

# THE NATIONAL PROBONO CENTRE

## The pros of pro bono

Assessing the quantitative value of legal pro bono advice and support services to pro bono and advice organisations

November 2025

THE  
**NATIONAL**  
**PROBONO**  
CENTRE

## The pros of pro bono

A report for The National Pro Bono Centre

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## **Disclaimer**

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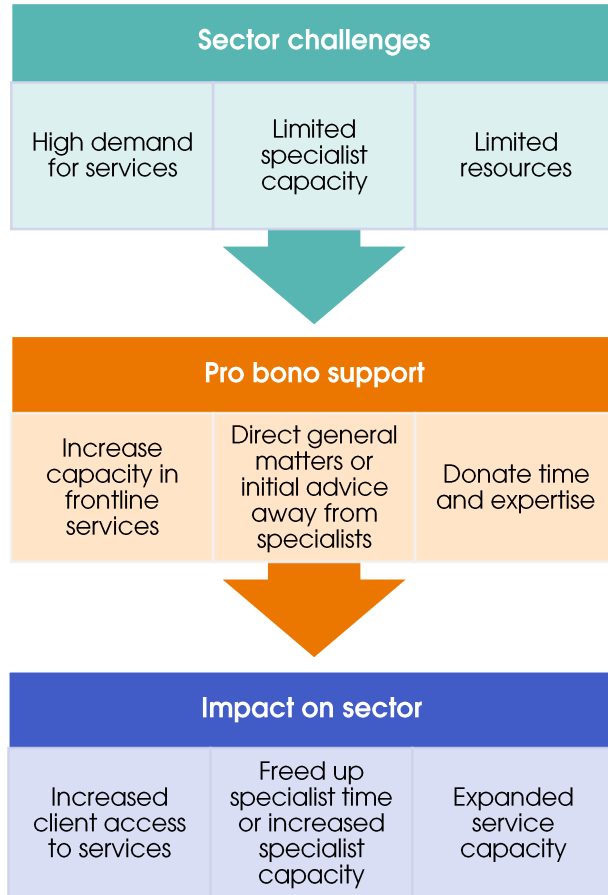
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# Executive summary

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# Pro bono strengthens frontline advice services



**Impact of pro bono support on the wider sector**

## Legal pro bono volunteers offer essential support to a system facing significant strain.

Demand for free legal advice, particularly in relation to social welfare issues, has intensified in recent years due to prolonged reductions in legal aid funding and ongoing political and social challenges. This has left many individuals without suitable access to legal support.

Research funded by the Access to Justice Foundation and Bar Council in 2024, as well as our recent discussions with pro bono charities highlighted that organisations providing free legal advice are struggling to keep up.

Rising demand and low remuneration rates make it difficult to attract and retain specialist advisors, and unpredictable short-term funding makes long-term planning impossible. As a result, many individuals are left to represent themselves in legal proceedings, if they choose to pursue their case at all, or are left without guidance on their rights and next steps.

To some extent, pro bono support reduces the strain on the wider sector, as in many cases, pro bono clinics are used as initial triage points, offering short, focused sessions that enable volunteers to connect with multiple clients in a short period of time. These sessions not only expand access to legal advice for clients who might otherwise go without but can also help to redirect general matters away from specialist staff.

While the impact on caseload capacity varies depending on the supervision required for volunteers, the majority of charities agreed that the benefits outweigh the costs.

# And yields a net positive value

**We calculated the value of pro bono by modelling volunteer hours, supervision time and hourly rates for paid staff, alongside an estimated volunteer rate informed by pro bono charities.**

We found that even after accounting for supervision, the total value of pro bono support to pro bono and advice organisations is net positive, estimated at just under £2 million for every 100,000 clients served.

This is made up of £730,000 in net savings from volunteers handling tasks that otherwise would've been performed by paid staff, £1.9 million in net added value generated through extended service reach or increased capacity and £480,000 in productivity gains attributed to supervising multiple volunteers, less the cost of supervision, which totals £1.2 million.

The combined effect of volunteers directly substituting for paid staff time, resulting in net savings, and the increased productivity achieved through the supervision of multiple volunteers can significantly free up staff capacity.

This freed-up time enables paid staff to redirect their efforts toward more complex and specialised casework, helping to expand long-term access to expert legal support for those with specialised needs.



**Total value of pro bono support**  
For every 100,000 clients

The value of pro  
bono services to  
the sector



# Value estimates derived from pro bono charities

To help inform this research we conducted a survey of pro bono charities, gathering data from 16 participating organisations.

The organisations were of different sizes operating across a range of advice and support services, as well as different areas of law.

Collectively, these organisations assisted approximately 24,500 people during 2024 and handled an estimated 12,500 individual cases.

The survey findings are representative of around 3,300 active pro bono volunteers, who together contributed more than 32,900 hours of their time.

In addition to our sector survey, we spoke with six different pro bono charities to gain insights into the value of pro bono to the wider sector.



