

A portrait of Mafalda Barreto, a woman with long brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a light blue blazer over a black top and a black belt with a gold GG buckle. She is leaning forward with her hands on a white surface. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office space with windows. The entire image is framed by a red border.

# The strategic vision behind GA\_P in Lisbon

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Aligning expertise with market demand: the approach of Mafalda Barreto

by Ilaria Iaquina

In the ever-evolving legal landscape of Portugal, Gomez Acebo & Pombo (GA\_P) continues to strengthen its market position through strategic hiring and targeted expertise. In the last six months, the Lisbon office welcomed three distinguished partners: **Filipa Cotta**, **Madalena Caldeira**, and **Ana Luísa Guimarães**, each a specialist in a vital legal sector — litigation and restructuring, labour law, and public law respectively. These additions are not only a testament to the firm's commitment to growth but also align with specific market demands that have emerged in Portugal's dynamic economic environment. This interview with **Mafalda Barreto**, the managing partner of the Lisbon office, delves into the strategic rationale behind these hires, the anticipated impact on the firm's service offerings, and the broader vision for the firm in the legal arena.

**How do the recent strategic hires align with the law firm's ambitions in Portugal?**

These three professionals possess a wealth of expertise in areas that we see as key for the market: litigation, labour, and public law. Collectively, they have strengthened our capabilities and will assist in advancing our legal excellence through the implementation of innovative solutions.

**Could you elaborate on the choice of these specific areas? Are there particular market needs or opportunities that the law firm aims to meet with these specialties?**

The decision to focus on Litigation, Restructuring and Insolvency, Labour Law and Public Law and Regulatory responds to distinct market needs. Economic challenges, such as increased corporate insolvencies, drive demand for legal support in resolving financial distress and disputes. In the evolving landscape of employment, specialized advice is crucial to navigate new labour regulations and ensure compliance while managing employees effectively. Additionally, the growing complexity of government regulations and the rise in public sector projects require expertise in administrative law and regulatory



MAFALDA BARRETO

## GÓMEZ-ACEBO & POMBO in PORTUGAL

**36 Lawyers**

**6 Partners**

**6 Of counsel**

### GÓMEZ-ACEBO & POMBO

#### 2023 Global revenues

92.86 million euros  
(+10.8% YoY)

#### 2023 Spain revenues

83.85 million euros  
(+11.6% YoY)

300 Lawyers

75 Partners

compliance. These areas directly address current market opportunities and fulfil client demands in Portugal.

#### **How will the expertise of these new partners enhance the law firm's service offerings?**

Ana Luísa will help consolidate our position in public law across the Iberian Peninsula. Her extensive experience, profound knowledge, and strong market presence will enhance our ability to serve clients in regulated sectors and support major projects that are being launched in Portugal. Madalena, a lawyer with an exceptional career in labor and social security law, is a significant asset for GA\_P, particularly in a crucial area of the business world where leading professional advice is indispensable. Her addition has significantly enhanced our capabilities. As to Filipa, she is known for being a litigation expert with a distinguished track record and unparalleled knowledge in a sector that is vital to our economy. Her extensive experience will be invaluable in supporting our clients and expanding our Iberian litigation, restructuring, and insolvency practices, areas in which we are already market leaders in Spain.

The combination of the expertise of these top-tier professionals with the strongly qualified team of partners and lawyers we already had in Portugal position us as one of the leading firms present in the market.

#### **Are there other areas where the law firm is looking to expand?**

The expansion of the Portuguese office is part of the strategy of the firm.

Our plans will combine the promotion of internal talent with lateral hires in areas that we see as strategic for our clients or that present specific market opportunities.

#### **What is your vision for the Lisbon office? What are the key challenges and opportunities you anticipate for the law firm in the upcoming years?**

We expect to keep a steady growth path. There are several challenges ahead, driven by very diverse factors, such as the retention of talented professionals, the demands of the new generation, the impact of the globalisation of law and new players coming into the market. But also, we see a lot of opportunities ahead



in an evolving landscape where AI will play a more significant role, the regulatory framework becomes more demanding and large projects and transactions are to be implemented. Keeping a motivated team of top skilled professional that stand side by side with our clients will make the difference.

