offering fixed budgets and alternative billing models, which are more predictable for the client and often more profitable for the law firm.

Q ***As over half of respondents anticipate tasks like legal research, document automation, and contract drafting shifting to ALSPs, how should "traditional" firms position themselves to remain competitive?***

Licia Garotti: This is certainly not an easy question. The legal profession has to deal with a very diverse group of lawyers and law firms, with skills, ages, and resources that are not necessarily aligned. As ALSPs capture routine work — research, document automation, contract drafting — traditional firms face a stark choice: evolve or become obsolete. Perhaps not immediately and not everywhere at the same time, but the challenge cannot be postponed for much longer.

The disruption must be embraced. The deployment of generative AI to slash costs and turbocharge efficiency on repetitive tasks could be the right key, beside partnering with ALSPs to offer flexible, cost-effective delivery models clients now demand. This is not just a matter of competition but a chance to diversify into consulting, managing services, and processing tools that corporate law departments crave. Meanwhile, double down on what ALSPs can't replicate: high-stakes, complex counsel and specialist expertise that keeps lawyers indispensable when it matters most.

Q ***Traditional legal skills remain vitally important. How can law firms and corporate legal departments balance the cultivation of those skills against developing the technical capabilities their employees need to manage AI-driven workflows?***

Professor Frauke Rostalski: As AI takes over simpler legal tasks, reducing junior roles, firms must ensure traditional legal skills are not lost. Human oversight remains essential: AI outputs must be reviewed through sound legal reasoning and ethical judgment by a human in — or at least on — the loop. To maintain this balance, organizations should integrate AI literacy into early legal training while preserving pathways for developing core analytical and interpretive skills needed for legal work. Replacing all junior lawyers with AI risks eroding the future pool of (senior-) experts needed for human-in/on-the-loop oversight and could potentially undermine both professional standards and trust in AI-assisted legal work.

Q ***What benchmarks or metrics should law firms and corporate legal departments be using to assess meaningful progress in AI adoption?***

Tomasz Zalewski: I do not believe that progress in AI implementation should be measured at all. It is not progress in AI implementation that counts, but results — and these cannot be achieved without AI.

Law firms should focus on measuring actual business outcomes: quality of service, client satisfaction, ability to take on more complex assignments, effectiveness in managing legal risk, and, of course, profitability. These are the true indicators of success.

Measurements of how many people use AI or how many AI tools we have implemented are vanity metrics that say nothing about real value. What matters is whether the law firm is able to serve its clients better, whether lawyers are more effective in their substantive work, and whether the organization is more competitive in the market.

Q ***What are the most promising AI-driven workflow innovations that legal organizations should prioritize to enhance service delivery and client satisfaction?***

Joy Heath Rush: This question needs to include lawyer satisfaction, as well. Agentic AI, for example, has the potential to automate many tasks that lawyers hate doing.

The biggest challenge here is how to measure changes in client satisfaction. In other words, what does good look like?

The biggest innovation — and this is, admittedly, a monumental generalization — is that lawyers will get the drudgery part of their work done more quickly and with greater accuracy. Then they can get to lawyering.

Q ***As ethical concerns and data privacy remain key obstacles to wider AI adoption, how can legal industry leaders help drive trust in AI-powered solutions across their organizations?***

Professor Frauke Rostalski: Legal industry leaders can drive trust in AI by fostering AI literacy across their organizations, ensuring all stakeholders understand both the potential and the limits of AI systems. This includes not only general knowledge of how AI works (AI literacy) but also a deep, system-specific understanding of the capabilities/shortcomings of the particular AI systems in use. To ensure reliable and comparable assessments, organizations should apply, foster knowledge about (and in some cases develop) standardized performance metrics focused on trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability. Such structured evaluation and knowing how to interpret results builds confidence while addressing remaining concerns, which may hinder further implementation.

Q ***What strategies have you seen prove most effective in fostering AI literacy within legal teams?***

Professor Dyane O'Leary: I think with such a widespread general purpose technology like GenAI, fostering AI literacy has to start in a personal way. What I mean by that is someone won't grasp it professionally until they start to familiarize themselves with it in a low-stakes, casual environment with topics familiar to them — cooking, travel, home repair, whatever the case may be. I've never been disappointed at the power of personal experimentation being a real gateway to early professional understanding (or at least awareness and appreciation).

Luminary insights

Q ***How can law firms and corporate legal departments mitigate the risk of employees from using AI solutions that have not been vetted and approved by the organization?***

Tomasz Zalewski: Law firms should realize that there is practically no lawyer left who does not use AI. If they do not get secure tools, they will have "shadow AI" and situations that are dangerous in terms of ethics and reputation. The only effective solution is a proactive approach: providing lawyers with secure, approved AI tools that meet their needs. Bans and restrictions do not work — lawyers will find a way to use AI anyway, but they will do so in an uncontrolled and potentially dangerous manner.

It is crucial to ensure that the tools provided are GDPR-compliant (that is, there is a Data Processing Agreement), come from reputable suppliers whose assurances of data security and confidentiality are more than just a paper commitment, and are sufficiently functional and useful so that lawyers do not feel the need to look for alternatives.

At the same time, education about the risks associated with unapproved tools should be provided, and a culture of responsibility should be built in which lawyers understand the consequences of their technological choices.