Summary of collective survey representation

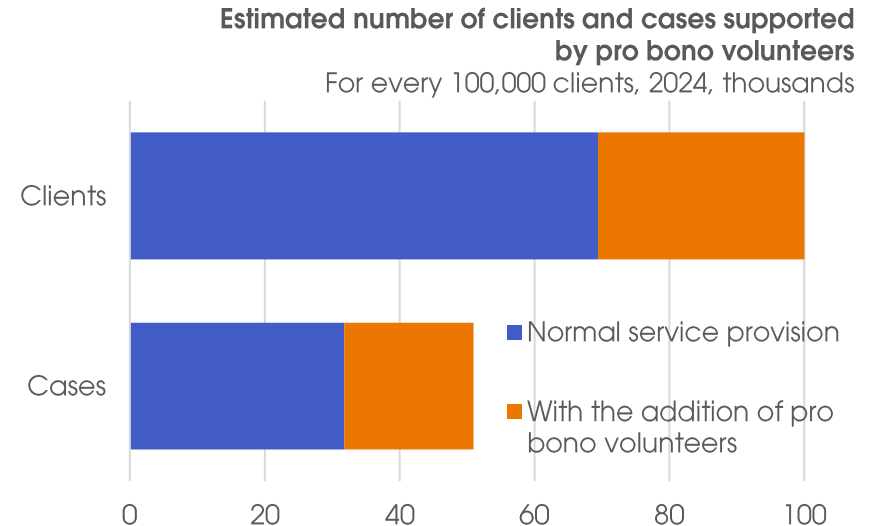
2025

## Pro bono support can increase organisational capacity.

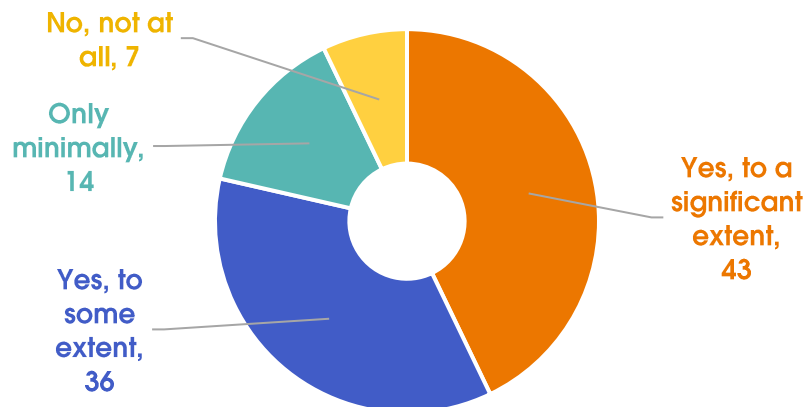
Pro bono and advice organisations we surveyed, representing approximately 24,500 clients, all said pro bono support helped them serve more clients.

For every 100,000 clients supported by pro bono charities, approximately 30,600 (31 per cent) are estimated to be supported solely by the addition of pro bono volunteers.

The majority of charities also reported the ability to take on additional cases as a result of the pro bono support they received in 2024, equating to roughly 38 per cent of total cases.



**Whether increased capacity helped staff focus on more complex matters**  
Share of pro bono charities who reported increased capacity, 2024, per cent



## And allows paid staff to focus on more complex matters.

Of the organisations that reported increased capacity, 80 per cent indicated that this allowed paid staff to dedicate greater attention to more complex cases, either significantly or to some degree.

To capture this value, we estimated both the direct contribution of volunteer hours and the indirect benefits from freeing up staff time for higher priority, complex legal matters.

# Pro bono helps to alleviate pressure on providers

## **Our engagement with pro bono and advice organisations highlighted that pro bono work makes a meaningful contribution not only to clients but also to the wider sector.**

A number of the organisations we spoke with operated pro bono clinics as initial triage points, involving short, focused sessions that allow volunteers to meet with multiple clients in a limited period of time. These clinics aren't designed to resolve complex legal issues but to establish whether an individual has a viable case, what their immediate next steps should be and who is best placed to support them further.

In practice, such clinics help to filter out cases with little prospect of success, reassure clients where legal action is unnecessary and signpost claims in need of further support to specialist providers. Stakeholders emphasised that this triage role can often be as valuable as end-to-end casework because it not only prevents people from pursuing hopeless claims and accessing legal advice they wouldn't otherwise have had but can also direct non-specialist work away from specialists. For example, one advice provider explained that having pro bono volunteers handle the email advice platform they offer allows a staff member to fully dedicate themselves to the specialist advice line.

In terms of caseload capacity, stakeholders suggested the impacts are somewhat mixed. In areas like family law, volunteers are often well placed to support clients end-to-end, meaning pro bono can significantly increase the number of cases that can be

handled. However, in areas such as housing, the picture is more complicated. Housing cases have grown increasingly complex, and since there are relatively few housing specialists, there simply aren't enough people available to provide the supervision that firms expect for their volunteers.

The situation is similar in immigration, where, as one advice provider noted, growing case complexity demands significant supervision, limiting how much pro bono can expand organisational capacity. This suggests that while pro bono adds valuable reach, its effect on overall caseload capacity varies considerably depending on the legal area and available resources.

While pro bono charities noted certain limitations with volunteers, some pro bono work is delivered by skilled specialists who can help to fill gaps in service provision, particularly in areas with significant shortages. This contributes to addressing unmet need within the sector, especially since a number of charities highlighted that specialist volunteers can and do end up taking clients through complete casework.

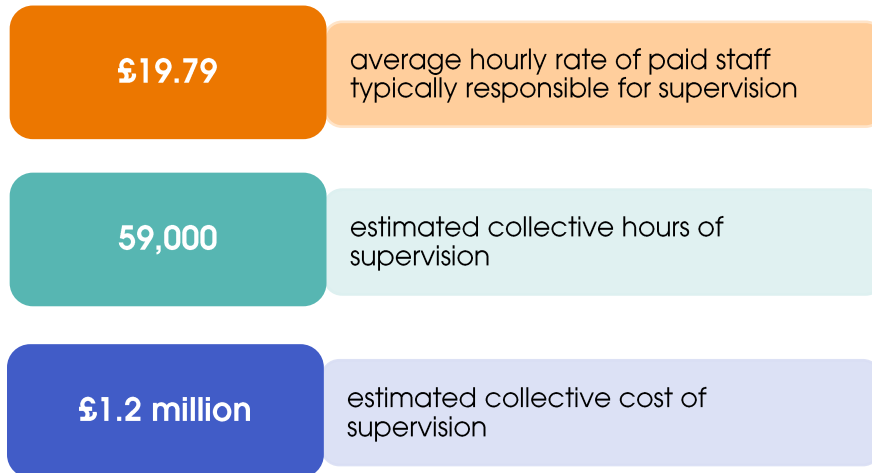
### Not all pro bono hours have the same impact.

