

Global In-House Counsel Recruiting Market Conditions Q4

Optimism for a return to a more stable hiring environment remains high, with activity projected to resume in full once the U.S. election cycle concludes and economic uncertainties begin to clear.

Overall, demand grew or remained steady in Q4 in most markets, with hiring projected to continue at a healthy pace into 2025. More conversations are happening with hiring managers, and many who have put searches on pause are now circling back to discuss their needs. However, companies are still taking a wait-and-see approach until the political landscape stabilizes. The U.S. election and interest rate adjustments are pivotal factors influencing in-house hiring, as well as a sense of economic stability that will fuel strategic planning and growth at companies across the board.

Beyond the election outcome, potential regulatory changes, economic factors (including interest rates and global trade dynamics), and the evolving ESG environment (including the pushback on DEI) are likely to impact the in-house legal landscape in the coming months.

Multinational companies are monitoring the intersection of U.S. election results and other global challenges such as geopolitical conflicts, energy prices, and economic sanctions to assess their impact on business operations. While recession concerns are looming, it is necessary to have perspective on this possibility since many industries exhibit resilience, with some even poised to thrive during downturns.

Industry Hiring Trends

Private Credit: Hiring in this sector is on the rise as the “golden age of private credit” persists and is presumably here for the long term. Hiring has surged given the need to support the growth and evolution of private credit strategies, and firms are building a bench to support the strategy for the long term.

Hedge Funds: While hedge fund hiring remains slow, the industry is innovating by embracing technology and exploring private credit opportunities, which may eventually stimulate hiring.

Banks: Hiring at large banks is typically correlated to transaction volume and capital markets activity. As such, hiring was slow over the past year as macroeconomic headwinds and the downcycle in M&A activity prevailed. With M&A activity rebounding, we expect hiring to follow suit.

Life Sciences: The sector is accelerating, especially in biotechnology, driven by IP talent and GC roles, due in part to several IPO announcements in September. Growth should continue into 2025.

Other noted areas of demand include:

- Cybersecurity and data privacy (especially AI)
- Private equity
- Labor and employment
- Financial services and fintech
- Healthcare
- Renewable energy and clean tech

Our global teams are observing growth in areas similar to those above, as well as in IT/technology, cloud computing/SaaS, automotive (electric vehicles), and logistics automation.

In-Demand Roles

GC searches are becoming increasingly competitive, with organizations seeking top-notch results. The interview process continues to be intense with several rounds and considerable preparation required. When assessing candidates, a strategic fit with the organization is a primary consideration for hiring managers.

Newly created Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) roles are in high demand, particularly in highly regulated industries like financial services and life sciences.

Other emerging roles include:

- Chief Sustainability Officer (ESG)
- Chief Privacy Officer
- Chief IP Counsel (biotech)

New Challenges and Expectations for GCs

The General Counsel role is evolving, with broader responsibilities spanning regulatory oversight, cybersecurity, ESG compliance, and risk management. Managing Board relationships, geopolitical risks, and workplace culture have become critical hiring considerations.

In the EU, GCs are increasingly tasked with navigating regulations such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and global sanctions compliance.

Private Equity, Funds, and Portfolio Companies

Private equity and venture capital are expected to benefit from lowered interest rates, creating more opportunities and driving increased legal hiring.

The democratization of private markets (giving high-net worth individuals/retail investors access to the private markets) is driving demand for legal talent to support new capital raising initiatives and innovative product structures.

Succession Planning

Many GCs talk to us about the importance of attracting and retaining top talent so when they are ready to retire or move on, there will be a strong successor or two on the team. We have noticed succession planning has become a higher priority for many in-house legal departments. This is driven by:

- An aging workforce of senior legal executives
- The need for diverse leadership pipelines
- Rapid technological changes requiring new skill sets

One trend we have started to notice is companies that need to replace their General Counsel are hiring a Deputy General Counsel (DGC), intending to promote that person in one or two years. This emphasis on grooming the next generation of leadership is reflected in our [2024 Global In-House Counsel Compensation Survey](#). Globally, DGCs and Associate General Counsel (AGC) together saw their total actual cash (TAC) increase by 8% between 2021 and 2023. In contrast, GCs and CLOs in the U.S. reported their total actual cash (TAC) compensation dropped by 4% since 2021.

