

# Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

## Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Northern Ireland

### Introduction

Northern Ireland has a longstanding commitment to the provision of pro bono legal services and a number of public interest groups, universities, private law firms and barristers offer pro bono legal services to members of the community. One of the most prominent providers of pro bono legal services is the PILS Project (Public Interest Litigation Support Project), which assists local NGOs and legal professionals to build public interest litigation cases to advance the protection, recognition and development of human rights in Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the Bar of Northern Ireland operates its own Pro Bono Unit which specialises in offering free advice and representation to members of the public who are unable to avail themselves of legal aid or where the applicant is unable to afford legal assistance.<sup>2</sup> Further, the Law Centre (NI), a not-for-profit agency, has been operating for over 45 years to provide a wide range of independent pro bono legal services to thousands of people annually, advising particularly on social security, employment and immigration. The Law Centre (NI) is also involved in the advancement of social justice through the provision of training, professional learning and quality assurance to the advice sector in Northern Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

### At a glance

| Minimum pro bono hours requirement for lawyers? | Specific pro bono licence required? | May foreign lawyers practice pro bono? | Insurance required for law firm pro bono? | Insurance required for in-house pro bono? | Rules to limit advertising pro bono work? | Does pro bono work count to CLE credit? | Limitations for in-house lawyers to do pro bono? |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| No  | No                                  | Yes                                    | Yes                                       | Yes                                       | No  | No                                      | No   |

### The landscape

| Professional regulation   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of legal services, including any licensing required to provide legal services. Please highlight any differences for lawyers working as in-house counsel.</li> </ol> | Upon being called to the Bar <sup>4</sup> or registering with |

<sup>1</sup> See [www.pilsni.org](http://www.pilsni.org) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>2</sup> See [Helping the Community | The Bar of Northern Ireland](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>3</sup> See [Who We Are | Law Centre Northern Ireland](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>4</sup> See Bar Code of Conduct [Code of Conduct | The Bar of Northern Ireland](#) and [Code\\_of\\_Conduct.pdf](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <p>the Law Society of Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup>, each barrister and solicitor is subject to the respective professional standards and regulations established by their governing bodies, which dictate the standards of conduct and practice required for legal professionals practising in Northern Ireland.</p>   |
| <b>Regulatory landscape for pro bono</b>  |  |
| <p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>  | <p>There are no rules or regulations specific to the provision of pro bono legal services in Northern Ireland.</p>   |
| <p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>                            | <p>In Northern Ireland, lawyers require a Practising Certificate to provide legal services, including pro bono legal services. There is no requirement to have an additional license to provide pro bono legal services.</p> <p>Providing any form of legal services without a current Practising Certificate would constitute professional misconduct.</p>  |
| <p>4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?</p> | <p>Foreign-qualified lawyers do not require an additional license to provide pro bono legal services in Northern Ireland provided that they are registered European lawyers.<sup>6</sup></p> <p>Foreign-qualified lawyers who are not registered European lawyers should be licensed to practice in Northern Ireland to provide pro bono legal services.</p> |
| <p>5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?</p>   | <p>There are no requirements which mandate that lawyers in Northern Ireland work a minimum number of pro bono hours, however, both the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Bar Council encourage lawyers to engage in the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>  |

---

<sup>5</sup> See [Regulations & Standards | The Law Society of Northern Ireland](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>6</sup> See [Registered European Lawyers | The Law Society of Northern Ireland](#) (last visited on 15 January 2025).

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?</p>  | <p>There is no requirement that aspiring lawyers (both barristers and solicitors) in Northern Ireland complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become licensed lawyers.</p>   |
| <p>7. Aside from mandatory targets (if any), are there aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers set by the local bar association, regulatory body or other body?</p>   | <p>Engagement in pro bono legal services is encouraged by both the Bar Council and the Law Society of Northern Ireland but neither these nor other bodies set any aspirational target for pro bono hours.</p> <p>Some law firms will have their own internal aspirational targets for their lawyers and have signed up to the Pro Bono Register in conjunction with the PLS Project to provide pro bono legal services in their areas of specialty.</p>  |
| <p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>   | <p>No, lawyers do not receive any continuing legal education or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked.</p>   |
| <b>Insurance and advertising</b>  |  |
| <p>9. Do lawyers need professional indemnity legal insurance cover for pro bono legal services they provide? Does the requirement differ for in-house lawyers?</p> <p>If insurance is required, can lawyers meet the requirement by working under the cover of another pro bono provider, e.g. in partnership with a private law firm or organization working on the same pro bono project?</p> | <p>All practising solicitors and barristers in Northern Ireland, including those who are in-house lawyers, require professional indemnity legal insurance cover.</p> <p>Solicitors in Northern Ireland who are employed in private practice (i.e., not in-house lawyers or government lawyers) are required to maintain professional indemnity insurance at a level and to a specification prescribed by the Law Society of Northern Ireland.<sup>7</sup> This applies equally to pro bono work, commercial legal advice services, work performed at law centres, charities and other non-commercial advice services, and work for foreign law firms.<sup>8</sup></p> <p>Every practising barrister in Northern Ireland is required under the Bar Code of Conduct to maintain professional indemnity insurance cover at the appropriate level prescribed by the Bar Council.<sup>9</sup></p> |