Some replace staff work, reducing direct labour costs, while others expand service reach, delivering help that wouldn't otherwise be possible.

Therefore, we've categorised hours into those that replace work that otherwise would've been carried out by paid staff and those that provide additional services or support that wouldn't have been possible without pro bono support.



**Estimated breakdown of collective volunteer hours**  
For every 100,000 clients, 2024

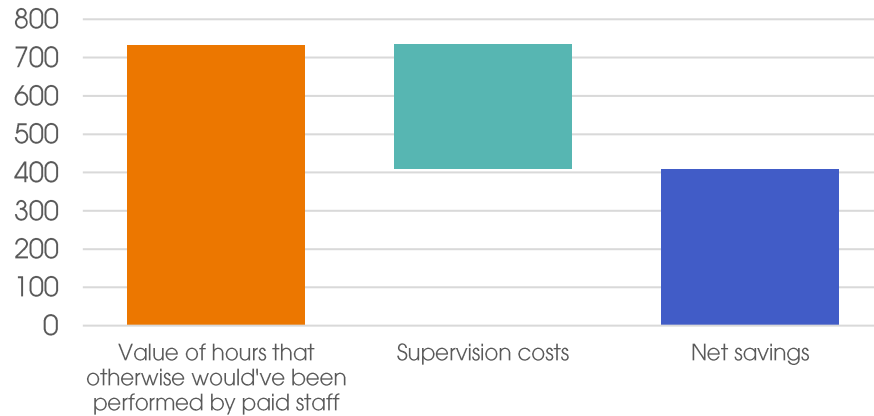


**Estimated collective hours and cost of supervision**  
For every 100,000 clients, 2024

### And it's important to factor in the cost of supervision.

We recognise that management of volunteers is a real resource commitment to pro bono charities. To reflect this, we factored in the cost of supervision proportionally to our estimates for the value of both substitution and expanded service hours.

**Net savings from volunteers handling tasks that otherwise would've been carried out by paid staff**  
For every 100,000 clients, £ thousands



**For volunteer hours that directly substitute paid staff time, we've estimated their value as the equivalent staff cost saved.**

Based on an average hourly rate of £20.38 (derived from participating organisations' average salaries), the net savings generated by volunteers handling tasks that otherwise would've been performed by paid staff is estimated to total just under £410,000 for every 100,000 clients.

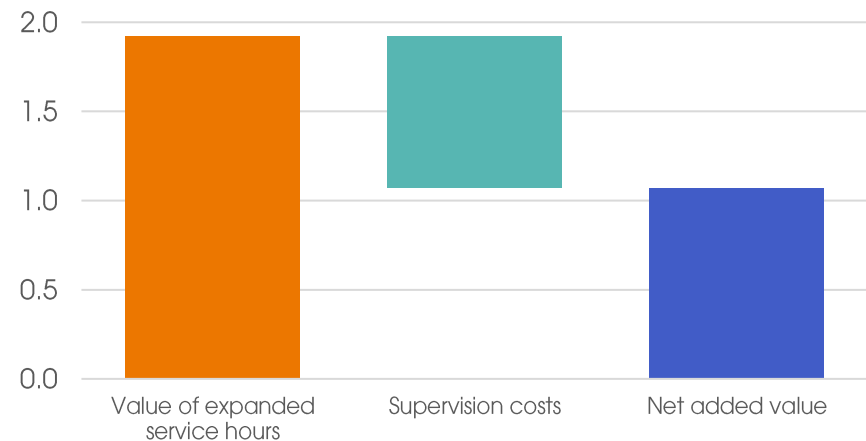
**Volunteer hours that extend service reach or increase capacity are measured in terms of their net added value to the organisations.**

For every 100,000 clients, there is a net added value of approximately £1.1 million.

To reach this value, we estimated the value of a single pro bono hour by applying an average hourly rate of £16.98, weighted to account for the different types of volunteers contributing time across the surveyed organisations.

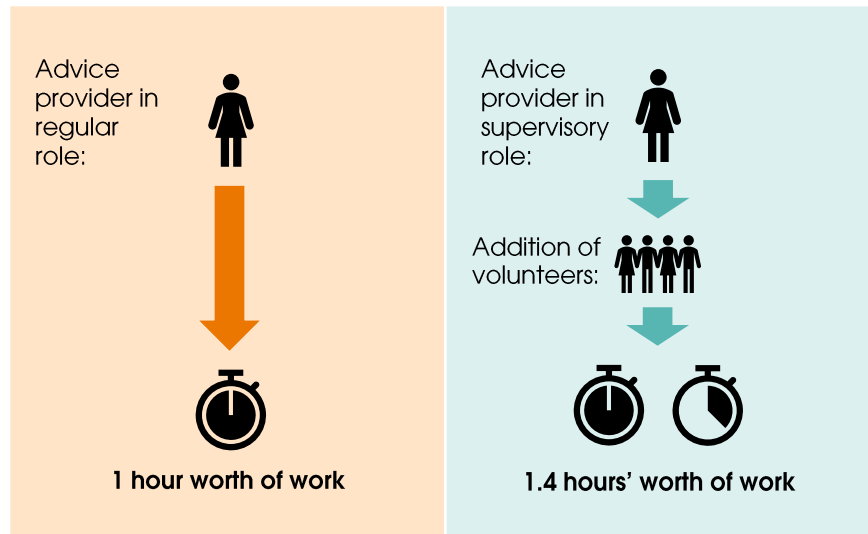
Because of this, the estimated benefits are likely conservative. The benefits could be greater if commercial rates were applied, as has been done in studies by other sector bodies.

