



**Pro Bono Pledge Ireland**

# **Impact Report 2023**

## A Welcome from PILA – Coordinator of Pro Bono Pledge Ireland



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. This report covers the second year of reporting for the Pro Bono Pledge Ireland. 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 is essential to the rule of law, to the vindication of rights, and to the functioning of a democratic society. Many people, especially those with low income, who experience disadvantage, discrimination, and/or marginalisation, face multiple legal issues either at the same time or consecutively – this is referred to as “clustered injustice”. We know that legal problems are not randomly distributed across populations but disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups and individuals and can create and exacerbate disadvantage. There is an additive element, the greater the disadvantage the greater the number of legal issues.

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 experiencing clustered injustice. 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.

The Pledge is coordinated by PILA (the Public Interest Law Alliance, a project of FLAC). The text of the Pledge together with the guidelines for reporting are contained in the appendix.

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.

“

We find the regular Pledge meetings very helpful and appreciate the support of PILA in finding pro bono matters.

”

Since launching in 2020 the Pledge has had the support of:

“

*We are delighted to be a Pledge member. We hope that further meetings and events, as well as opportunities to collaborate with other signatories will increase in time. Thank you!*

”

Infographic:



## Pro Bono Pledge Ireland - Impact in Numbers 2023

The Pledge's aspirational target is that all lawyers will carry out (on average) 20 hours' pro bono legal work annually. This infographic relates to pro bono work undertaken by those 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.

**29%** OF LAW FIRMS REPORTED THAT ON AVERAGE,  
LAWYERS IN THEIR FIRM COMPLETED OVER  
**20 HOURS** OF PRO BONO WORK

and

**41%** OF LAW FIRMS REPORTED THAT ON AVERAGE,  
LAWYERS IN THEIR FIRM COMPLETED OVER  
**10 HOURS** OF PRO BONO WORK

LAW FIRM SOLICITOR PARTICIPATION RATE RANGED FROM

**11 - 100%**

and

**47%** OF LAW FIRMS REPORTED A SOLICITOR  
PARTICIPATION RATE OF **50% OR HIGHER**

**28** SIGNATORIES REPORTED UNDER  
THE PLEDGE

**42,742**

HOURS PRO BONO LEGAL WORK REPORTED

LAW FIRM PARTNER PARTICIPATION  
RATE RANGED FROM

**1 - 100%**

and

**35%**

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

## Case studies

# Stories of Collaboration, Flexibility and Innovation

The following are a sample of some of the Pro Bono work engaged in during 2023. They have been chosen to show the breath, scope and impact of pro bono work. We were lucky to have so many examples to draw from

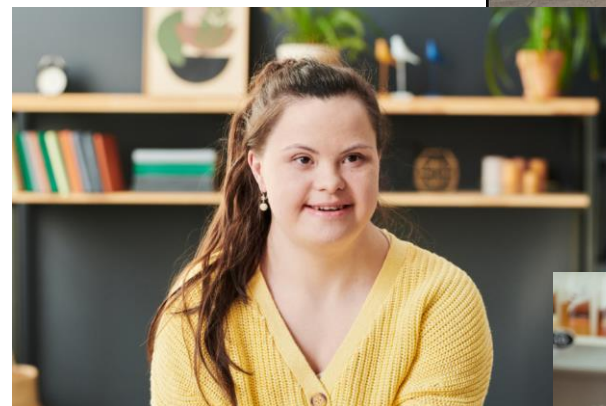
## Case Study 1:

### Law firm collaboration with enterprise providing employment opportunities for young adults with Down Syndrome

Currently, the unemployment rate for adults with Down Syndrome in Ireland stands at 90%. The social enterprise offers certified training, practical work experience, job prospects, and an essential social and support network to its students. It has a dedicated pathways to employment team working to link future employers with a group of trained young adults who are ready to work in a variety of paid positions including administrative work, catering & café employment, event-based employment, sporting ambassador positions and production tasks.

The law firm provided corporate, employment and intellectual property advice to the social enterprise in relation to a collaboration with an independent café brand. This collaboration aims to bridge the gap in paid employment opportunities and promote inclusivity in the workforce by opening a one-of-a-kind café in Dublin that will not only contribute to the local community but also provide valuable employment opportunities for individuals with Down Syndrome.

“ We are delighted to be part of the pro bono pledge, and to have the opportunity to assist with such a significant project. Our colleagues in employment, corporate and data protection can see the real-life and meaningful impact of their work for young adults with Down Syndrome and we look forward to engaging further with this fantastic initiative.



