

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Bulgaria

Introduction

Free legal representation was institutionalized in Bulgaria in 2006 with the adoption of the Legal Aid Act, which recognized the need to ensure equal access to the justice system for all.¹ There are no regulatory barriers to providing pro bono legal services in Bulgaria and pro bono legal services in general are becoming increasingly popular in recent years. However, the country's legal industry has yet to cultivate a strong pro bono culture. Pro bono culture in Bulgaria is still developing and commercial practitioners have slowly started to offer pro bono legal services. However, dedicating time and resources to pro bono in a systematic way is the exception rather than the rule.

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	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

The landscape

Professional regulation	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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>The Bar Act of 2004, as most recently amended in 2021 (the "Bar Act"),² regulates the legal profession, and governs the rights to provide legal services.</p> <p>Amendments adopted in 2005 to the Ordinance on the Unified Requirements for Acquiring Higher Education in Law and the Professional Qualification "Lawyer,"³ (the "Legal Education Ordinance") adopted by the Council of Ministers with Resolution No. 75/Apr. 5, 1996⁴ specifically allow for the establishment of legal clinics, recognizing their role in providing valuable</p>

¹ Promulgated in the Bulgarian State Gazette, issue No. 79/Oct. 4, 2005, in force as of Jan. 1, 2006.

² Bar Act, Promulgated State Gazette No. 55 (June 25, 2004).

³ Promulgated in SG, issue No. 31/Apr. 12, 1996, last amended, SG, issue No. 55 of 15 July, 2022.

⁴ "Ordinance on the Unified Requirements for Acquiring Higher Education in Law and the Professional Qualification "Lawyer.," Adopted with Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 75/Apr. 5, 1996, promulgated in SG, issue No. 31/Apr. 12, 1996, last amended SG No. 62 (July 12, 2013), Article 6.

	<p>practical experience to law students.⁵</p> <p>Legal professionals' ethical obligations are governed by the Attorney's Code of Ethics, adopted by the Supreme Bar Council, a professional organization comprised of elected members representing bar associations across the country. The Code of Ethics addresses matters of independence, confidentiality and conflicts of interest, as well as questions of remuneration for legal services.</p> <p>Pursuant to the Bar Act, anyone wishing to become an attorney must have a university law degree.⁶ Law school is a formally accredited five-year university program that concludes with state oral and written examinations.⁷</p> <p>Under the Legal Education Ordinance, in order to earn a law degree, students must complete at least ten semesters and a minimum of 3,500 hours of study.</p> <p>All graduates of law school are known as "lawyers", but not all graduates of law school become practicing attorneys.</p> <p>Only an attorney admitted to and registered with a Bar Association (<i>адвокатска колегия</i>) may engage in the private practice of law and appear in court on behalf of clients that are not their employer.</p> <p>Non-attorney lawyers, known as legal advisors or juris consultants, work within companies, governmental agencies, or NGOs, and may engage in the practice of law only on behalf of their respective employers.⁸</p>
Regulatory landscape for pro bono	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>There is no specific regulation that promotes or limits pro bono.</p>

⁵ Legal Education Ordinance, Articles 10a.(1-2).

⁶ Article 4.(1).1 of the Bar Act.

⁷ The Legal Profession Reform Index for Bulgaria, American Bar Association, May 2006, available at <http://www.bili-bg.org/cdir/bili-bg.org/files/LPRI-2006-eng.pdf> (last visited on December 31, 2024).

⁸ The Legal Profession Reform Index for Bulgaria, American Bar Association, May 2006, p.8.

	The Legal Aid Act of 2006 (“ Legal Aid Act ”) regulates the provision of state sponsored legal services for qualifying individuals.
3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?	Lawyers do not need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond the usual local qualification to practice law).
4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?	Foreign-qualified lawyers do not need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law).
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	There is no obligation on attorneys to work a minimum number of pro bono hours under Bulgarian law.
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	Aspiring lawyers in Bulgaria are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono in order to become a licensed attorney. Article 4 of the Bar Act sets out the requirements to become a licensed attorney, which include completing a university degree in law, acquiring legal competence pursuant to Chapter 14 of the Judiciary System Act, having at least two years of legal practice, successfully passing the state bar examination and having the moral and professional qualities necessary for practicing law. ⁹
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?	There are no aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers set by the local bar association, regulatory body or other body. However, some law firms have set internal targets. ¹⁰
8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?	Under the Bar Act attorneys-at-law are obliged to maintain and develop their qualifications (Article 27 and 28) but it does not address whether pro bono activities can be credited. There is no precedent to establish whether pro bono activities could cover such obligations.

