

## Willkie Farr's Latest Promotion Round Includes 3 Latina Lawyers

The firm's thriving Latin America practice is nurturing female talent as it grows.

By Amy Guthrie

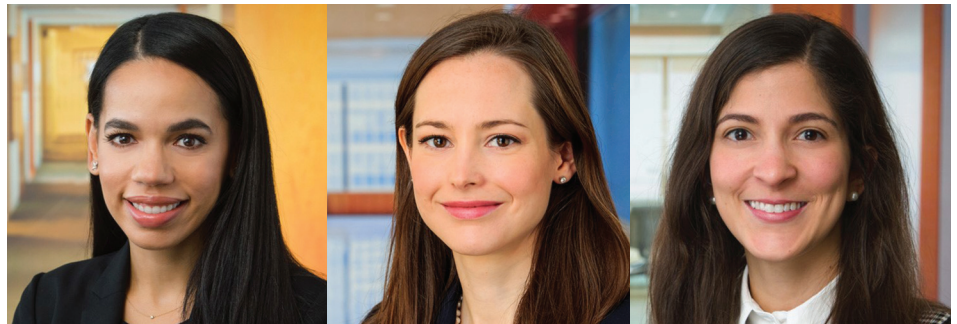
Three of the 31 attorneys recently promoted to partner at Willkie Farr & Gallagher are Latinas, marking a proud moment for Maria-Leticia Ossa Daza, the Colombia-born founding chair of Willkie's Latin America practice, who has mentored several up-and-coming Latina attorneys at the firm. More than 70% of the core team that makes up Willkie's Latin America practice, in fact, is female.

Ossa Daza said the legal profession has made great strides in increasing representation of all individuals, but she noted that it still has a long way to go when it comes to diverse leaders at the top. "For me, it is personally very important to see this continue to change over time," she said, adding that the promotion of the Latina partners "shows that the work we are doing within Willkie to build an inclusive culture is paying off."

We asked Willkie's newest Latina partners to share a bit about their backgrounds and what it took to climb the ranks in Big Law. Their thoughts below have been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

**Anna Martini G. Pereira, Corporate and Financial Services Partner**

**How would you describe your cultural upbringing? Where**



Courtesy photos

(L-R) Isabel Araujo, Pia Keevil and Anna Martini G. Pereira, partners at Willkie Farr & Gallagher.

**were you born and raised? Where did you study?**

I would sum up my upbringing in one word: multicultural. My dad worked for a multinational bank for over 10 years, and his job took us around the globe. By the time I was eight, I had lived in five different cities, including Bangkok (where I was born), Caracas, Boston, New York and Rio de Janeiro, where I eventually earned my law degree and MBA.

After practicing for five years at Mattos Filho in Brazil, I decided to pursue my LL.M. at Stanford University. My [Brazilian] parents raised my siblings and me to be very conscious that we were a part of a fast-paced world becoming increasingly globalized. They always emphasized the importance of speaking multiple languages [English, Portuguese, Spanish and French], understanding different cultures and backgrounds, and swiftly and steadily

transitioning across them. My dad went as far as telling 13-year-old me that if I wanted to be a good lawyer, I would need to speak other languages—naturally, a lie, but my language skills did turn out to be pretty valuable to the path I took.

**How did you become involved in Willkie's Latin America practice group? Where are you licensed to practice law?**

At Willkie, being in the Latin America practice doesn't mean you are limited to doing Latin American work. In fact, I am also a part of the M&A/PE group in the corporate and financial services practice. The majority of my work focuses on transactions involving Latin America. I believe that being involved in both practices makes me a better lawyer overall. I am licensed to practice both in New York and Brazil.

**How has being multicultural helped you (or hurt you) in the course of your legal career?**

Being multicultural has always given me the ability to work and interact with people from different cultures in a very natural way. It is also comforting to our Latin American clients that I can speak with them in their native language and serve as a bridge between cultures. I like to say that I am like a puzzle put together with pieces from different puzzles that may appear at first glance to not fit neatly together. I think that being multicultural has allowed me to create deeper and more authentic relationships.

**What is it like to be a Latina practicing law in the U.S. and/or Latin America? Do you see other Latina role models in your field?**

I have always been fortunate to have amazing and authentic sponsors and mentors—both in Latin America and in the U.S. Earlier in my career, I was advised by someone I admired that it would be more challenging to progress in the U.S. than in Brazil and that I would definitely never be in a leadership position. I am grateful that this has not been the case because many barriers were broken by those who came before me, and I will continue working hard to break even more barriers and provide more opportunities to those coming after me. I am lucky to have found a mentor in [Latin America practice group head] Maria-Leticia Ossa Daza relatively early in my career.

**Isabel Araujo, Executive Compensation and Employee Benefits Partner**

**How would you describe your cultural upbringing? Where were**

**you born and raised? Where did you study?**

I came to the United States from the Dominican Republic when I was very young, and was raised in Brooklyn, New York, in a predominantly Dominican/Puerto Rican neighborhood. We spoke Spanish at home, at grocery stores, at church, pretty much everywhere. I learned English in school and through watching kids' television shows. I was very fortunate to have teachers who saw potential in me and encouraged me to keep reaching for greater things, and so I did. I stayed in New York for college and law school, attending Barnard College and later Columbia Law School.

**How did you become involved in Willkie's Latin America practice group? Where are you licensed to practice law?**

I am licensed in New York and practice executive compensation and employee benefits law, which is largely based on U.S. tax laws. However, this also becomes very useful for clients whose main operations are not in the U.S. and are looking for a lawyer who can guide them through market practices in the U.S. I met the head of Willkie's Latin America practice, Maria-Leticia Ossa Daza, when I was a summer associate, and as the Latin America practice grew over the years, we started working together more often.

**What is it like to be a Latina practicing law in the U.S. and/or Latin America? Do you see other Latina role models in your field?**

It is an absolute privilege to be a Latina practicing law. I look at it

as not just an accomplishment for myself, but also as an opportunity to show young people that anything is possible.

Unfortunately, I can only think of a handful of Latina role models in law, including my mentor Maria-Leticia Ossa Daza. I hope that in the future this will drastically change and I will do my part to contribute to that change.

**What advice would you give to other up-and-coming Latina lawyers?**

My advice to them is to think about ways their background can bring something unique to the table. Never think of it as a hindrance.

**Pia Williams Keevil, Litigation Partner**

**How would you describe your cultural upbringing? Where were you born and raised?**

I was born and raised in New York City by a mother from Puerto Rico and a father from Georgia. I am fortunate that my mother was committed to my speaking Spanish as fluently as my cousins and family in Puerto Rico.

**How has being multicultural helped you (or hurt you) in the course of your legal career?**

Speaking Spanish has certainly helped me in my legal career. As a junior litigator, I was given opportunities that might normally have been reserved for more experienced associates—work related to investigations in South America or that involved Spanish-speaking clients. More broadly, being multicultural has helped me connect with clients across Willkie's international litigation practice.