However, while it continues to be a key factor in some searches, not all our teams notice succession planning being a major driver for hiring. Some are seeing it becoming less of a priority, with more going outside the company for new talent. This may be due to changes in the organization or simply changes in the company's legal needs.

The emphasis on succession planning is greater in Japan, which has a large aging workforce and a severely limited work pool. In Greater China, as well, succession planning is increasingly being assessed, and many GCs already have in place, or are establishing, plans to identify successors for their legal functions.

Pulse Check on AI-Related Hiring

In-house leaders are increasingly embracing AI, with many creative use cases emerging:

- Contract analysis and management
- Legal research and due diligence automation
- Predictive analytics for litigation outcomes
- AI-powered chatbots for basic legal queries from employees
- Compliance monitoring and risk assessment tools

In some markets, there has been a major spike in demand for AI-related roles in legal departments. This includes:

- AI executives or Chief AI Officers to oversee AI strategy and implementation
- Lawyers with AI expertise, particularly in areas like data privacy, intellectual property, and regulatory compliance
- Legal technologists who can bridge the gap between legal and technical domains; this includes cyber legal roles

Other teams are noting less demand for AI skills and knowledge and have yet to see any AI-specific legal searches. It is common for clients not to know exactly what they need in terms of AI expertise or not have the budget to add headcount in this area.

According to our EMEA and APAC teams, AI is still a hot topic, with virtually every GC focused on AI and the implications it can have on both their business and function. However, these markets are still in a holding pattern as they look to the U.S. to get a better grasp on how this technology will impact their business. This wait-and-see approach is largely due to the unproven nature of the products and the speed at which the technology is evolving. There's also been some pushback from in-house teams, who are often reluctant to abandon their longstanding workflows and adopt a completely new approach. Additionally, even when GCs do want to use AI to boost efficiency, few have been given license to actively identify and implement AI legal tools at this stage.

Work-Life Balance and Workload

Work-life balance continues to be challenged, especially as in-house lawyers are asked to do more with fewer resources, particularly at the senior level. Teams are stretched thin, and additional headcount is not an option unless there is a specific business driver allowing budget dollars to be spent on legal hiring.

Given the scarcity of new opportunities in the market and the continued pressure for companies to do more with less, many overworked lawyers are biding their time until they can move to the next role.

While hybrid and remote work models persist, there is a notable shift toward requiring more in-office presence, particularly for senior roles. Some organizations are addressing the increased workload by offering flexible work arrangements and greater support for employee well-being.

Overseas, workload continues to increase as budgets for expanding departments are being cut. While many companies are still prioritizing work-life balance, the intensity of legal demands is starting to stretch teams, especially lean ones.

Mental health and flexible working arrangements continue to be top concerns, but there is increasing pressure on in-house teams to manage growing workloads without sacrificing their well-being.

Interestingly, hybrid work arrangements and flex time remain the norm in Japan, as heavy investment in IT and processes for remote working during the pandemic have led to a normalization of those systems. Most candidates express having a better work-life balance since these were implemented.

Interim Update

On the West Coast and in other U.S. markets, the interim market made some impressive gains in Q4 compared to earlier in the year. Some markets find that organizations have needs for interim talent, while others are holding off due to budget limitations.

While there has been robust interim hiring in Singapore due to reluctance of companies to approve permanent headcount, the market is slowing down in Amsterdam. This uncertainty around hiring self-employed interim candidates (not limited to legal) will continue as the much-criticized DBA (Employment Relations Deregulation) act comes into effect in 2025.

Budget constraints continue to influence interim hiring globally, with many companies exploring secondment options or flat-fee arrangements.

In-Demand Interim Roles

- Commercial contracts
- Compliance
- Corporate securities
- Finance
- Litigation
- M&A

In Boston, biotech contract managers have been the focus. Overseas, we are seeing more demand for senior-level roles. Areas of demand include:

- Compliance
- Conflicts
- Employment
- International commercial contracting
- IT/SAAS expertise
- Low-deal M&A
- Privacy

Paralegal and contract manager interim candidates are also being requested by clients.