⁹ Article 4.(1).1 of the Bar Act, Promulgated State Gazette No. 55 (June 25, 2004).

¹⁰ https://madaralaw.com/en/Pro-bono.c109?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

Insurance and advertising

<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>A distinction should be made between (1) general legal services (not requiring attorneys-at-law to be involved) and (2) services which may be provided exclusively by attorneys-at-law. In the first case, there is no requirement for mandatory insurance.</p> <p>Attorneys-at-law must be insured for the duration of their professional activity against damages, which may occur as a result of a failure to exercise their obligations.¹¹</p> <p>Pro bono legal services are covered in Article 38 of the Bar Act and they fall within the definition of “professional activity of a lawyer”. Therefore, pro bono legal services are also covered by professional liability legal insurance, for the duration of the lawyer’s professional activity.</p> <p>Each lawyer will be covered by personal insurance, where an individual law firm, or other group insurances can also be added. Pro bono activity per se does not require additional insurance.</p>
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>The Council of Ministers' bill lifts the general ban on lawyers advertising their services and introduces regulation for the use of intermediaries to reach potential clients. When promoting legal services through an intermediary, the use of information society services is permitted, provided that data protection, lawyer-client privilege, and the ethical standards of the legal profession are strictly observed.¹²</p>
<h2>Pro bono practice and culture</h2>	
<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>The main areas of law which present opportunities for the provision of pro bono legal services in Bulgaria traditionally include human rights, discrimination, domestic violence and violence against women. For example, the</p>

¹¹ https://www.bulstrad.bg/en/produkti/zastrahovki-na-otgovornosti/profesionalni-otgovornosti/otgovornost-na-advokata?utm_source (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

¹² https://www.bta.bg/en/news/bulgaria/984464-parliament-approves-at-first-reading-advertising-of-legal-services?utm_source (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

	<p>Gender Alternatives Foundation¹³ is a non-governmental organization which works on projects to overcome and prevent domestic violence as well as assisting victims of trafficking in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania to receive legal aid.</p> <p>Additionally, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee¹⁴ focuses on the legal protection of human rights and has worked on matters involving discrimination of ethnic minorities from the Roma community. This issue in particular presents opportunities for pro bono services and collaboration, including stimulating legislative reform to bring Bulgarian legislation in line with international human rights standards and carrying out advocacy for the protection of human rights.</p> <p>Also, the Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria has worked on assisting migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups with their rights, which present another opportunity for the provision of pro bono legal services.¹⁵</p> <p>Other areas of law, such as access to public information, consumer protection, data protection, environmental law and administrative law also increasingly provide opportunities for pro bono work. Further, with the recent implementation of whistleblowing legislation, support for whistleblowers has also become an opportunity for pro bono work.¹⁶</p>
<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>NGOs offering legal services are the most common providers of pro bono legal services in Bulgaria. The NGOs' activities may be primarily law-related, or they may cover a broader range of social services, with legal representation as only one aspect of such services.</p> <p>For example, a "legal" NGO may provide (i) free legal representation to individuals in cases involving human rights (e.g., the Bulgarian Helsinki</p>

¹³ <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/our-partnership/member-directory/gender-alternatives-foundation/> (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

¹⁴ <https://bghelsinki.org/en/> (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

¹⁵ See <http://www.centerforlegalaid.com/> (last visited on December 31, 2024).

¹⁶ https://transparency.bg/invitation-for-a-workshop-protection-of-whistleblowers-the-role-of-civil-society-organizations-in-bulgaria/?lang=en&utm_source (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

