

Pro Bono Clients And Focus Area

As seen in previous Index analysis and through the in-depth insights afforded by the global [commentary pieces](#), pro bono looks very different in different parts of the world. There are many reasons to provide pro bono services and many types of potential pro bono clients. The clients and sectors in which these organisations work are varied and the Index has mapped the various approaches taken by different firms to elucidate trends and determine the link between the size of the respondent firm and the type and focus of work for the pro bono client.

To further understand why certain firms work with certain clients, the Index analysed why respondent firms do pro bono in the first place and what trends exist in relation to this.

Why Do Pro Bono?

In order for law firms to have successful pro bono practices, not only do lawyers need to be willing to work on pro bono matters, but the firms themselves need to be willing to devote resources to build and maintain a pro bono practice and embed a culture of pro bono in their own organisation.

At the Thomson Reuters Foundation, we believe in the importance and benefits of pro bono as a powerful force for good within society, lending valuable expertise to strengthening organisations working to build stronger, cleaner and healthier communities. But why do firms themselves encourage their staff to do pro bono and, in doing so, divert resources away from revenue-generating work which ultimately is the lifeblood of any commercial organisation?

Across the entire set of respondent firms, **by far the most common reason to perform pro bono was a desire to support the community**, selected by 96.9 percent of respondents. Training and skills development for lawyers was the next most popular reason at 58 percent. Retention of staff, an alignment with the interests of the client, and marketing were also commonly selected at 33.6 percent, 29.8 percent, and 27.5 percent respectively.

WHY DO PRO BONO?

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENT FIRMS WHO INDICATED THEY OFFER PRO BONO SERVICES FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:



Although the trends for Large, Medium-sized and Small Firms are similar to that of the entire dataset, we did see some subtle differences between these groups.

Amongst Small Firms, training and skills development ranked second (34.1 percent) to a desire to support the community. It is understandable that Small Firms are less likely to take into account some of the more commercial justifications for pro bono, such as marketing or alignment with the interests of clients and rather focus on the community benefit.

For Medium-sized Firms, skills training and development (55.6 percent) was considered an important factor, in contrast to Large Firms, where staff retention was considered to be a far more important factor than at their smaller peers (selected by 60 percent of Large Firm respondents). Being aligned with the interests of clients was also far more frequently selected amongst Large Firms (40 percent) than amongst Medium-sized Firms (18.5 percent) and Small Firms (22.7 percent). It was evident that Large Firms were more willing to embrace the more commercial drivers behind pro bono.

Pro Bono Focus

In line with findings from the Index over the previous two years, **the most commonly selected pro bono focus area for firms overall was Access to Justice** with 68 percent of respondent firms indicating they supported organisations and initiatives in this sector. Economic Development, Microfinance and Social Finance (selected by 51.6 percent); Human Rights (50.0 percent); and Education, Training and Employment (46.1 percent) were the next most supported focus areas.

Interestingly, **Immigration, Refugees and Asylum was selected as a focus area by 41.4 percent of firms who indicated they supported organisations and initiatives in this area.** This was a substantial increase from the previous two years (24 percent and 28 percent respectively) and was likely a reflection in response to the refugee crisis across Europe and elsewhere as significant populations from the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel are displaced.

Analysing links between the size of firms and the development areas they focus on adds colour to these findings. Access to Justice continued to be the most popularly selected focus areas amongst Small, Medium-sized, and Large Firms (selected by 61.4 percent; 69.2 percent; and 72.4 percent respectively). Small Firms additionally focused on Education, Training and Employment (50.0 percent), followed by Economic Development, Microfinance (47.7 percent), Human Rights (38.6 percent) and Women's Rights (29.5 percent).