**Net added value from volunteers expanding service reach and capacity**  
For every 100,000 clients, £ millions



## Despite supervision needs, 94 per cent of organisations found volunteer benefits exceeded the costs.

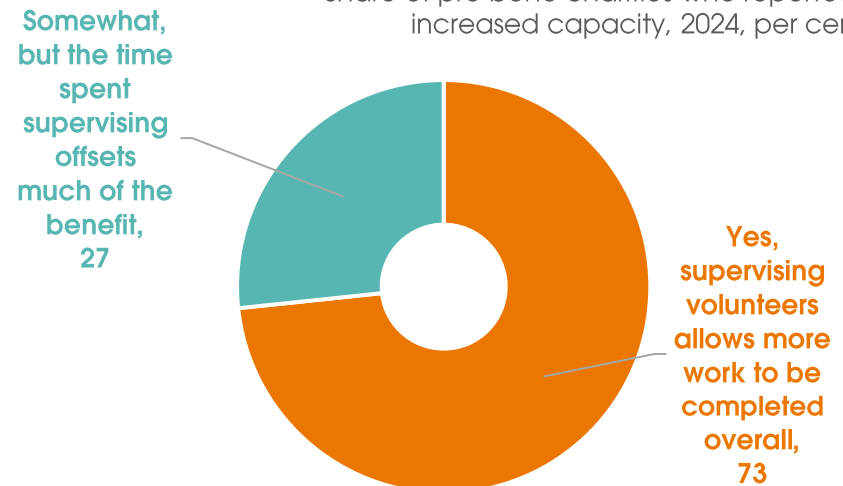
Most respondents (73 per cent, representing approximately 17,300 clients) completely agreed that volunteers brought overall benefits. However, 27 per cent said the benefits were only partial, as the time required to manage volunteers reduced much of the gain.



Additional output generated by supervision

## Whether supervising multiple pro bono volunteers provides greater organisational benefit than a supervisor working independently

Share of pro bono charities who reported increased capacity, 2024, per cent



## Factoring in these additional productivity gains leads to further benefits.

Pro bono charities estimated that for every hour a paid staff member spends supervising volunteers, approximately 1.4 hours of additional client support or casework is completed through the volunteers' contributions.

Compared to working independently, this represents a net productivity gain, volunteers extend the reach of staff time, enabling more work to be completed overall.

The value of these productivity gains are estimated to be worth roughly £480,000 for every 100,000 clients.

# Pro bono yields net positive value, even with supervision



**Total value of pro bono support**  
For every 100,000 clients

**Even after accounting for supervision, the total value of pro bono support to pro bono and advice organisations is estimated at just under £2 million for every 100,000 clients served.**

This is made up of £730,000 in net savings from volunteers handling tasks that otherwise would've been performed by paid staff, £1.9 million in net added value generated through extended service reach or increased capacity and £480,000 in productivity gains attributed to supervising multiple volunteers, less the cost of supervision, which totals £1.2 million.

The combined effect of volunteers directly substituting for paid staff time, resulting in net savings, and the increased productivity achieved through the supervision of multiple volunteers can significantly free up staff capacity.

This freed-up time enables paid staff to redirect their efforts toward more complex and specialised casework, helping to expand long-term access to expert legal support for those with complex cases and additional needs.

And it's not just the sector that is likely to benefit, research for the Access to Justice Foundation and Bar Council in 2024 estimated that for every £1 spent on free specialist legal advice and its outcomes, there is a government saving of £2.71. While pro bono work is not exclusively specialist, it plays a key role in supporting the wider value of the sector.

# Pro bono strengthens sector connections

**Pro bono charities also highlighted the role that pro bono can play in fostering connections across the legal sector.**

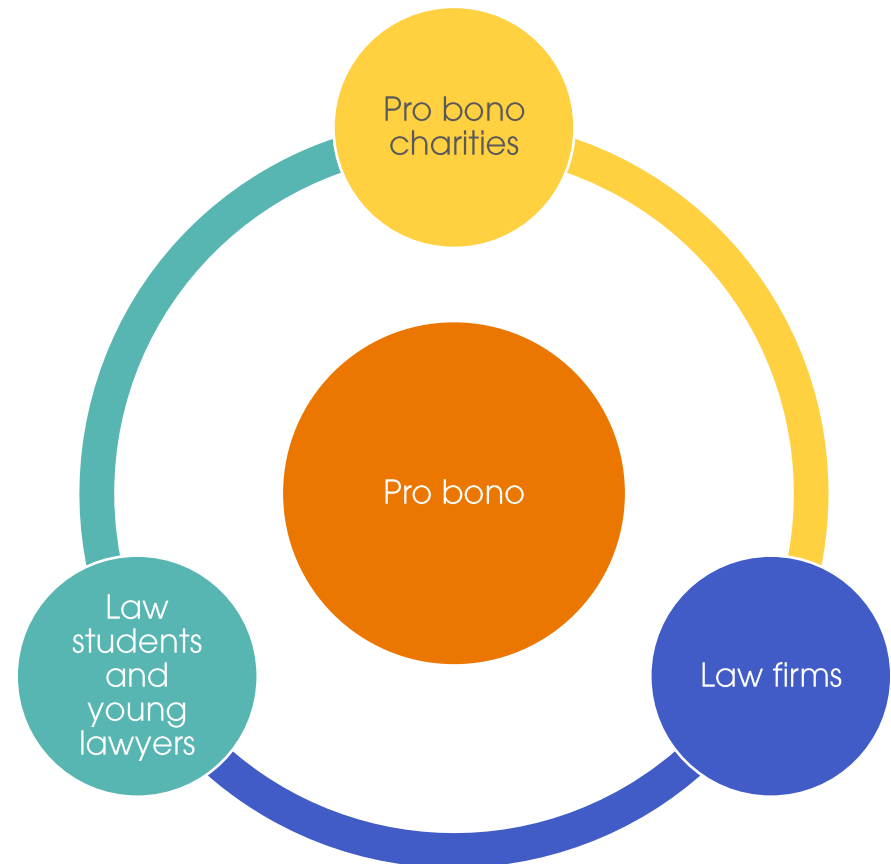
Some organisations we spoke to reported that pro bono had helped to create meaningful links between their organisations and law firms, helping build collaborative relationships that in some cases led to further projects, shared resources and funding opportunities.