	<p>Committee) or refugees' rights (e.g., the Program for Legal Protection of Refugees and Migrants or the Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria¹⁷), or (ii) free legal consultations for civic organizations (e.g., the Bulgarian Center for Not for Profit Law).¹⁸</p> <p>On the other hand, a “social services” NGO, such as one focused on women’s rights, may carry out a range of activities aimed at promoting women’s rights, including lobbying the legislature, providing medical and psychological support to victims of domestic violence, and offering free legal services to these victims (e.g., the Gender Alternatives Foundation).</p> <p>The law faculties of many universities in Bulgaria operate law clinics where law students provide legal services on a pro bono basis in areas such as human rights, refugee law, employment law.¹⁹</p> <p>Private practitioners offering pro bono legal services as part of their general practice is the least common approach but there are examples of formalized pro bono practices and clinics.²⁰ There is not much pressure among private, commercial practitioners to demonstrate a commitment to providing pro bono legal services.</p>
<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>	<p>There are currently not any publicly reported examples of innovative technology or artificial intelligence being used to enable access to pro bono legal services or otherwise as part of pro bono cases or matters.</p> <p>More generally, some access to justice legal tools are developing, such as Pravko, a free legal assistant with artificial intelligence, created to make legal information in Bulgaria more accessible and understandable for everyone. The assistant has access to basic sources of Bulgarian law.²¹</p>

¹⁷ <https://atdnetwork.org/pilot-projects/protecting-migrants-with-precarious-status-decreasing-the-use-of-detention-and-applying-community-based-alternatives/> (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

¹⁸ See <http://bcnl.org/en> (last visited on December 31, 2024).

¹⁹ <http://www.bili-bg.org/32/page.html> and <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/143/policy-lab-access-cla-roma-2013.pdf> (last viewed on 7 March 2026).

²⁰ https://www.newbalkanslawoffice.com/nblos-startup-pro-bono-legal-advice-clinic-programme/?utm_source (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

²¹ https://www.pravko.bg/about?utm_source (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

There is also the i-ACCESS MyRights project which focuses on enhancing children's access to justice by developing innovative, AI-based solutions that help young people navigate criminal proceedings and understand their rights.²²

Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts

14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.

Notable sources of pro bono matters are described below:

The Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria (“CLA”) promotes the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers on the territory of Bulgaria, through legal aid and advocacy. The CLA provides pro bono legal consultations to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, as well as legal representation in administrative and judicial proceedings on the national and European levels. The CLA is also actively engaged in protecting the basic human rights of undocumented migrants and its representation includes weekly visits to the Detention center for undocumented migrants in Sofia, Busmantsi district.

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee is an independent non-governmental organization for the protection of human rights. Some of the objectives of the committee are to promote respect for the human rights of every individual, to stimulate legislative reform to bring Bulgarian legislation in line with international human rights standards and to carry out advocacy for the protection of human rights.

Bulgarian Lawyers for Human Rights (“BLHR”) is a nonprofit organization that seeks to promote the establishment and effective implementation of Bulgaria to international standards of legal protection of human rights. BLHR works with over 25 authoritative practitioners and covers issues concerning protection of human rights in virtually all major sectors of the Bulgarian legislation.²³

There are also global pro bono clearinghouses

²² https://justicewithchildren.org/en/events/i-access-myrights-final-conference?utm_source (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

²³ <https://blhr.org/en/> (last viewed on 7 March 2026).

	and legal services providers such as TrustLaw or PILnet. ²⁴
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?	<p>With respect to pure pro bono legal work, we are not aware of a dedicated Bulgarian organization flagging pro bono opportunities.</p> <p>Attorneys wishing to provide legal aid under the Legal Aid Act must file an application with the NLAB, which must be pre-approved by their local Bar Council. The NLAB then includes all such individuals in the National Legal Aid Register, which is a public document, available to individuals seeking legal aid and the attorneys will be made aware of the opportunities they can be involved with.²⁵</p> <p>They can also join the European Pro Bono Alliance, a collaborative network of European clearinghouses and pro bono initiatives with the goal of supporting and promoting the work of its members and strengthening, championing, and informing the European pro bono movement.²⁶</p>
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	<p>There are currently no awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work in Bulgaria.</p> <p>There are global pro bono awards offered by TrustLaw, PILnet and the International Bar Association.²⁷</p>

Acknowledgements

Name of law firm: Wolf Theiss

Name of lawyers: Oleg Temnikov and Anna Rizova

Learn more

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

²⁴ See <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/> and <https://www.pilnet.org/> (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

²⁵ <https://www.humanrightsguide.bg/en/themes/organisations-that-can-help-you/state-institutions/national-legal-aid-bureau> (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).

²⁶ <https://www.pilnet.org/our-work/european-pro-bono-alliance/> (last viewed on 7 March 2026).

²⁷ <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/awards/the-2025-awards/>, <https://www.pilnet.org/event/pilnet-global-forum/awards/> and <https://www.ibanet.org/Annual-IBA-Pro-Bono-Award>. (Last viewed on 7 March 2026).