

IAFL pro bono 40th anniversary webinar, Thursday 17 September 2026

The IAFL pro bono committee was pleased to put on a 40th anniversary webinar on September 17.

Our President opened the session in support of the committee and importance of pro bono work. Sarah Higgins (co-chair) introduced the work of the committee. We covered the purpose of the committee:

To share information about pro bono needs and provision in different jurisdictions; to provide a database of fellows willing to act pro bono; to champion pro bono initiatives, in particular local initiatives, at IAFL meetings, including during the Introduction to International Family Law events aimed at future IAFL fellows.

The definition of pro bono we use is “legal work, done voluntarily and without expectation of payment, for the public good”. Family lawyers are well placed to do pro bono work as they do not need to retrain, unlike in other areas of the law. The committee now has 26 members and covers 19 jurisdictions. Doing international pro bono work with other fellows enables us to build up links with other fellows, and broaden our understanding of overseas jurisdictions, whilst contributing to the social responsibility of the IAFL and its impact report.

Geoff Wilson (co-chair) has produced a very helpful spreadsheet (attached) which sets out the charities which the IAFL has helped at the various conferences, and the impact. We hope to build on this at future conferences and to fill in the gaps. Some of the charities are not pro bono in the sense of providing free legal advice, but the committee is well placed to support and encourage local charities for the various conferences.

Karen O’Leary (secretary) had a very interesting panel session with committee members Peter Barnes (Hong Kong), Konstantinos Rokas (Greece) and Monica Badaji (Spain). The panel covered how the pro bono structure worked in their jurisdiction; whether pro bono was mandatory as part of continuing professional development; the challenges which arise when providing pro bono assistance; and whether junior lawyers regard pro bono work as accelerating court room exposure and professional growth. There is an understandable distinction between jurisdictions in which legal aid is available, which reduces the need for pro bono as well as the ability of lawyers to undertake it.

The committee would welcome new members, and would like all fellows who are willing to do some pro bono work, subject to capacity, to let me know and mark it on their web profiles. It may only be answering a query on the telephone, or giving an initial steer.

We look forward to hearing from you.