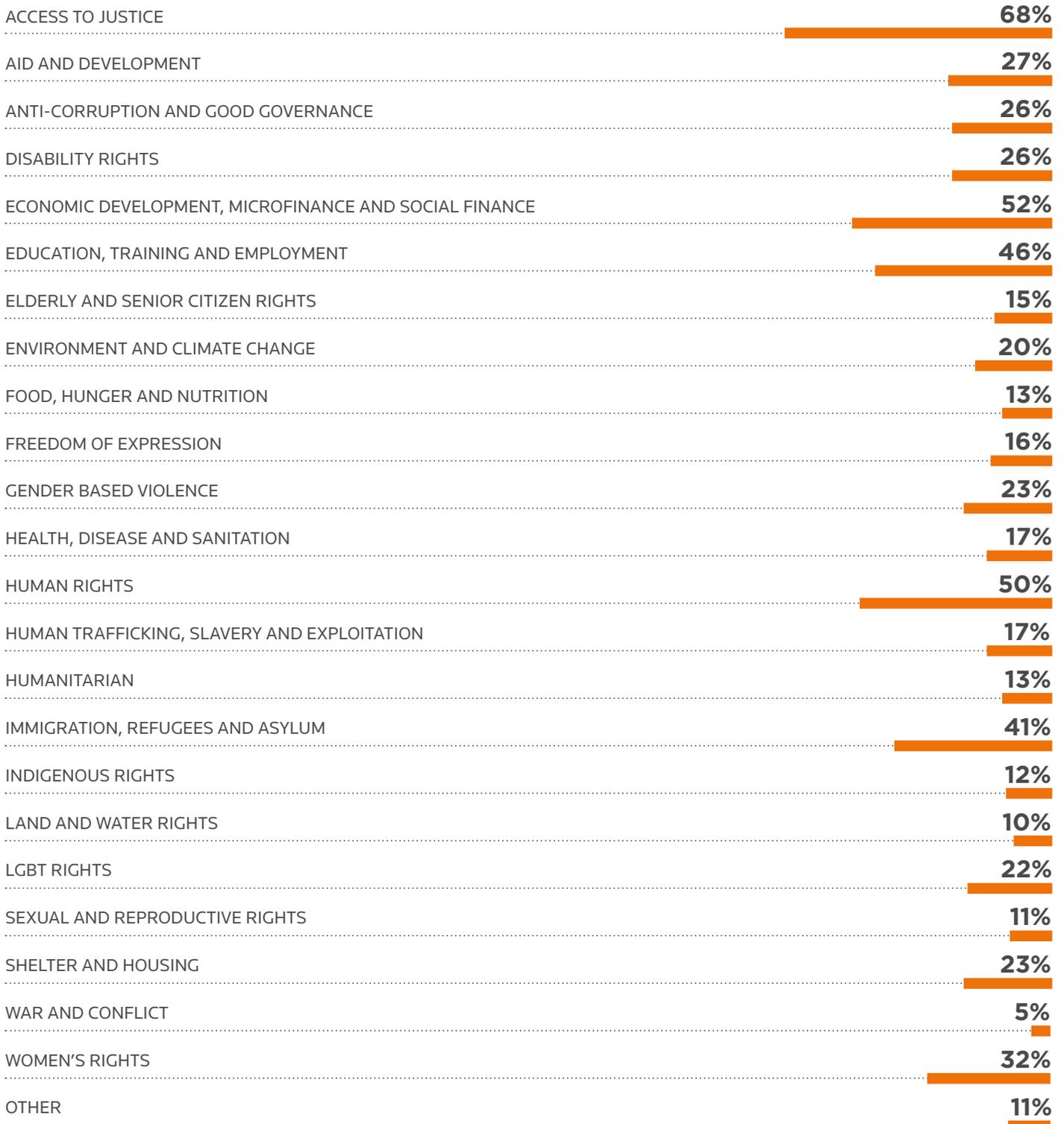
Amongst Medium-sized Firms, there was a stronger focus on Education, Training and Employment (61.5 percent), which was selected almost as frequently as Access to Justice. Economic Development, Microfinance and Social Finance was also a popular choice (57.7 percent), followed by Aid & Development (46.2 percent).

Large Firms had the strongest focus on Immigration, Refugees and Asylum projects, with 58.6 percent of Large Firm respondents indicating they were working on this topic. This made it the third most popular focus area for Large Firms behind Access to Justice (selected by 72.4 percent) and Human Rights (67.2 percent). It is possible that the scale of the refugee crisis is such that only the largest law firms have the resources to take on the high demand for pro bono support.

It is likely that the variety of topics that different firms focus on is to a great extent impacted by the jurisdictions in which these firms operate. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many firms try to work on issues that directly affect their local communities so it may well be that there is a correlation between the jurisdiction and the focus area.

