

# Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

## Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Belgium

### Introduction

Under the Belgian Constitution (the Constitution), all individuals have a right to legal assistance, which is provided and obtained in the form of advisory services and representation in judicial matters. Even outside the framework of state-organised legal assistance and aid, ample opportunities exist for lawyers and law firms to provide voluntary legal services on a pro bono basis, including, for instance, advising and representing social enterprises and non-profit organisations on European law issues. Although Belgian law mandates the government to make differing types of assistance available to indigent people, thereby requiring a fair contribution from the legal profession in assuring the constitutional right to legal assistance, a strong pro bono culture has not traditionally existed in the Belgian domestic legal community for various reasons. In fact, the vast majority of pro bono projects were taken on by the local offices of international associations with UK or US roots, rather than by domestic or Benelux firms. The latter regularly offer legal aid services for which they are remunerated by the Belgian government on a per-activity basis.

### 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	No	No	Yes	No	Yes

### The landscape

Professional regulation	
<p>1. 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.</p>	<p>In Belgium, the provision of legal services is enshrined in Article 23 of the Constitution, which ensures that all Belgian citizens have the right to legal assistance. In addition, the provision of legal services is regulated in a number of Belgian laws, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Judicial Code (<i>Code Judiciaire/Wetboek Gerechdelijk Recht</i>), which outlines the organisation of the judiciary and the legal profession, including the rights and obligations of lawyers.</li> <li>• Code of Ethics: All lawyers must adhere to the Code of Ethics, which covers aspects such as client confidentiality, conflicts of interest, and professional integrity.<sup>1</sup> The overarching Bar Associations: (i) the</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The Dutch version of the most up-to-date Code of Ethics is available at <https://www.ordevanvlaamsebalies.be/nl/kennisbank/deontologie/codex-deontologie-voor-advocaten>; the French version of the most up-to-date Code of Ethics is available at: <https://avocats.be/fr/actualites/code-de-deontologie-de-lavocat>.

	<p>“Flemish Bar Council” (<i>Orde van Vlaamse Balies</i>) for the Dutch-speaking Bars and (ii) the <i>Ordre des Barreaux Francophones et Germanophones</i> for the French and German-speaking Bars regulate the profession at a regional level and enforce ethical rules and professional conduct. Aspiring lawyers must hold law degrees and are required to complete a three-year apprenticeship under the supervision of a senior qualified lawyer (<i>stagemeester/ maître de stage</i>) before being qualified to practice independently. However, even during such time, aspiring lawyers are full members of the Bar association, may handle and represent cases themselves, and are allowed to use the title of lawyer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU laws impact the legal profession, including any rules impacting cross-border legal services and the recognition of professional qualifications.</li> </ul> <p>Alternative rules and licensure requirements apply for in-house counsel — the principal difference between a lawyer and in-house counsel being that the former acts as a self-employed legal service provider, while the latter provides similar services, except those that remain reserved to the legal profession, under an employment contract. Foreign qualified lawyers can also practice in Belgium by registration to the list of European Lawyers (E-list) or the list of associated members of the Brussels Bar (B-list) and Nationals of the EU, European Economic Area (EEA) Member States, and Switzerland can requalify as Belgian lawyers by completing an aptitude test and completing three years of continuous and effective practice in Belgium under supervision of a Belgian-qualified lawyer.</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>According to Article 23 of the Constitution, all Belgian citizens have the right to legal assistance, and this is extended to anyone residing on Belgian territory, unless the legislator can objectively justify a differential treatment for non-Belgian citizens. This is reflected in the Belgian legislation through two types of pro bono advice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) “First-line legal assistance”, which entails that any Legal Assistance Bureau in Belgium is available to provide initial high-level legal advice to everyone (natural person or legal entity), including non-Belgian citizens and non-Belgian residents, on a first-come-first-serve basis, without the need to satisfy any eligibility criteria; and</li> <li>(ii) “second-line legal assistance” or “pro deo” advice, which entails in depth legal advice, typically in relation to legal proceedings or legal disputes to individuals who meet the relevant</li> </ul>

	<p>eligibility criteria primarily linked to the financial situation and living conditions of the natural person to be entitled to such legal representation for free or partially free.<sup>2</sup> Further details on both types of legal assistance are available here<sup>3</sup></p> <p>However, this does not mean that the government itself should be providing legal assistance in the broadest possible way, or that it should command that all legal assistance should be gratuitous — a great deal of the actual implementation of this right can left to specialised organisations, and notably to the legal profession.</p>
3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?	No — lawyers do not require a licence (beyond the usual qualification to practice law) to provide pro bono legal services.
4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?	No — foreign lawyers do not require any additional licence (beyond their foreign qualification to practise law) to provide pro bono legal services. However, if the relevant pro bono legal service in question entails representation in Belgian courts, they may only represent and defend clients in association with a Belgian lawyer. Foreign non-EU lawyers cannot plead in Belgian courts.
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	No – lawyers are not required to do any pro bono hours. Lawyers’ involvement in pro bono matters is entirely voluntary.
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	No — aspiring lawyers are no longer required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services. Until recently, the Code of Ethics required aspiring lawyers to treat a minimum amount of pro bono matters during their three-year training, but this requirement has been removed. Currently, aspiring lawyers are required to attend meetings at a Legal Assistance Bureau, in which they are able to take on pro deo cases. However, these pro deo cases are not part of pro bono legal services, but of state-subsidised legal assistance.
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?	No — there are no aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers in Belgium.