**Are there specific sectors or practice areas where you expect significant growth?**

The regulated sectors will play a key role in the coming years, considering the major projects that will come to light, notably road concessions and the airport of Lisbon. Regarding our core practice, the M&A sector, it is no secret

that 2023 was marked by a significant drop in transaction volume. Many law firms, including ours, attribute this largely to the macroeconomic factors and global uncertainty driven by geopolitical situations. However, as we move through 2024, we are experiencing an unprecedented boost of the M&A market that has kept the team busy with top clients on leading transactions. Overall, the convergence of these trends positions us for substantial growth. Leveraging the expertise of our new partners and the anticipated recovery in the M&A market, we are well-prepared to meet the increasing demands of our clients and the market.

**GÓMEZ-ACEBO & POMBO RECENT INCORPORATIONS IN LIBON**

From the end of December up to date Gomez Acebo & Pombo has made significant additions to its Lisbon office with the strategic incorporation of three new partners.

- **Filipa Cotta:** joined as the new partner responsible for the litigation, restructuring, and insolvency area. Cotta brings a robust expertise and a proven track record in high-stakes litigation, aiming to enhance the firm's capacity in handling complex financial disputes and insolvency cases.
- **Madalena Caldeira:** appointed as the head of the Lisbon office's labour department. Caldeira's extensive experience in labor and social security law will provide critical guidance and support to businesses navigating the evolving employment landscape.
- **Ana Luísa Guimarães:** joins as a partner in public and regulatory Law. Her deep understanding of regulatory issues and public law is set to bolster the firm's leadership in these sectors across the Iberian Peninsula, particularly in handling government-related projects and compliance matters.



FILIPA COTTA



MADALENA CALDEIRA



ANA LUÍSA GUIMARÃES

**What are the law firm's financial targets and strategic plans to achieve them?**

Our financial targets are driven by the increase in the business volume, while enhancing quality and profitability.

This targets an expansion of our client base, which is guaranteed by the recent integrations. To achieve this, we are focusing on market expansion into emerging sectors. We hired six new lawyers this year and are actively seeking more talent, addressing the sector's retention challenges.

Overall, we are giving a big boost to our teams to better respond to clients, combining more expertise and know-how, which adds significant value to the firm.

Additionally, we are investing in strengthening client relationships through value-added services and strategic marketing initiatives, aiming at solidifying our market position and drive sustained growth.

**Who do you consider to be your main competitors?**

Portugal is a mature market with players that stand side by side in skills and client reach with the major international firms. Considering Portugal's competitive legal market and our positioning in terms of capabilities, we consider that our main competitors include the largest law firms in the market, both national and Iberian. These firms bring significant competition across various sectors and practice areas, requiring us strategic differentiation and excellence in service delivery.

**Since assuming the role of managing partner in 2018, how do you believe your leadership has shaped the direction and achievements of the Lisbon office?**

I have placed special emphasis on values such as excellence, innovation, good judgement and proximity, understanding above all the need to promote real cohesion with the head office in Spain and multidisciplinary, creating important synergies between the different practice areas so that our clients sense the full confidence that comes with the backing of a brand like GA\_P. Each of our professionals

takes on these values as their own and they are reflected in our work.

**As a female managing partner, do you believe that your leadership has influenced the recruitment of talented women to the GA\_P team in Lisbon?**

Of course it has had a positive influence. It is clear that the change of mentality has to come from the top management level and that, in these cases, it is necessary to "lead by example". It is essential to show that it is possible for a woman to be a partner in a demanding area of the law and lead the team of a large office such as our.

This role gives the privilege of seeing and knowing what is happening in different layers of the structure, hearing the concerns of professional women and playing a role in supporting their professional growth by identifying the career obstacles and creating the opportunities for each of them. In short, positions of responsibility provide the opportunity to get to know aspects of the business that can be cross-referenced with the opportunities that arise and offer them to the most suitable profile.

**The three recent partner additions to the Lisbon office, for examples, are all women. Is this a deliberate part of the firm's diversity strategy, or more a reflection of the candidates' qualifications and fit for the firm's needs?**

We are of course focused on maintaining a proper gender balance at the firm, at all levels of seniority.

But most importantly we are concerned in hiring the best in class. I can honestly say that in this case a window of opportunity has opened to recruit three great professionals in a row, which only by coincidence are women. We are committed to equal opportunities without discrimination of any kind, and it is precisely for this reason that the expertise of these professionals has been the key to the decision to recruit three women, without considering anything less than their proficiency and capabilities. 