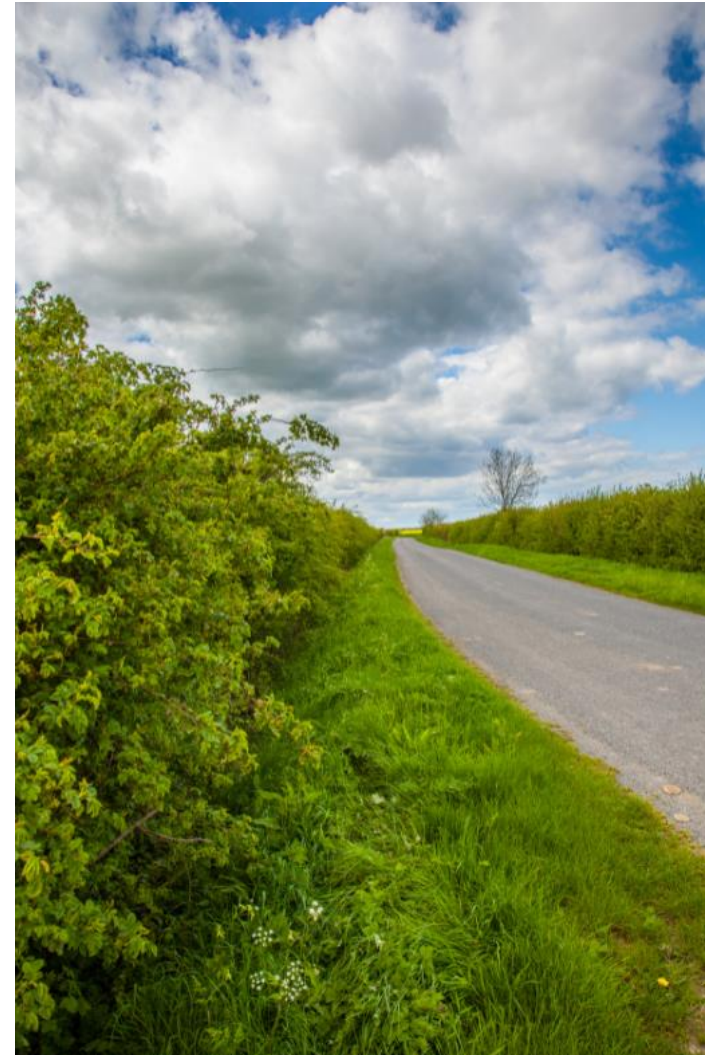
Case Study 2:

**Building legal capabilities;  
Hedgerows legislation  
project - legislative drafting**

Hedgerows Ireland (Tipperary). The group involves approx. 10 barristers and 1 master's student and has entailed approx. 6 online group meetings, bilateral contacts with subgroups, drafting provisions and editing provisions drafted by others and networking with former government members and civil servants regarding the best strategy to advise Hedgerows Ireland as to how to lobby to have the bill introduced in the Oireachtas.



“  
Hedgerows are Ireland's  
Rainforests  
”



Case Study 3:

## Afghan Admissions Programme, discretionary visa applications and ongoing work

The law firm received approval in relation to the AAP application submitted (this initial work is included in the Pro Bono Pledge Impact Report 2022). Since said 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 (due to difficulties faced by the third beneficiary). 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.

“





## 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, and in Ireland is operated through a joint collaboration between the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Irish Refugee Council. Together they provided training and supervision to the pro bono lawyers to enable them to take on cases in an area outside their usual areas of expertise. Three law firms provided, child-friendly pro bono assistance.

One law firm represented 8 refugee children from Afghanistan and Somalia who were seeking family reunification. The cases typically take around 18 months to process. They recently received a positive decision in their first case.

Lawyers from a second firm worked on a family reunification application on behalf of a young girl who was an orphan who was looking to be reunited with her 5 brothers and aunt in Ireland. This was a challenging application as it was technically "outside of the rules" as usually applications have to be made where the parent is in Ireland.

A third law firm acted for unaccompanied refugee children who have already been granted refugee status, preparing and submitting family reunification applications to the Department of Justice.

Another law firm is advising a number of unaccompanied minors as part of its involvement with the KIND project.



Our law firm volunteers have found helping with the KIND project extremely rewarding to date. As there is no state-provided legal aid available for applications for family reunification in Ireland, without legal help it is difficult for children to apply for family reunification and to understand and meet all of the requirements of the application, or to challenge refusals of their applications. It is extremely fulfilling to be able to provide assistance to children who might otherwise struggle with the application process especially knowing that the end goal is to reunite a young person with their family, sometimes after many years apart.