For example, one charity explained how links to a law firm because of their pro bono ties resulted in funding for a bespoke case management system that significantly improved efficiency across the wider organisation.

Such links are also beneficial to firms as pro bono contributions, whether in the form of time or sponsorship, deliver tangible corporate social responsibility benefits, while highlighting the firm's active involvement in the wider justice ecosystem.

For law students, volunteering provides valuable hands-on experience and helps them build professional networks that can support their future careers.

One organisation expressed that the pathway of pro bono is particularly important for young solicitors, as it gives them exposure to real-world practice and opportunities to connect with firms that they may otherwise have missed out on.



The sector without  
pro bono support

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# Capacity reductions without pro bono support

## Without pro bono support, the majority of organisations would reduce capacity to some extent.

87 per cent of pro bono and advice organisations who responded would either close, scale down services or reduce the number of clients they support.

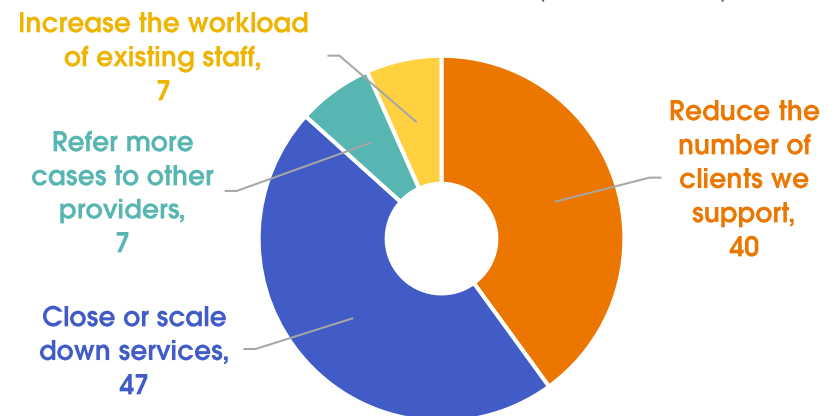
When asked how many additional paid staff would be required to maintain current service levels without pro bono support, organisations estimated a need for 98 staff members.

Assuming a 37.5-hour full-time week and an average hourly rate of £20.38 (derived from participating organisations' average salaries), this represents around \*£3.8 million in additional salaries across participating organisations, approximately £240,000 per organisation.

Based on participating organisation estimates of client and case capacity, the number of clients supported would fall by 31 per cent in the absence of pro bono volunteers, with corresponding reductions in cases equal to 38 per cent.

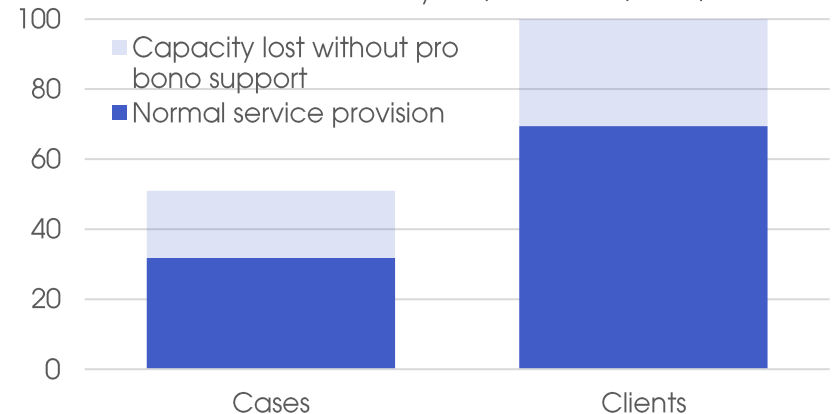
Pro bono and advice organisations noted that without pro bono volunteers, more people would face legal problems alone, as these volunteers often fill vital gaps by providing advice in areas not covered elsewhere in their organisations. One provider voiced concern that, in their absence, many individuals would be forced to seek help online, exposing them to the risks and inaccuracies found there.

Response if pro bono support ceased to exist  
Share of responses, 2024, per cent



Case and client capacity

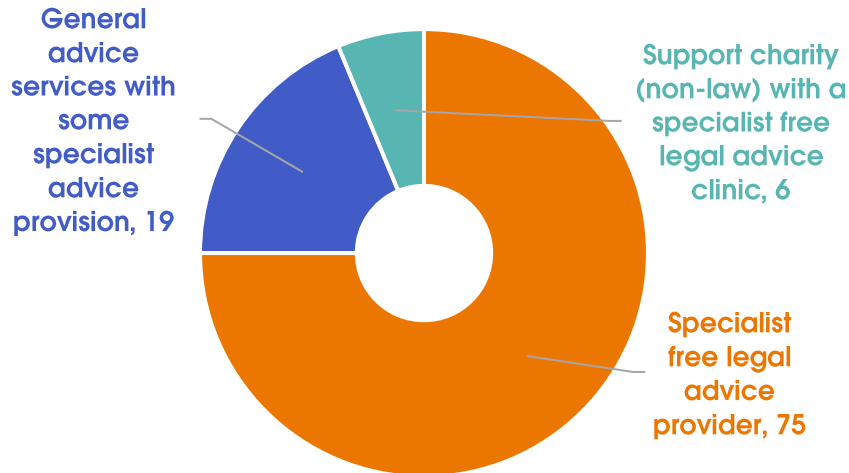
For every 100,000 clients, 2024, thousands



