



Pro Bono Impact Report 2024

Pro Bono Pledge Ireland

The Purpose of this Impact Report is to outline the Pro Bono work reported by signatories to the Pro Bono Pledge during 2024.

It provides 13 Case Studies of Pro Bono work undertaken by signatories to the Pledge during 2024.

These Case studies demonstrate the powerful impact and potential of Pro Bono. We hope they will inspire and encourage current and future signatories to the Pledge in their Pro Bono endeavours.

About the Pro Bono Pledge

PILA, the Public Interest Law Alliance, is a project of FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres). PILA acts as coordinator of the Pro Bono Pledge.

The pledge is open for signature by solicitors, barristers, law firms and in-house legal departments.

It provides a common definition of pro bono legal work, a commitment to a minimum aspirational target of 20 pro bono hours per lawyer per year, and a mechanism to benchmark progress through annual reporting of anonymous pro bono data.

The full text of the Pledge and the Pledge Reporting Guidelines are available on probonopledge.ie

Since the launch of the Pledge in November 2020, it has been signed by:





Introduction

This report shines a light on those who are leading the way to create a legal system where engaging in pro bono work is a key part of a career in the legal profession. The Pro Bono Pledge was developed by an independent grouping of law firms, barristers, and in-house teams with a presence in the Republic of Ireland who came together to affirm their commitment to delivering pro bono services in Ireland.

Signatories to the Pro Bono Pledge believe that universal access to justice and legal service are essential to the rule of law, to the vindication of rights, and to the functioning of a democratic society. The legal profession has a privileged role and a unique purpose and position in the legal system, in society, and in matters of justice. Signatories to the Pro Bono Pledge Ireland are committing to change the existing status quo and to correct the imbalance of a justice system weighed against those who face multiple barriers to access to justice.

The pro bono work described in this report has a number of key elements of a legal service for people and communities experiencing disadvantage and discrimination. It puts the person/community at the heart of the service, strives to be accessible, flexible, tailored and targeted and prioritizes the greatest areas of need. There is also a focus on preventative justice, which involves early legal advice and assistance to address issues before they escalate. It also looks to build legal capabilities, including the knowledge and confidence to cope with the legal issues, alongside the awareness of legal mechanisms and those for reform. Pro bono works most effectively when it is collaborative, flexible and innovative, and complements and supports wider legal and advice provision.

We are grateful to all of the Pledge signatories who reported, to enable PILA shine to a spotlight on the pro bono work of the last year. PILA is very proud to be working with and supporting our Pledge signatories to coordinate the Pro Bono Pledge Ireland and to continue to support the nurturing and developing of this critically important work.



A Message from Eilis Barry, FLAC Chief Executive:

“This report reflects a new era of Pro Bono in Ireland. At least in certain sectors of the legal world, Pro Bono has been mainstreamed into the work of lawyers. This is a cause for celebration and the result of years of work undertaken by PILA and its legal and NGO stakeholders.

There remains work to be done. We must ask how we can engage even more of the legal community in pro bono work. Many barristers and solicitors already engage in pro bono and public interest work as part of their practices but do not engage with PILA or the Pledge. They are an important part of the wider pro bono movement. It is important that we recognise their contribution and provide them with the supports they need to develop as pro bono practitioners.

Pro Bono is about bringing free legal assistance to people and communities to empower them to achieve social change. At its most effective, it can address the barriers to justice faced by people experiencing discrimination and disadvantage and who often have multiple, inter-related legal issues.

I hope the diverse array of Pro Bono projects outlined in this report acts as an inspiration and sets in motion the next chapter for Pro Bono in Ireland.”

Pro Bono Pledge Ireland 2024: Impact in Numbers

The Pledge's aspirational target is that all lawyers will carry out (on average) 20 hours pro bono legal work annually. This information relates to pro bono work undertaken by the signatories who reported into this year's report. We understand that far more pro bono work is carried out than has been reported to PILA, in particular by barristers and solicitors, with only 323 hours being reported by barristers.