<sup>7</sup> See the [Solicitors \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1976](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>8</sup> See [Professional indemnity insurance](#) | [Liability insurance](#) | [Business insurance](#) | [ABI](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>9</sup> See section 7.1 i and section 8 of the [Bar Code of Conduct.pdf](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
| <p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>  | <p>In Northern Ireland, there are no rules that prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients by barristers. However, a barrister who advertises their practice must do so in a manner consistent with the British Code of Advertising Practice.<sup>10</sup></p> <p>There are no rules in Northern Ireland that prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients by solicitors, however client consent is generally required for solicitors to advertise the identity of a client or items of the client's business, and soliciting of business is generally subject to customary ethical standards e.g., no inaccurate, misleading or unjustifiable statements.</p> |
| <b>Pro bono practice and culture</b>   |  |
| <p>11. What are the main areas of law which require or present opportunities for pro bono? What are the major unmet legal needs?</p>   | <p>The main areas of law which require or present opportunities for the provision of pro bono legal services in Northern Ireland are personal injury, personal finance, divorce, employment, family, housing and human rights.</p> <p>A major unmet legal need is that Pro Bono Costs Orders are largely not available in Northern Ireland and are only being available in relation to environmental cases.<sup>11</sup> Pro Bono Costs Orders are court orders that require a losing party in a legal case to pay the costs of the winning party's free legal representation to a designated fund, often a charity that supports pro bono work.</p>   |
| <p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>  | <p>The main providers of pro bono legal services in Northern Ireland are universities, NGOs, private law firms and barristers.</p>   |
| <p>13. Are there any noteworthy examples of how innovative technology or artificial intelligence is being used to enable access to pro bono or otherwise as part of pro bono cases or matters?</p> | <p>There are no noteworthy publicly available examples of how innovative technology and/or artificial intelligence is being used to enable access to pro bono legal services or otherwise used as part of pro bono cases or matters in Northern Ireland.</p>   |

<sup>10</sup> See section 29 of the [Bar Code of Conduct.pdf](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>11</sup> See [The Costs Protection \(Aarhus Convention\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2013](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>However, researchers at Ulster University have created an AI-driven legal assistant named "Aura." This tool is designed to automate tasks such as legal drafting, research, and initial assessments. The goal is to minimize the time spent on repetitive tasks and enhance access to justice.<sup>12</sup> This illustrates how AI innovation is directly targeting access to justice problems that often underpin pro bono demand. Ulster University has also launched a Centre for Legal Technology (CLT), marking a pivotal moment in legal innovation and reinforcing Northern Ireland's emergence as a leader in law and technology.<sup>13</sup></p> |
| <b>Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts</b>  |  |
| <p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>   | <p>There are no governmental sources of pro bono and/or other legal services in Northern Ireland. The main non-governmental sources of pro bono and/or other pro bono resources in Northern Ireland are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's Law Centre;<sup>14</sup></li> <li>• Citizens Advice Bureau;<sup>15</sup></li> <li>• Law Centre NI;<sup>16</sup></li> <li>• PILS Project;<sup>17</sup></li> <li>• Pro Bono Unit of the Bar of Northern Ireland;<sup>18</sup> and</li> <li>• Ulster University Law Clinic.<sup>19</sup></li> </ul>  |
| <p>15. Is there any public or private organization with which a local or foreign lawyer can register to be made aware of pro bono opportunities?</p> | <p>Lawyers can register their interest to provide pro bono legal services with universities and NGOs in Northern Ireland.</p>  |

<sup>12</sup> <https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/aura-an-ai-powered-legal-assistant-for-enhancing-access-to-justice/#:~:text=Aura:%20An%20AI%20Powered%20Legal,UK%20Legal%20System%20%2D%20Ulster%20University> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.ulster.ac.uk/news/2025/september/ulster-university-celebrates-launch-of-new-centre-for-legal-technology?utm\\_](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/news/2025/september/ulster-university-celebrates-launch-of-new-centre-for-legal-technology?utm_) (last viewed on 27 January 2026).

<sup>14</sup> See [Children's Law Centre – Children's Rights Change Children's Lives](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>15</sup> See [Get advice in Northern Ireland - Citizens Advice](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>16</sup> See [Home | Law Centre Northern Ireland](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>17</sup> See [PILS Project - Public Interest Litigation Support Northern Ireland](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>18</sup> See [Helping the Community | The Bar of Northern Ireland](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

<sup>19</sup> See [The Law Clinic](#) (last visited on 12 February 2025)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work? | There are no awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work in Northern Ireland. |
|---|--|

### Acknowledgements

**Name of Local Counsel:** A&L Goodbody NI LLP

**Name of Individual at Local Counsel:** Aisling Byrne

### Learn more

[Navigate the full Global Pro Bono Guide](#) to explore the global landscape and pro bono practices and opportunities across 100+ jurisdictions.