

Kirkland partner: ‘barriers and injustices that already existed will only exacerbate’

Giselle Sedano was made a partner in the firm’s government, regulatory and internal investigations practice as part of a wave of promotions last month

By Alice Tchernookova



Global law firm Kirkland & Ellis recently announced the promotion of 205 attorneys to partner in offices including Paris, Washington DC, New York, Shanghai and others, across practices such as ESG, M&A, private equity and capital markets.

As part of this wave of promotions, long-term Kirkland lawyer Giselle Sedano was named as a partner in the firm’s government, regulatory and international investigations practice.

As part of her remit, Sedano will advise organisations and individuals alike on a range of issues, including compliance, Department of Justice (DoJ) and Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) enforcement actions, cross-border transactional due diligence, as well as financial statements and disclosures. Her fluency in Spanish means she will also focus on Latin American and Iberian cases.

Sedano began her career in Kirkland’s New York office

in 2017 upon graduating from university. Known for her hard work and resilience, she is a coordinator of the firm's Unidos Latino professional network group in New York, and assists on firmwide diversity, equity and inclusion strategy and attorney programming. Sedano is also an active member of the Hispanic National Bar Association.

In 2023, she was selected by Kirkland to take part in the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) Pathfinder – a programme designed to increase diversity at the leadership level of US law firms and across corporate legal departments. She has received the firm's pro-bono service award every year since her start.

IFLR caught up with Sedano as she takes the next step in her already brilliant legal career.

What attracted you to the legal profession in the first place?

Unequivocally, the law drives so many aspects of our lives, even those that we might not be fully aware of during our quotidian lives. During my upbringing, I witnessed unbelievable injustices and always felt somewhat helpless. Later, I realised that those with the power and financial means to advocate for themselves through legal counsel were at a huge advantage. It also seemed that there were less attorneys who looked like me and that motivated me to want to be someone who could impact the lives of others who never ordinarily saw an attorney such as myself. Knowing the law is a tool and skill that is truly invaluable.

What do you see as the biggest challenges in doing your job currently?

As a new partner at Kirkland, I am learning how best to navigate transitioning from being an associate. Although substantially many parts of my job are essentially unchanged, I know it is imperative for my success to become more engaged in other aspects of the firm, such as business and client development which does not occur organically. There are also numerous firm efforts and projects that I deem are critically

important and want to be actively involved in but finding the time given competing priorities makes it difficult. However, I am strongly committed to contributing to mentorship, recruitment, and diversity and inclusion at Kirkland.

What attracted you to Kirkland specifically, and how did the opportunity for your current role come about?

I had an incredible mentor at the law firm where I was a summer associate and was able to follow him and his practice group when they moved to Kirkland the summer before I was to start as a first-year associate. Without hesitation, joining Kirkland was the best decision I made and have since day one felt that it genuinely is the firm where I belong.

Although I knew I wanted to commence my career at a law firm of the calibre of Kirkland & Ellis, the process was immensely competitive and daunting. It is a true privilege to have joined the firm upon graduating from Fordham University of Law, where I studied while working full-time. I have been provided with incredible opportunities, resources, and the joy to work with extremely intelligent and talented colleagues.

Can you describe the culture at Kirkland? What differentiates it from other firms?

Kirkland has the absolute highest standards in everything the firm does, which I truly love and admire. I believe Kirkland is special because there is a culture of continuously setting the highest work expectations for ourselves to advise our clients and provide the best legal counsel possible. The difference is palpable in terms of how we assemble our cases, communicate internally and externally, and seek the best outcome for our clients.

What experience and skills are you bringing to the firm?

Since high school until present, I have always had a job because I saw how hard my parents worked — my father often pulled two shifts at the factory until dawn and my mother had carpal tunnel syndrome surgery

due to the labour demanded by her cleaning job. Ingrained in me is a tremendous work ethic which is a part of everything I do at Kirkland and influences my cases and teams. Since I worked in a legal and compliance department in finance before, I also have a good understanding of what clients need and can triage situations accordingly.

How does your appointment contribute to the firm's wider strategy and expansion?

Being promoted to partner is an encouraging step for my practice group as we continue to grow and bolster our team across all offices, especially in New York where I am located. The government, regulatory, and internal investigations practice at Kirkland is a true powerhouse. I knew from day one that this is the work I wanted to do and thus for the past six years have strived to learn, undertake every opportunity, hone in on my skillset, and become an integral part of the practice group.

What trends do you currently observe in your practice area, and how are you advising your clients accordingly?

Within my practice, the current government and political climate influences and sometimes drives the guidance we provide to our clients. The everchanging nature of the government's priorities, those elected to power, and international relations are matters we track constantly and strive to be knowledgeable about. It is essential to know the law but also the context in which a subpoena, DoJ investigation, or internal investigation is situated.

Finally, what big trends do you foresee for 2024 – in your practice and beyond?

One challenge I foresee in 2024 is an unfortunate consequence of the fear surrounding diversity and inclusion efforts by law schools and law firms. It is an evolving topic and there is much to see on how this will play out, but I feel the barriers and injustices that already existed will only be exacerbated.