PILA is also conscious of the administrative burden involved in reporting and keen to make it less onerous.

28

SIGNATORIES REPORTED
UNDER THE PLEDGE.

44,906

HOURS PRO BONO
LEGAL WORK REPORTED.

26% OF LAW FIRMS REPORTED THAT ON AVERAGE, LAWYERS IN THEIR FIRM COMPLETED OVER 20 HOURS OF PRO BONO WORK.

52% OF LAW FIRMS REPORTED THAT ON AVERAGE, LAWYERS IN THEIR FIRM COMPLETED OVER 10 HOURS OF PRO BONO WORK.

LAW FIRM PARTNER PARTICIPATION RATE RANGED FROM 11% – 100%.

47% OF LAW FIRMS REPORTED A PARTNER PARTICIPATION RATE OF 50% OR HIGHER.

52% OF LAW FIRMS REPORTED A SOLICITOR PARTICIPATION RATE OF 50% OR HIGHER.

Case Study 1:

Legal Education Project promoting Legal Literacy

This project promotes early access to justice for students in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) schools through the delivery of quality legal education. Legal education has a key role in facilitating early access to justice. By instilling knowledge of the law at an early stage, young people develop an understanding of its impact and of their rights as citizens. The Legal Education Project is delivered in partnership with seven charity DEIS schools.

This project is delivered through five interactive lessons by 67 lawyers representing 630 pro bono hours. Students are key stakeholders of this project. Lesson content is developed based on feedback gathered from students and teachers through regular surveys and focus groups.

A Transition Year student participant in the Legal Education Project at Blakestown Community School stated:

“I think Legal Education is important because you know about your rights and if you are being mistreated in any way, you know how to defend yourself, because you know what is right and what is wrong.”



Case Study 2:

Cy-Pres Scheme for a National Charity

This firm engaged in assisting a nationwide charitable entity in a very substantial project: a pilot scheme to modernise and streamline the management of a very large number of small (in present-day values) trusts. The project aims to simplify the use and management of the trusts.

Typically, these trusts contain funds donated for a variety of purposes and the administration of the trusts has become unwieldy and laborious. The pilot project aims at framing an application to the Charities Regulatory Authority for a 'cy-pres scheme' which would allow for the trusts to be re-categorised in a smaller number of charitable purposes and for the amalgamation of the trusts into single master trusts for each re-defined purpose, whilst preserving the spirit and intention of the original gift. The cy-pres application will also make proposals to reform the governance of the trusts.

Legal Support for the Endometriosis Association of Ireland

The same firm have committed to work with The Endometriosis Association of Ireland.

The organisation supports and represents those impacted by endometriosis, by empowering the patient and advocating for change. Endometriosis is a chronic inflammatory disease and it is estimated that 155,000 women in Ireland are affected by the condition.

The firm are advising on revising and updating its constitution, including dealing with issues around membership. This work requires knowledge of corporate law, corporate governance and charities law, as well as experience to provide overall sound practical advice. For that reason, the work will be done by a senior partner.

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This scheme is legally complex and will take a considerable amount of time and investment on the firm's behalf which shows our long-term commitment to a pro bono project.

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Case Study 3:

Afghan Admissions Programme, discretionary visa applications

Under the Afghan Admission Programme, Afghan people living in Ireland could apply for family who are in Afghanistan, or certain neighbouring countries, to join them in Ireland.

The law firm in this case study previously assisted with a successful application to the Programme (this work is reported in the Pro Bono Pledge Impact Report 2022). Since the approval was received, the firm has liaised with the relevant units of the Department of Justice in relation to logistical and other issues faced by their clients.

It has also made successful visa applications for two of three beneficiaries, with the third application yet to be submitted. In addition, it has been working with two more Afghan nationals who are living in Ireland, in relation to discretionary visa applications to bring certain members of their family to Ireland.

Legal Support for study with university

The firm also assisted a charity in putting in place a service level agreement with a leading Irish university in relation to the provision of a study by UCC to evaluate SoS's online "Eden" programme.

