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Law firms champion pro bono amidst global health crisis

The Thomson Reuters Foundation publishes the 2020 TrustLaw Index of Pro Bono: a survey identifying global pro bono legal trends.

(February 4, 2021) – London. The scale of economic and social disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, with tens of millions of people at risk of falling into extreme poverty. Despite this, the practice of legal pro bono is thriving around the world, assisting charities, non-profits, social enterprises and individuals in need.

[The 2020 TrustLaw Index of Pro Bono](#), the Thomson Reuters Foundation’s survey mapping the global scale and trends of the pro bono legal sector, found that nearly 4 million hours of legal pro bono were completed globally, with lawyers dedicating an average of 26.3 hours of their free expertise each year. The topics they addressed in 2020 ranged from access to justice, economic development and microfinance to human rights, women’s rights, the environment and climate change.

Compiled over a twelve-month period, with data from 215 law firms representing 150,000 lawyers in 91 countries, the 2020 TrustLaw Index of Pro Bono provides a snapshot of key national, regional and global trends shaping the pro bono marketplace, and illustrates a story of global growth and commitment to pro bono legal assistance during one of the most challenging years in recent history.

“In an era where three global crises converge - health, economic and environmental - maintaining and growing the pro bono support of leading law firms and corporate legal departments around the world has never been more critical for NGOs and social enterprises on the frontlines of social change,” said Antonio Zappulla, CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“The Thomson Reuters Foundation has long championed the practice of pro bono; scaling and developing the sector has been core to the work of TrustLaw, our pro bono legal network - now the largest in the world. We hope this index provides law firms with the information they need to create the right infrastructure for robust and sustainable pro bono practices and to achieve the greatest impact from their pro bono work.”

Data from the Index shows that the practice of pro bono is continuing to spread beyond the realm of traditional pro bono markets and global law firms: the US, UK and Australia.

- The Americas saw firms nearly double the average amount of pro bono performed since 2016.
- Submissions from firms in Africa and the Middle East nearly tripled, and Nigeria stood out with one of the highest global averages of pro bono hours per fee earner, indicating a strong culture of pro bono in Africa’s largest nation.
- Europe’s pro bono culture continues to thrive, boosted by the region’s inaugural launch of the European Pro Bono Week in 2019, organised both by law firms and non-profits.



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- In the Asia-Pacific region, some countries continued to further embed pro bono infrastructure into their national legal practice systems, while others saw lawyers respond in large numbers to human rights crises.

Since the launch of the TrustLaw Index of Pro Bono in 2014, it has become a central repository of information on the global pro bono sector, uncovering emerging trends and quantifying the complex ways in which the sector is evolving.

“As in prior years, an overwhelming majority of lawyers (96%) state that they perform pro bono in order to give back to their community. This has certainly been TrustLaw’s experience working with thousands of lawyers across the globe and over the last decade, who have been continuously generous with their skills, expertise and resources,” said Carolina Henriquez-Schmitz, Director of TrustLaw, Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“The Index illustrates a story of global growth and commitment to pro bono legal assistance to help drive the social and environmental change that is so critically needed across the globe during these challenging times.”

About Thomson Reuters Foundation

We are the corporate foundation of Thomson Reuters, the global news and information services company. We work to advance media freedom, foster more inclusive economies, and promote human rights. Through news, media development, free legal assistance, training and convening initiatives, we combine our unique services to drive systemic change.

TrustLaw, the Thomson Reuters Foundation’s global pro bono service, connects high-impact NGOs and social enterprises working to create social and environmental change with leading law firms and corporate legal teams to provide them with free legal assistance. Since 2010, the pro bono service has facilitated 7,000 legal projects across 175 countries – empowering thousands of organisations to achieve greater impact.

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