Licia Garotti: The proliferation of unauthorized AI tools ("shadow AI") threatens client confidentiality, regulatory compliance, and professional standards, demanding a comprehensive response that integrates policy, technology, AI literacy, and organizational culture. Legal organizations should establish clear approved-use policies defining permissible tools, acceptable use cases, and mandatory human verification, while explicitly prohibiting client or personal data in public models without robust safeguards, including data processing agreements, no-retention guarantees, and EU/EEA compliance. It is advisable to provide a curated, vetted AI catalogs through a single sign-on infrastructure while deploying technical barriers (as cloud access security brokers, DNS filtering, data loss prevention systems) to block unauthorized applications, supported by comprehensive logging and role-based access controls.

Beyond technical measures, the substantial investment in AI literacy programs enabling legal professionals to recognize hallucinations, bias, prompt injection vulnerabilities, and escalation protocols is crucial. Moreover, continuous monitoring, periodic audits, and proportionate enforcement for violations should be implemented beside ensuring appropriate client disclosure and documented consent where AI materially affects representation. This could be more easily enabled through an active governance with dedicated AI committees, risk registers, and change control processes that maintain alignment with evolving regulatory guidance and professional standards. A proper integrated framework can transform shadow AI from unmanaged risk into controlled innovation, preserving professional integrity.

Q ***Do you think that law firms and legal departments need to reshape their hiring strategies to attract tech-savvy legal talent? How?***

WEI Xin: The most valuable talent today are those who possess both legal experience and technological expertise, and we need targeted reforms in both recruitment and talent development. Organizations may establish legal-technology clubs or study groups internally, appointing the most passionate young professionals as leaders, and providing them with institutional support such as funding, training opportunities, and access to external technical experts for guidance. This will help identify and cultivate compound talents within the organization who combine legal knowledge with technological capability.

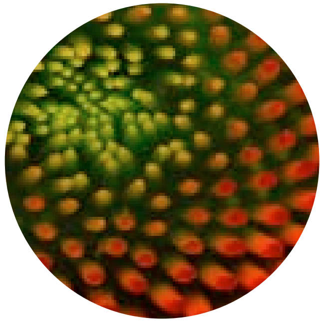
Supporting technology clubs in law schools and organizing technology competitions within law schools to identify outstanding young individuals is also an effective strategy.

Meet the luminaries

Frauke Rostalski
Professor Frauke Rostalski is a German legal scholar, legal philosopher, and author. Since 2018, she has held the Chair of Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure Law, Legal Philosophy, and Comparative Law at the University of Cologne and has been a member of the German Ethics Council since 2020. As an expert, she also leads several projects focused on AI and regularly gives lectures on the challenges of digitalization for law and ethics.

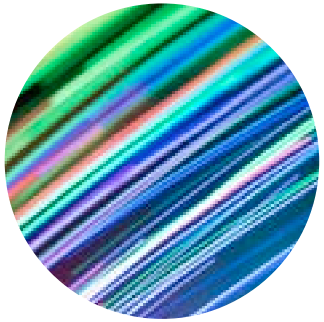
WEI Xin
WEI Xin is the Founder and Managing Partner of RICC & Co., and also serves as a Council Member of the Shanghai Bar Association, holding positions as the Director of the Information Technology Committee, the Director of the Legal Technology Committee, and the Director of the Sports Law Committee. Additionally, he acts as the Vice President of the Shanghai Legal Technology Association.

Tomasz Zalewski
Tomasz Zalewski is an attorney-at-law specializing in public procurement law, new technologies, and intellectual property law. He is the founder of the law firm Zalewski Legal and the LegalTech Polska Foundation, which promotes technological innovation in legal services and knowledge sharing in the legal tech sector.





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Wolters Kluwer (WKL) is a global leader in information, software, and services for professionals in healthcare, tax and accounting, financial and corporate compliance, legal and regulatory, and corporate performance and ESG. We help our customers make critical decisions every day by providing expert solutions that combine deep domain knowledge with specialized technology and services. Wolters Kluwer reported 2024 annual revenues of €5.9 billion. The group serves customers in over 180 countries, maintains operations in over 40 countries, and employs approximately 21,600 people worldwide. The company is headquartered in Alphen aan den Rijn, the Netherlands.

About the *2026 Wolters Kluwer Future Ready Lawyer Survey*

The *2026 Future Ready Lawyer Survey* from Wolters Kluwer's Legal & Regulatory division included quantitative interviews with 810 lawyers in law firms and corporate legal departments across the U.S., China, and nine European countries — Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, and Hungary — to examine how client expectations, technology, and market trends are affecting the future of the legal profession and how legal organizations are prepared to address these.

The survey was conducted online for Wolters Kluwer by a leading international research organization from August 8 to August 25, 2025.

Methodology

This report contains the results of the *2026 Wolters Kluwer Future Ready Lawyer Survey* — a current and in-depth perspective on law firms and corporate legal departments, with insights from 810 legal professionals across the U.S., China, and nine European countries — Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, and Hungary.

The survey examines issues and trends affecting the future of law as organizations adapt to a new world of digital transformation. This seventh edition of the annual report also provides the perspective of legal luminaries on these topics.

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