The programme is an educational programme with a therapeutic element for those who have thought about or attempted suicide. It provides a safe space where participants can develop the skills to monitor and manage their own mental health, build a range of supports appropriate to their individual needs and move away from suicide as an option of choice in times of crisis. The firm's work in this regard was to appropriately document and contract the relationship between the charity and the university in this context.

Case Study 4:

Collaboration between four law firms, family reunification & Kids in Need of Defence (KIND)

The KIND project operates in many countries across the globe. In Ireland, it is operated through a joint collaboration between the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Irish Refugee Council. Together they provide training and supervision to pro bono lawyers to enable them to take on cases in an area outside their usual areas of expertise. A considerable number of law firms reporting under the Pledge have provided child-friendly pro bono assistance in 2024 as part of the KIND project.

One law firm represented 17 refugee children from Afghanistan and Somalia who were seeking family reunification. The cases typically take around 18 months to 2 years to process.

Lawyers from a second firm worked on 2 family reunification applications on behalf of unaccompanied minors. In one case, the firm assisted the child to file an appeal after the application was rejected, and the matter is ongoing.

A third law firm provided immigration advice and assistance to the Immigrant Council of Ireland (through its partnership with KIND Ireland).

Another law firm is advising a number of unaccompanied minors as part of its involvement with the KIND project. It stated that in 2024 it had a surplus number of lawyers wishing to assist in these challenging but rewarding cases.



Case Study 5:

Information sessions for international protection applicants in Direct Provision Centres

Recent changes in processing refugee applications in Ireland have resulted in applicants completing their initial questionnaire on arrival, sometimes within 24 hours, without access to free legal advice or information. This has been exacerbated by the fact that the questionnaire must be completed in English with limited access to interpretation services. Alongside these challenges applicants are being accommodated at emergency reception centres, with varying levels of onsite support.

The project is the result of a partnership between the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), the UNHCR and a large Irish law firm. Each of the partners bring a unique skill set which has shaped the direction of the project. JRS provide ongoing support to protection applicants as they navigate accessing the labour market and other services in Ireland. Among its various functions, UNHCR empowers those seeking international protection in Ireland by ensuring they have access to accurate information on the application process and their rights and obligations while applying for international protection in Ireland. The law firm provide an outline of the legal process involved in seeking protection in Ireland.

Supported by a panel of 40 solicitors, the volunteer lawyer outlines the rights and entitlements of international protection applicants, the protection process (the documentation to be provided, access to legal aid, attending interviews, appealing decisions, etc.), what it means to receive permission to remain in Ireland through international protection.

The project partners travel to reception centres that specialise as transit hubs for recent arrived applicants. Over 2.5 hours attendees are given information on their rights and entitlements, the protection process and what it means to receive permission to remain in Ireland. The session also provides information on family reunification and the support provided by various State and voluntary organisations to assist applicants to navigate the process and day-to-day life in Ireland.

Since launching just over one year ago the project has reached more than 1,000 individuals at various reception centres in the Leinster region

Case Study 6:

Research project on Access to Justice for Children's Environmental Rights and immigration advice for victims of domestic violence

A firm's Dublin office became involved in a cross-border pro bono project with their London and Brussels offices. This was a research project for the Child Rights International Network on Access to Justice for Children's Environmental Rights. The project involved a comprehensive review of how the law protects children's environmental rights and what children can do to challenge violations of these rights. Although the project has a wide scope, it is important to distil the research down into a report that is both concise and accessible in order to arm children and their advocates with the tools to enforce children's environmental rights. This work began in August 2023 and concluded in August 2024.

Immigration Advice and Assistance to the Immigrant Council of Ireland

The firm also provided immigration advice and assistance to the Immigrant Council of Ireland (through its partnership with KIND Ireland). This entailed interacting with the Department of Justice on behalf of individuals who have left their partner due to domestic violence and who need the permission of the Minister to remain in Ireland (in cases where the individuals only currently have residency status by reference to their spouse/partner's own immigration status). This requires pro-bono assistance in the preparation of correspondence to the Minister in respect of their residency status.