# Appendix

- Scope and specialisation of pro bono charities
- Organisational scale and reach
- Service delivery models
- Pro bono volunteer profile and support
- Types of pro bono supervision
- Impact of pro bono support

**Proportion of services provided by pro bono charities**  
Share of participating pro bono charities, 2024, per cent



**Three quarters of participating organisations were specialist free legal advice providers.**

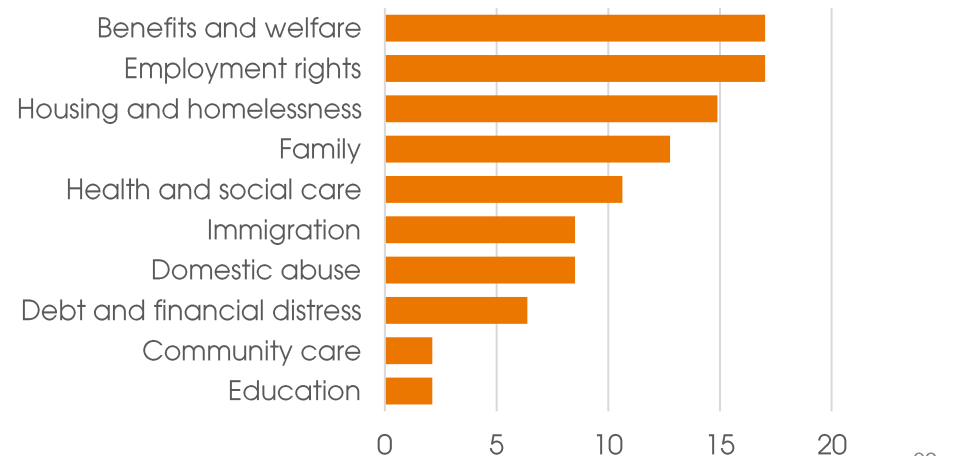
The remaining were made up of general advice services with some specialist advice provision or non-law support charities with a specialist free legal advice clinic.

**Participating organisations most commonly specialised in benefits and welfare and employment rights law.**

This was closely followed by housing and homelessness and family law.

Education and community care were the least represented in the survey sample.

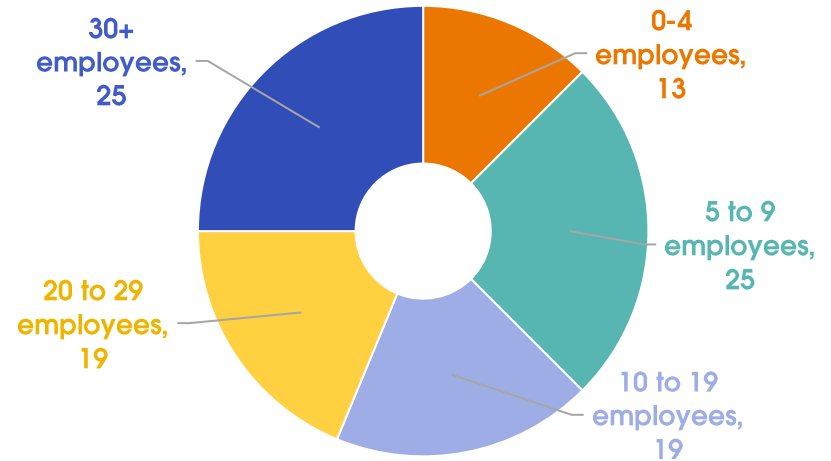
**Areas of legal specialisation across organisation**  
Share of total responses, 2024, per cent



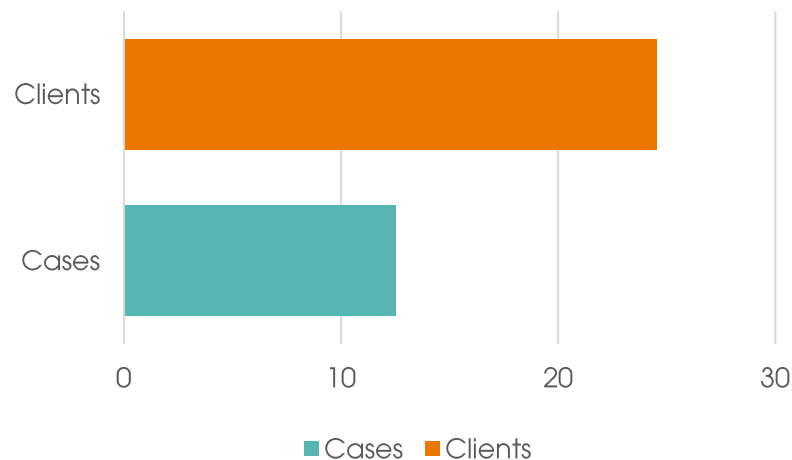
**Participating organisations varied in size, ranging from small to larger teams of legal professionals.**

The organisations surveyed ranged widely in size, from one entirely volunteer-run organisation to the largest employing 46 paid staff members.

**Distribution of organisations by number of paid staff**  
Share of participating pro bono charities, 2024, per cent



**Collective number of clients and cases supported by participating pro bono charities**  
2024, thousands

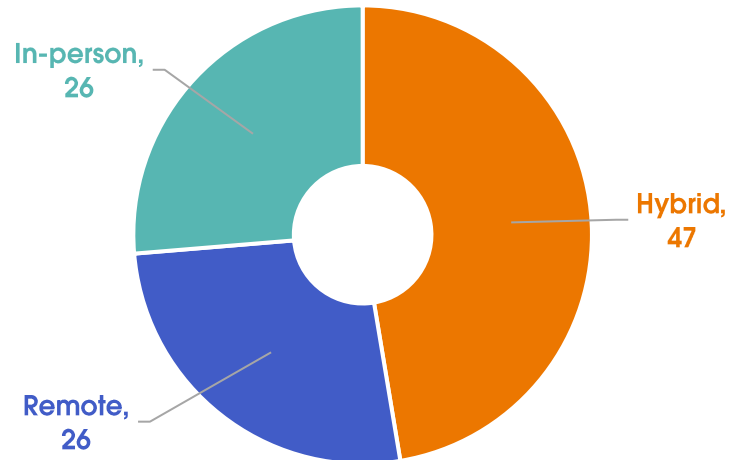


**The survey sample is representative of a client base of around 24,500 individuals.**

On average, this works out at around 1,750 clients per organisation in 2024.