PRO BONO FOCUS AREAS

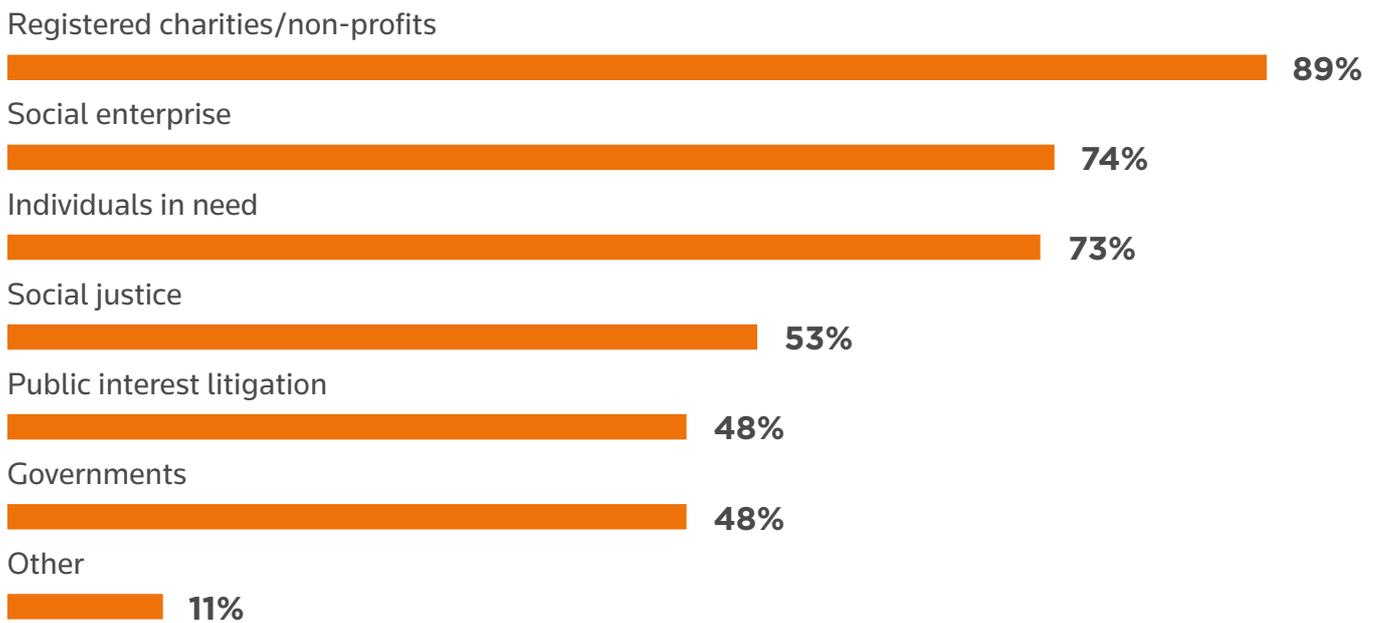
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENT FIRMS WHO INDICATED THEY OFFER PRO BONO SERVICES IN SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING SECTORS:



Pro Bono Clients

PRO BONO CLIENTS

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENT FIRMS WHO INDICATED THEY PRIMARILY OFFER PRO BONO SERVICES TO THE FOLLOWING CLIENTS:



The most common type of clients supported by respondent firms were registered charities or non-profits, with 88.6 percent of respondent firms indicating they work with them. A total of 74.2 percent indicated they work with social enterprise clients, and 72.7 percent worked with individuals.

A total of 69.9 percent of respondent firms stated they have formal eligibility criteria in place for pro bono clients. This figure dropped to 43.2 percent amongst Small Firms, suggesting that Small Firms are more flexible in which pro bono clients they support compared to Large Firms, where 88.7 percent have formal eligibility criteria in place.

Amongst Large Firms, individuals in need were selected more often than social enterprises (selected by 82.3 percent of Large Firm respondents and 74.2 percent respectively). Interestingly, public interest litigation was selected more frequently by Large Firms (66.1 percent) than by Small or Medium-sized Firms (31.8 percent and 30.8 percent respectively). This may well be as a result of the resources required and the unclear time frames, meaning only the largest firms are enthusiastic about throwing their weight behind these matters.