Case Study 7:

Collaboration with the Irish Youth Foundation

The Foundation is a registered charity and grant-giving organisation committed to supporting children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. They accomplish this by funding a variety of projects and organisations across the country aimed at providing under-represented young people with the resources they need to achieve their full potential. The projects to which the Foundation provides funds range from afterschool homework and meals for school children living in difficult circumstances to special facilities to help keep underprivileged children in education, and training schemes for older youths.

The law firm has provided ongoing general corporate advice to the Foundation including the provision of governance training to the directors, assistance in relation to charities legislation which includes annual compliance with the Charities Regulator and also a review of existing structures and historic governance documents in place. The law firm also facilitates and attends board meetings for the Foundation, dealing with company secretarial matters. It has also directly supported some of the projects and organisations the Foundation works with.

Support for Work Equal

WorkEqual (formerly known as Dress for Success) is a social enterprise that supports people across Ireland to access employment. It provides coaching, mentoring, career development, interview preparation and professional styling services, helping boost their clients' confidence.

The law firm provided corporate, commercial contracts and corporate governance advice to WorkEqual in relation to a three-year partnership with Primark. This partnership will support WorkEqual in helping women in Ireland to access employment. The partnership will assist WorkEqual in delivering its services nationally and Primark will also provide styling sessions and confidence building workshops in its headquarters in Dublin as well as in stores around Ireland.

“We were absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to work with WorkEqual on this partnership. WorkEqual is a fantastic organisation that is making a huge difference to women across Ireland. We wish them all the best with the partnership and look forward to working with them again in the future as they continue their terrific work.”

Case Study 8:**Legal Information Clinic in partnership with Women's Aid**

The law firm has partnered with Women's Aid since 2019 to provide a legal information clinic to support women experiencing domestic violence who are representing themselves in family proceedings. A new cohort of volunteers was trained on this programme during the last reporting period and is now providing monthly clinics on an ongoing basis to women in need of assistance.

Assisting Young people in Changing their Name

Empowering People in Care (EPIC) is a rights-based organisation advocating with and for children in care and young care-leavers. From time to time, young people working with EPIC want to change their birth surname for a variety of reasons, including where their birth surname has negative associations for them. Since 2024, the firm have undertaken, in partnership with EPIC, to assist those young people with the deed poll process and have taken on a number of young people as clients for this purpose. The firm have a number of applications in process and are continuing to take on new applications.

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Providing free legal services to those who are unable to access or afford them is a fundamental aspect of our firm's ethos. We have put in place a number of exciting new projects which we hope will afford us the opportunity to continue to significantly improve our contribution.

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**empowering people in care**

Case Study 9:

Court Skills Training in Child Care Law

A medium-sized law firm provided onsite Court Skills Training to a non-profit child & family support service aimed at supporting and promoting positive childhood outcomes. As part of this training, the law as it relates to the Child Care Act 1991 and associated legislation was explained, the rules for giving evidence were highlighted and the session finished with a mock trial which was acted out as a real-life court session.

Training on Assisted Decision Making

The law firm also delivered training to charitable organisations on Enduring Power of Attorney and Assisted-Decision Making. The organisations that availed of the training included a charity which offer life-changing supports to people with congenital, progressive, or acquired neuro-physical disabilities, and their family members, and a support group offering support and information to people diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's disease in Ireland

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We believe our solicitors have a responsibility to provide access to justice to those who cannot afford it. We encourage all solicitors, at any career stage, to become involved in pro bono work, which we believe will make them better solicitors. Many of our solicitors are volunteers at FLAC telephone clinics, providing general legal advice and specialist employment law clinics. We are registered for referrals with Public Interest Law Alliance “PILA” (project of FLAC) and through this have provided training on the Assisted Decision Making Capacity Act. We have been able to avail of a number of pro bono opportunities through the PILA Portal and the Pro Bono Pledge Ireland meetings and find both of these great resources to have access to.