In terms of cases, around 12,500 cases were managed in 2024. This is, on average, 900 per organisation.

**Types of service delivery offered by organisation**  
Share of total responses, 2024, per cent



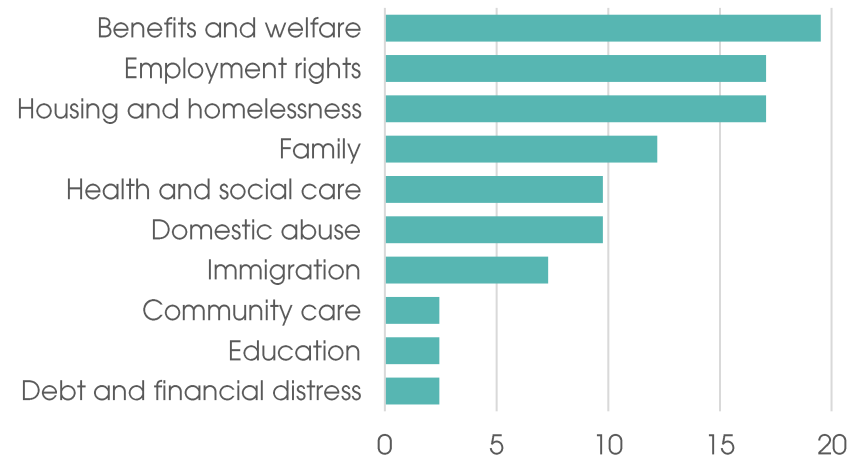
**Hybrid pro bono services accounted for 47 per cent of all responses from participating charities.**

Among all responses, the remaining shares were equally split between remote and in-person service delivery.

**Alike the wider organisation, pro bono services covered a wide variety of areas of law.**

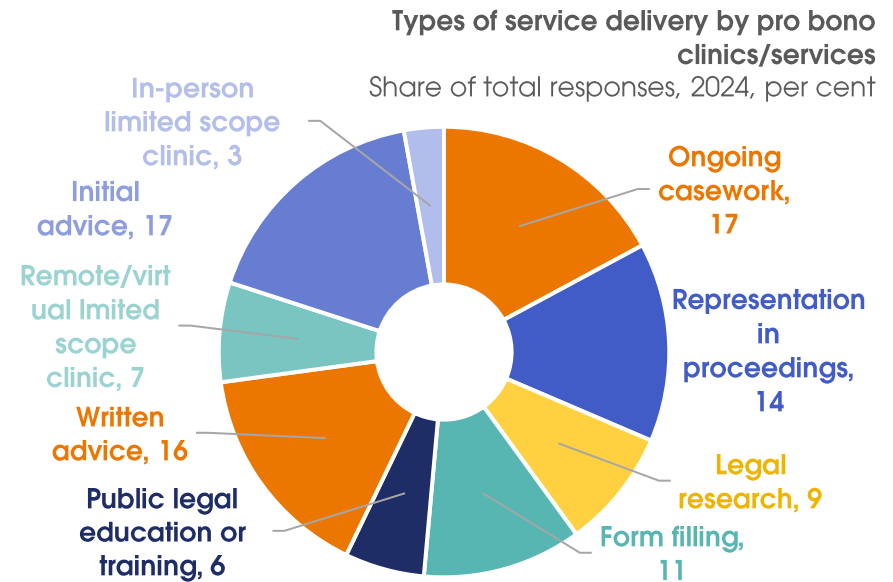
Although pro bono clinics covered all the same areas of law as the wider organisations collectively, they specialised in fewer areas overall.

**Areas of legal specialisation within pro bono clinic/services**  
Share of total responses, 2024, per cent

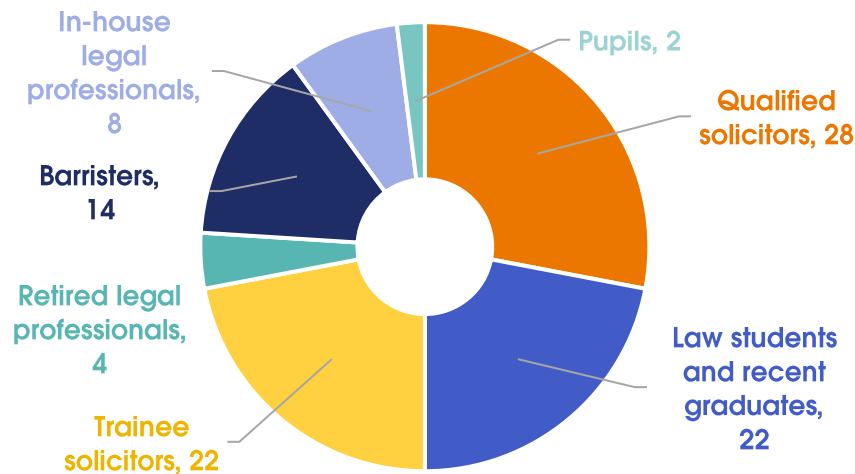


### Pro bono clinics delivered services in a range of different ways.

Initial advice, ongoing casework and written advice were the most common forms of delivery for pro bono services.