<sup>2</sup> In this regard, Article 89 of the Code of Ethics requires lawyers to inform their client about the existence of “second-line legal assistance” if they suspect or know that the client could be eligible for this type of assistance.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ordevanvlaamsebalies.be/nl/kennisbank/toegang-tot-het-recht> or <https://www.advocaat.be/nl/woordenlijst/pro-deo>

<p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>	<p>No — lawyers in Belgium do not receive any CLE or equivalent credit granted for pro bono work.</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>No — lawyers do not need to procure professional indemnity legal insurance specific to pro bono legal services. The bar fees paid to any of the Belgian bars will cover indemnity insurance applicable to all legal services, including pro bono.</p>
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>No — there are no rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients, except for the general rules in the Code of Ethics. The lawyer may not advertise a specific case or file without being allowed to do so by his current/former client (Article 84(2)) and requires the client’s explicit consent to mention him/her by name (Article 86).</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>There is no recent public report available that provides an overview of the main areas of law that require or present opportunities for pro bono. However, based on the geopolitical landscape and the influx of asylum seekers in Belgium and Europe in general, a lot of pro bono work has been centered around refugee assistance, in particular by assisting applicants seeking internal protection in accessing free and official legal services. As explained on the website of <i>Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen</i>, since the fall of 2022, single men applying for international protection in Belgium have faced a dire situation. The Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers in Belgium (Fedasil) has been unable to provide shelter for these applicants, and in response to this crisis, the Legal Helpdesk, supported by independent organisations, initiatives, volunteers, and volunteer lawyers, has united to provide</p>

	<p>practical and legal assistance to single <sup>4</sup>ale applicants without shelter.<sup>5</sup></p> <p>In terms of pro bono for legal entities, we consider legal advice in relation to EU law, assistance with setting up and advising non-profit organisations and related services as another main area that requires and present opportunities.</p>
12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?	<p><b>Law firms</b> — There is no recent public report available that provides an overview of the main providers of pro bono legal services. However, based on interactions in relation to pro bono activities, law firms are still one of the main providers, and mainly large Anglo-American law firms, which are familiar with the pro bono culture. One of the key initiatives with involvement of these large law firms is the Legal Helpdesk.</p> <p><b>NGOs</b> — One of Belgium’s most prominent pro bono NGOs is Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF)<sup>6</sup>, which seeks to provide legal assistance in sensitive cases around the world. Headquartered in Brussels, ASF organises seminars for European lawyers on topics such as corporate social responsibility and the role of lawyers in the prevention of torture. However, most of its activities are implemented ‘in the field’, in fragile or post-conflict countries, where it offers legal aid services, among others, through the establishment of legal centers, organisation of mobile court hearings, and raising awareness and educating the population on their rights. It also offers professional training to lawyers, institutional support to local Bar associations for the development of the profession and organisation of legal aid, observation of trials, and networking for the creation of local synergies.</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>There are currently no noteworthy examples in Belgium of how innovative technology or AI is being used to enable access to pro bono legal services or otherwise as part of pro bono cases or matters.</p>
<b>Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts</b>	
14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in	<p>In addition to the aforementioned sources of pro bono matters, there are a number of initiatives that provide pro</p>

<sup>5</sup>For more information on the Legal Helpdesk visit: <https://vluchtelingenwerk.be/startpunt/legal-help-desk>.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on ASF visit: <https://asf.be/?lang=fr>.

your jurisdiction.	bono opportunities or resources, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Pro Publico</b>,<sup>7</sup> which is a Brussels-based nonprofit that connects civil society with top-tier law firms and public affairs consultancies providing their assistance pro bono publico: free-of charge in consideration of societal value of such activities.</li><li>• <b>Rule 39 Pro Bono Initiative</b>,<sup>8</sup> which is a formalised collaborative initiative between civil society organisations working to defend and promote fundamental rights through communication campaigns, legal action, training, and organisational support activities.</li><li>• <b>PILnet</b>,<sup>9</sup> which is an organisation that focuses on three programme areas: increasing resilience of civil society and protecting civic space; advancing rights, justice, and solutions for refugees and people on the move; and promoting environmental and climate justice. PILnet works with civil society organisations to identify their legal needs and connect them with pro bono lawyers in PILnet’s global legal network who have the relevant skills and expertise to help.</li><li>• TrustLaw, a program of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, is the world’s largest global pro bono legal network, connecting over 120,000 lawyers across 190 countries with civil society organisations, social enterprises, and independent media in need of free legal assistance. Through this platform, TrustLaw facilitates high-impact legal support, research, and training to help organisations tackle pressing social and environmental challenges, promote access to law, strengthen resilience of independent media, and encourage ethical corporate practices. The service is entirely free and enables members to access legal expertise on issues ranging from corporate governance to advocacy and policy reform, empowering them to focus on their missions while navigating complex legal landscapes.<sup>10</sup></li></ul>
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?	Local or foreign lawyers can register with Pro Publico to be made aware of pro bono opportunities.
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	No — there are no awards, lists, or rankings related to pro bono work.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on Pro Publico visit: <https://propublico.eu/>

<sup>8</sup> For more information on Rule 39 Pro Bono Initiative visit: <https://cild.eu/en/rule-39/>

<sup>9</sup> For more information on PILnet: <https://www.pilnet.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> For more information see [TrustLaw - Our Global Pro Bono Legal Network - Thomson Reuters Foundation](#)

## Acknowledgements

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## Learn more

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