

Pro Bono Pledge Ireland

Reporting Guidelines

Pro Bono Pledge Ireland is the first collaborative effort in Ireland to articulate the shared professional responsibility of lawyers to promote access to justice and provide pro bono legal assistance to those in need. The Pledge sets out the core values of such work to assist both those who undertake it and their clients.

The Pledge was developed by an independent grouping of law firms, barristers, and in-house legal teams with a presence in the Republic of Ireland who have come together to affirm their commitment to delivering pro bono services in Ireland. The Pledge is coordinated by PILA (the Public Interest Law Alliance, a project of FLAC).

Launched in 2020, the Pledge provides a common definition of pro bono, 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.

All barristers, law firms, and in-house legal teams are welcome to join the Pledge. Further information can be found at www.probonopledge.ie or by contacting Danielle Curtis at danielle.curtis@flac.ie. These Guidance Notes provide additional information on annual reporting requirements.

January 2022 will mark the first year of reporting for signatories to the Pro Bono Pledge. The reporting year will run from **September - September**. This timeframe would allow PILA to analyse the data reported by firms and prepare an Impact Report. With this in mind, 2022 will be a shorter reporting period, running from January - September.

The Aspirational Pro Bono Target

The Pledge promotes an aspirational target of 20 hours per lawyer per year as an appropriate minimum commitment.

The Pledge recognises that Signatories will achieve the target within different timescales and that some Signatories may set higher pro bono hours targets. The intent is to collaborate to achieve the target while respecting that substantial difference will exist between Signatories as regards their current levels of pro bono activities.

What can be reported?

The definition of 'pro bono legal services' provides information on how to determine whether the work you or your firm are delivering qualifies as pro bono for the purposes of reporting on the target. Only work that involves the delivery of pro bono legal services as defined for the purposes of the Pledge should be reported.

The work is considered pro bono only if it is free to the client, without reasonable expectation of payment to the lawyer, law firm, or in-house team regardless of the outcome, and provided voluntarily either by the lawyer or his or her firm.

'Pro Bono Legal Services' under the Pledge

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The definition follows international best practices and ensures that lawyers can use varied legal skills in a broad range of activities in order to meet their pro bono responsibility.

While many lawyers undertake charitable work of different kinds, this Pledge concentrates specifically on the provision of legal skills by lawyers.

Who can deliver 'Pro Bono Legal Services'?

- Any barrister or lawyer employed by a law firm or within an in-house team, including trainees, professional support lawyers, and Pro Bono Associates.
- Lawyers that have been seconded to the public interest or non-profit organisation in a legal role.
- Paralegals and interns can be included in pro bono data, however, they must then be included as part of the full headcount of employed lawyers. Firms may choose to exclude trainees, paralegals, and/or interns from both reported hours and head-count.
- Non-legal employees do not qualify.

How do I calculate the number of lawyers and partners in a firm?

- The number of lawyers should be calculated for reporting purposes by using the average of the number of full-time equivalent ('FTE') lawyers employed on the first day and the last day of the year.

(lawyers on 1 January + lawyers on 31 December) / 2

- The same calculation can be used when reporting on the number of partners per firm.

What counts as 'Pro Bono Legal Services'?

Pro bono legal services are legal services provided without reasonable expectation of a fee when the matter commences. This does not include discounted work or work taken on 'no foal, no fee', save where any costs awarded will be reinvested in the pro bono practice or used to support organisations that provide services to low-income, disadvantaged, or marginalised communities.

Charging for disbursements, fees, stamp duty, expert reports or other costs does not prevent the work from being pro bono.

- Pro Bono legal work may include, but is not limited to:
 - Legal advice, assistance, representation, and research, drafting agreements, policy documents, or legislative instruments, as well as attending legal clinics or supervising pro bono matters.
 - Training sessions, seminars, and webinars for pro bono clients on legal topics.
 - Attending or delivering training that is essential to the delivery of pro bono practice. International pro bono legal services or projects undertaken by lawyers based in Ireland.

- Pro Bono legal work **does not** include:
 - Time spent volunteering in a non-legal capacity such as:
 - Work done by pro bono coordinators in managing a firm's pro bono programme or other administrative roles related to the pro bono programme.
 - Acting as a pro bono committee member.
 - Time spent acting as a board member of a non-profit.
 - Offering training sessions on legal topics in schools may be considered pro bono if undertaken for public interest reasons such as improving the employability of disadvantaged groups; mentoring young people or presenting on careers in law would not.
 - Sponsorship of cultural or sporting events, business development projects, and other marketing opportunities, even if done without payment.

Reporting under the Pledge

- In September each year, Signatories will be contacted by PILA to complete an online reporting form detailing their pro bono performance. The reporting questions can be found on pages 7-9.
- Within 3 months, PILA will aim to publish a public infographic demonstrating the collective performance under the Pledge, including the number of signatories, level of participation, and the percentage that have met the target within each category. PILA will NOT publish the names of those Signatories that have met or not met the Target. More detailed data will be shared within the group in a de-identified way.
- New Signatories will be provided with a grace period of 12 months before requiring that they complete the annual questionnaire.
- Each Signatory should have systems in place to ensure that accurate records are kept of the pro bono legal work performed.

- Signatories that have not achieved the target during the year are welcome to contact PILA for support in reaching the target in future.
- Signatories that do not submit their annual report within 6 months will be removed from the Pledge.

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Pro Bono Reporting - Law Firms

- How many lawyers as defined by the Pledge were employed by your firm in the Republic of Ireland in 2021 - 2022? Please indicate whether trainees, professional support lawyers, paralegals, or interns are included.
- How many partners were in your firm in 2021 - 2022?
- How many hours of pro bono legal work were provided by your firm in 2021 - 2022?
- What was the average number of pro bono hours provided per lawyer in 2021 - 2022?
- What percentage of lawyers employed by your firm undertook some pro bono legal work in 2021 - 2022?
- What percentage of partners undertook some pro bono legal work in 2021 - 2022?
- Please provide a brief overview of your current pro bono practice, with three examples of pro bono work undertaken during 2021 - 2022.

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Pro Bono Reporting - In House

- How many lawyers as defined by the Pledge were employed by your company in the Republic of Ireland in 2021 - 2022? Please indicate whether interns are included.
- How many hours of pro bono legal work were provided by your company in 2021 - 2022?
- What was the average number of pro bono hours provided per lawyer in 2021 - 2022?
- What percentage of lawyers employed by your company undertook some pro bono legal work in 2021 - 2022?
- Please provide a brief overview of your current pro bono practice, with three examples of pro bono work undertaken during 2021 - 2022.

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Pro Bono Reporting - Barristers

- How many hours of pro bono legal work were provided by you in 2021 - 2022?
- Please provide a brief overview of your current pro bono practice, with three examples of pro bono work undertaken during 2021 - 2022?