**Typical background of pro bono volunteers**  
Share of total responses, 2024, per cent

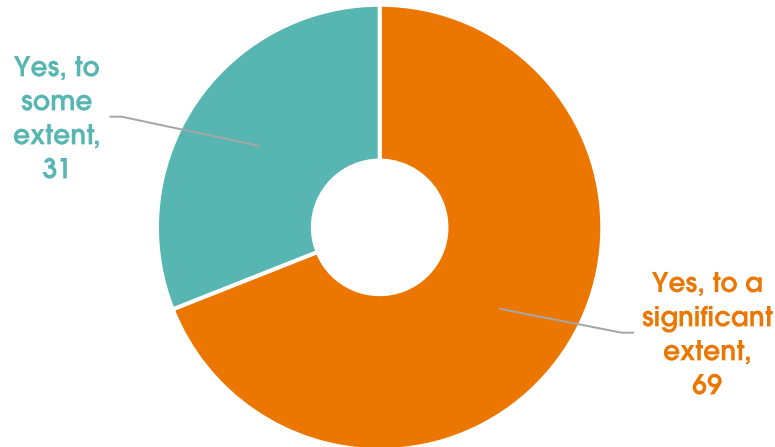


### Pro bono volunteers had a diverse range of backgrounds.

Qualified solicitors were the most common type of volunteer represented in the sample making up 28 per cent of total responses, followed by trainee solicitors at 22 per cent and law students and recent graduates, also at 22 per cent.

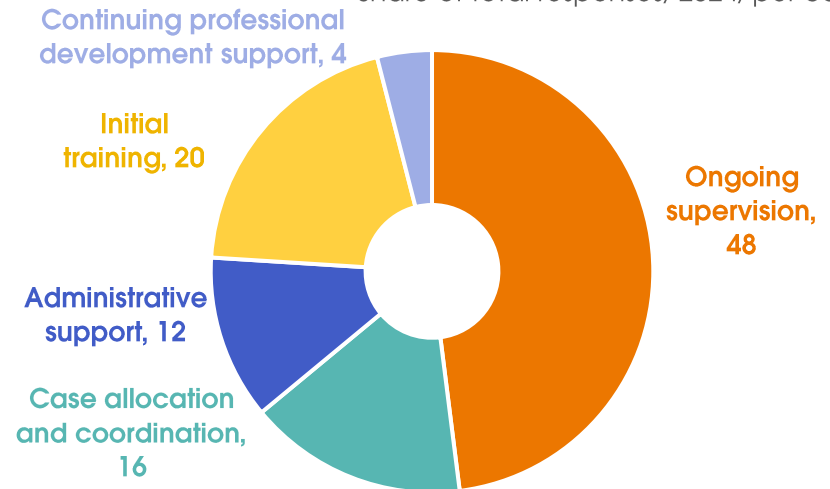
**Whether pro bono support enabled organisations to assist more clients than it otherwise could have**

Share of participating pro bono charities, 2024, per cent



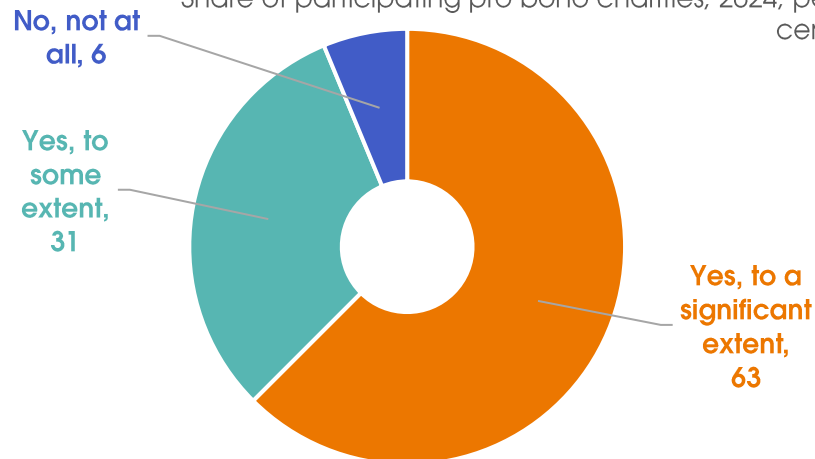
**Typical support provided by paid staff to pro bono volunteers**

Share of total responses, 2024, per cent



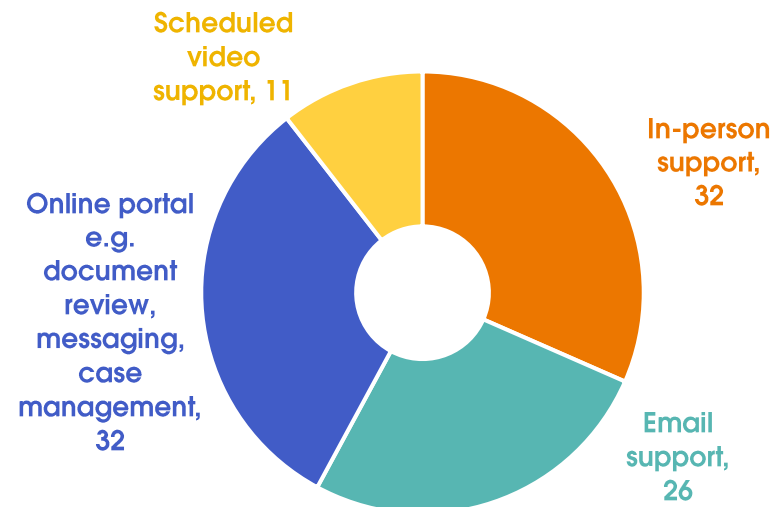
**Whether pro bono support allowed organisations to take on additional cases that otherwise would not have been possible**

Share of participating pro bono charities, 2024, per cent



**Types of supervision of pro bono volunteers**

Share of total responses, 2024, per cent



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