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Case Study 10:

Business Bootcamp for Displaced Ukrainian People and

In November 2023, an international law firm partnered with United for Changes (U4C) to organize the Ukrainian Business Bootcamp (UBB), a two-day in-person event in Dublin. The bootcamp aimed to help displaced Ukrainians integrate into Irish society by providing them with the knowledge and tools to start their own businesses. Thirty participants, some with entrepreneurial experience and others new to business, attended the event. The lawyers delivered comprehensive workshops and trainings on various topics, including business startup, tax, employment, regulatory, and other legal issues. The law firm provided pro bono legal advice to the five participants. Over the following six months, the lawyers continued to support these participants, helping them to navigate the legal landscape to successfully launch their businesses in Ireland.

As a result of the firm's efforts, 10 out of the 30 attendees have either set up businesses or are in the process of doing so. Notable examples include a family-run Ukrainian food delivery service; an equipment import company; a B2B collaboration platform; a recruitment agency; mindfulness workshops; and a web studio. The bootcamp not only provided essential legal assistance but also inspired and empowered the participants to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams.

Legal Representation for a visually impaired individual in the Court of Appeal

The law firm is also currently representing a visually impaired individual in a case before the Court of Appeal. The appeal addresses the appellant's inability to engage with documents relied on by the State at first instance due to their visual impairment. This case raises critical issues regarding the State's duty to conduct litigation in a manner that ensures a fair trial and due process for people with disabilities.



Case Study 11 and 12:

Small Law Firm supports Disability Rights Cases

The law firm represented a family who was refused Domiciliary Care Allowance for a child with a disability in a social welfare appeal. The appeal was refused but the firm then successfully challenged that outcome in the High Court. This resulted in a fresh appeal which was successful.

The firm also represented a client who was refused a special school place for a child with disability. Proceedings against the Department of Education were brought and then settled in the clients' favour. This resulted in a school place being granted.

When another child with a disability was not provided with an appropriate assessment of their education needs by the NCSE and HSE, the law firm made submissions to the two bodies. Those were not adequately addressed and the solicitors brought proceedings. Those proceedings settled and this resulted in the child receiving the appropriate assessment.

Individual Solicitor: Focus on Human Rights Litigation

In 2024, a sole practitioner reporting under the Pledge undertook business and human rights litigation matter concerning widespread violence against the Rohingya people in Myanmar. He has also undertaken efforts to conduct litigation concerning Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine

Case Study 13:

Examples of Pro Bono Work undertaken by Barristers: Environmental and Human Rights litigation

- Legislative drafting of a Bill to protect hedgerows, liaising with politicians and organising the launch of the bill in December 2023. The Bill was introduced to the Dail in May 2024.
- Acting for the family of a deceased man in a claim against the State relating to the failure to investigate his death in compliance with the Constitution and/or Article 2 of the ECHR. This involved client consultations, legal drafting and court appearances.
- Acting for a Humanist Charity who intervened in a Court of Appeal judicial review case in Northern Ireland. The case concerned a challenge to the primary school curriculum.
- Providing ad hoc legal advice to an environmental group which is active in protecting a Special Area of Conservation and has taken legal challenges in the High Court.
- Acting pro bono in a Judicial Review seeking a decision on a family reunification for a programme refugee. The proceedings were issued in late 2023 and settled in early 2024 after multiple High Court appearances.
- Providing legal assistance in FLAC clinics for the deaf community throughout the year.
- Providing ongoing representation to a Traveller family who allege that they have been discriminated against by a local authority on the basis of their membership of the Traveller community and who also claimed that the local authority is in breach of its obligations to them under the Housing Acts.
- Drafting a legal opinion on guardianship matters and court attendances in family law proceedings.
- Client consultations and court representation in the RTB and in the District Court for client of an immigration focused NGO.

The data contained herein has been provided by the pro bono practitioners that reported. It is unverified by PILA and PILA takes no responsibility for the accuracy hereof.