## Case Study 5:

### Building legal capabilities and empowerment of survivors of sexual violence to safely tell their own stories

52% of women and 28% of men in Ireland have been victims of sexual violence. 78% of adults who have experienced sexual violence were raped or assaulted by someone they knew. Only 53% of women and 34% of men, who experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, told someone about it.

The We-Speak Platform is part of a long-term national campaign by the Dublin Rape Crises Centre (DRCC) to inform, educate and engage with all members of society about consent. The campaign is about igniting and opening meaningful conversations about sex and relationships. The We-Speak Platform is a safe space for all victims and survivors to share their stories, in their own words and in their own time.

For the development of We-Speak, the DRCC engaged with Our Wave a US based organisation that had built a similar platform there. The platform was to be custom built, secure and encrypted to allow for complete anonymity while considering triggers and sensitivity in the user journey. The challenge for the DRCC was to ensure that the platform here complied with all Irish jurisdiction laws, most notably data protection given the nature of the material shared.

The law firm worked hand in hand with the staff at the DRCC to ensure the confidentiality of those brave individuals who shared their stories; advising on the structure and layout of the platform itself, carrying out privacy risk assessments, including prominent disclosures to ensure transparency, and negotiating agreements with and securing assurances from Our Wave. Since its launch in June the Platform has had 32,000 visits and 47 stories to date.

Commenting on the pro bono legal support, Sarah Monaghan, Consent Project Manager stated



“

Without this legal support, this project would have been impossible, as we don't have the necessary legal expertise in-house to ensure that the online platform is safe, secure and in compliance with all necessary legal frameworks. With the firm's extensive support we were able to launch the platform secure in the knowledge that users of the site, and DRCC itself, was safe and protected from a legal standpoint. Without this assurance, the organisation simply could not have incurred the risk of launching a site of this kind, despite the fact that DRCC believes it to be transformative in empowering survivor voices to be heard in Ireland.

”

## Case Study 6:

### Preventative justice and early legal information on the FLAC telephone information and referral line

“  
Since July 2022, we have partnered with FLAC to resource their Information and Referral Line with our legal and professional services with volunteers providing free legal information to individuals across Ireland who often face barriers in accessing legal services. We are proud to collaborate with FLAC to deliver this important initiative and look forward to continuing and expanding this partnership in 2024  
”

FLAC operates a telephone legal information and referral line which provides basic legal information to callers. It is hugely oversubscribed. In 2022 alone, 13,556 callers were provided with legal information. However FLAC is concerned and acutely aware that at least 4,466 callers were not able to get through to the phone line service in 2022. In addition to providing early legal information, the statistics from the phonenumber are used by FLAC to highlight unmet legal need and campaign for more comprehensive legal aid.

Two law firms assisted FLAC to answer the telephone information and referral line. The volunteers from the firms answered calls from the general public and provided legal information across a variety of matters including family law, domestic violence, social welfare, housing/landlord and tenant, litigation, criminal law and consumer law. The volunteers from the two firms have upskilled in areas not usually practiced in their law firms.

One law firm continued to operate the FLAC free legal information line every Wednesday, with 115 lawyers now having answered in excess of 1,000 calls.

Another law firm volunteers, every Monday in 3 teams of two, to resource the telephone information Line where 32 volunteers provided 640+ callers with free legal information between July – December 2022.

Erin Brogan, FLAC Telephone Information and Referral Line Development Manager notes that: ***“The law firms provide invaluable support helping people gain early access to vital legal information which can point them in the right direction and may stop things from escalating. With the assistance of the two law firms the FLAC phone line is able to answer a significant number of additional callers that otherwise would go unanswered”***.

#### FLAC phone legal advice clinics

- Four members of one firm volunteer with FLAC’s phone legal advice clinics
- 80 volunteers from another firm took part in 102 FLAC legal advice clinics
- Another law firm operates a dedicated FLAC clinic providing advice on all areas of law
- Staff from another law firm regularly advise on family law and inheritance in FLAC clinics
- A number of barristers regularly advise in FLAC legal advice clinics. FLAC’s independent law centre also relies heavily on barristers providing pro bono support



## Appendix

## Pro Bono Pledge Ireland

**We believe** that universal access to justice and legal service is essential to the rule of law, to the vindication of rights, and to the functioning of democratic society. Many, especially low income, disadvantaged, and marginalised people, cannot get access to justice because they cannot afford legal service.

**We recognise** that the legal profession has a privileged role and a unique purpose and position in the legal system, in society, and in matters of justice.

This gives us the means and opportunity, and therefore the duty, to promote and, in collaboration with civil society and others, to assist in securing access to justice and respect for human rights and the rule of law. An important part of this duty is providing legal services at no cost to those who cannot afford them, pro bono publico. The legal profession in Ireland and

elsewhere has traditionally contributed to meeting otherwise unmet legal needs in this and other ways.

**We regard** the services provided by the Legal Aid Board as vital for individuals and families of limited means. Civil legal aid in Ireland, however, is not adequately resourced to bridge the gap in access to justice, leaving critical legal needs unmet. Pro bono legal services are not, nor can they be, a substitute for a properly funded system of legal aid.

**We define** pro bono legal services as legal services provided free of charge, and with no reasonable expectation of payment, to

- Low income, disadvantaged or marginalised individuals and communities, who cannot afford to pay for effective legal services without incurring significant financial hardship, and whose legal needs would otherwise be unmet,

- Certain charitable, other non-profit groups and social enterprises that work with the groups identified above or for the public good, and
- Individuals and organisations on matters of public interest that may not otherwise be pursued.

**We declare** as follows:

- Members of the legal profession have a responsibility to provide pro bono legal services.
- Pro bono legal services should be provided with the same quality of service and standards of professional conduct as services to paying clients.
- Members of the legal profession should co-operate with each other and with professional organisations, independent law centres, other civil society organisations, law schools and others to enhance

the effectiveness and availability of pro bono legal services.

**We commit** that, in a manner consistent with our role in the legal profession:

- We will endeavour to provide more than 20 hours of pro bono legal service per individual lawyer per year. For law firms and legal departments, we will endeavour to provide an average of more than 20 hours pro bono legal service per lawyer per year.
- We will, in consultation with other signatories to this Pledge, review this target in 3 years with a view to increasing it.

- We will collaborate with other signatories to this Pledge to improve the effectiveness and availability of pro bono legal services, including by sharing appropriate information and developing agreed guidance and protocols.
- We will contribute data and case studies for annual reports on pro bono work in Ireland in accordance with an agreed protocol.

This Pledge is open for signature from November 2020 by solicitors, barristers, law firms and in-house legal departments in Ireland.

## 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](http://www.probonopledge.ie) or by contacting [pila@flac.ie](mailto:pila@flac.ie). These Guidance Notes provide additional information on annual reporting requirements.

2023 will mark the second year of reporting for signatories to the Pro Bono Pledge. The Reporting Period (as agreed by Pledge Stakeholder Signatories) is a 12-month period of signatories' choice and signatories undertake to report consistently on this basis going forward. In 2023, Reports are due on 15 September. This timeframe will allow PILA to analyse the data reported by firms and prepare an Impact Report.

### 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

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.

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 in the next section.

- 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.

### Pro Bono Reporting – Law Firms

- How many lawyers as defined by the Pledge were employed by your firm in the Republic of Ireland in 2022 - 2023? Please indicate whether trainees, professional support lawyers, paralegals, or interns are included.
- How many partners were in your firm in 2022 - 2023?
- How many hours of pro bono legal work were provided by your firm in 2022 - 2023?
- What was the average number of pro bono hours provided per lawyer in 2022- 2023?
- What percentage of lawyers employed by your firm undertook some pro bono legal work in 2022 - 2023?
- What percentage of partners undertook some pro bono legal work in 2022 - 2023?
- Please provide a brief overview of your current pro bono practice, with three examples of pro bono work undertaken during 2022 - 2023.

### Pro Bono Reporting – In House

- How many lawyers as defined by the Pledge were employed by your

company in the Republic of Ireland in 2022 - 2023? Please indicate whether interns are included.

- How many hours of pro bono legal work were provided by your company in 2022 - 2023?
- What was the average number of pro bono hours provided per lawyer in 2022 - 2023?
- What percentage of lawyers employed by your company undertook some pro bono legal work in 2022 - 2023?
- Please provide a brief overview of your current pro bono practice, with three examples of pro bono work undertaken during 2022 - 2023.

### Pro Bono Reporting – Barristers

- How many hours of pro bono legal work were provided by you in 2022 – 2023?
- Please provide a brief overview of your current pro bono practice, with three examples of pro bono work undertaken during 2022 – 2023?



Pro Bono Pledge Ireland

# Impact Report 2023

**Disclaimer**

*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.*