

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in China

Introduction

The concept of pro bono legal services is relatively new to the legal community in China compared to other jurisdictions. There is no requirement, either formal or informal, for individual attorneys to engage in pro bono legal work and, as a result, the provision of pro bono legal services is not well established. In China, lawyers usually participate in volunteer legal services out of a commitment to social care and social responsibility. Volunteer lawyers mainly rely on law firms and NGO organisations to provide legal services on a pro bono basis. Law firms generally provide a fixed amount of volunteer legal services on a regular basis; NGO organisations are usually small¹ with small offices or even no offices at all, and the number of staff is usually few. In addition, the China Legal Foundation has also launched volunteer activities in the western parts of the country.²

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	No	No	No	No	No	No

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>In China, the provision of legal services is governed by the PRC Lawyer's Law, which outlines standards for the legal profession, provides rules on malpractice, specifies prohibited activities for lawyers and firms, and sets tax laws and regulations for legal institutions. The Ministry of Justice (the MOJ) is tasked with supervising and regulating lawyers, law firms, and lawyers' associations, as well as administering qualifying exams and licensing and disciplining attorneys for misconduct.</p> <p>To become a lawyer in China, a candidate must obtain a recognised degree (bachelor's, master's,</p>

² Thomson Reuters Foundation News, Pro Bono in China, available at <https://news.trust.org/item/20160717131713-ypi72> (last visited on 13 January 2025).

	<p>or doctoral degree), pass the National Uniform Legal Profession Qualification Exam (the Chinese Bar Exam),³ and complete a one-year apprenticeship.⁴ Any candidate who obtained a non-law degree (bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree) must be engaged in legal work for at least three years before being qualified to sit for the Chinese Bar Exam.⁵ There is no additional regulation for in-house counsel and no differentiation between the regulation of lawyers working in private practice or as in-house counsel.</p>
Regulatory landscape for pro bono	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>In China, the regulatory framework for legal services primarily focuses on state-funded legal aid for economically disadvantaged citizens, rather than pro bono services provided voluntarily by private lawyers. The Legal Aid Law (August 2021), along with the Lawyers Law (September 2017) and the Legal Aid Regulations (September 2003), mandates that the state offers free legal services, including consultation, representation, and defence, to those in need.⁶</p> <p>Although not legally required, the Chinese government encourages pro bono work through administrative guidelines. For instance, the Ministry of Justice's Opinions on Promoting Lawyers' Participation in Public Interest Legal Services⁷ (October 2019) encourages lawyers to engage in at least 50 hours of public interest legal services annually or handle two legal aid cases, reflecting governmental support for voluntary legal service contributions.</p>
<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local</p>	<p>In China, PRC-qualified lawyers do not need a licence beyond the usual local qualification to</p>

³ When the new Implementation Measures for the National Uniform Legal Profession Qualification Examination took effect in April 2018, the National Uniform Legal Profession Qualification Examination replaced the National Judicial Examination for the candidates in China.

⁴ PRC Lawyer's Law (2017), Article 5, CN version available at http://www.npc.gov.cn/zqrdw/npc/xinwen/2017-09/12/content_2028697.htm (last visited on 13 January 2025).

⁵ Implementing Measures for the National Uniform Legal Profession Qualification Examination (2018), Article 9, CN version available at https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2018/content_5341398.htm (last visited on 13 January 2025).

⁶ Legal Aid Law (2021), Article 2, CN version available at https://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/jgsz/jgszsdw/zsdwflyzxx/flyzxcxx/zcxczcfq/zcfqfl/202109/t20210901_436729.html; PRC Lawyer's Law (2017), Article 42, CN version available at http://www.npc.gov.cn/zqrdw/npc/xinwen/2017-09/12/content_2028697.htm; Legal Aid Regulations (2003), Article 2, 6, CN version available at https://www.gov.cn/banshi/2005-07/12/content_14080.htm# (last visited on 13 January 2025).

⁷ Opinions on Promoting Lawyers' Participation in Public Interest Legal Services (2019), CN version available at https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-10/23/content_5444206.htm (last visited on 13 January 2025).

qualification to practice law)?	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)?	There is no specific license required for foreign lawyers to provide pro bono legal services in China. However, Chinese laws rule against foreign lawyers practicing Chinese law, ⁸ therefore, it is difficult for foreign lawyers and foreign law firms in China to engage in pro bono legal services that involve any legal matters related to PRC law.
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	Lawyers in China are not required to work a minimum number of pro bono hours.
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	Aspiring lawyers in China are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become licensed lawyers.
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?	According to the Opinions on Promoting Lawyers' Participation in Public Interest Legal Services, published by the MoJ in October 2019, lawyers are encouraged to engage in at least 50 hours of public interest legal services annually or handle two legal aid cases.
8. Do lawyers receive any "Continuing Legal Education" (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?	Chinese law firms do not officially recognise or encourage pro bono legal work. Foreign lawyers practicing in China may need and receive credits for the CLE or equivalent credit in their home jurisdictions for the pro bono hours they worked in China.
Insurance and advertising	
9. Do lawyers need professional indemnity legal insurance cover for pro bono legal services they provide? Does the requirement differ for in-house lawyers? If insurance is required, can lawyers meet the requirement by working under the cover of another pro bono provider, e.g. in	There is no requirement for lawyers to have professional indemnity legal insurance coverage for any pro bono legal services that they provide in China.

⁸ Regulations on the Administration of Resident Representative Offices in China of Foreign Law Firms (2002), Article 15, CN version available at https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2002/content_61860.htm; Provisions of the Ministry of Justice on Implementation of the Regulations on Administration of Resident Representative Offices in China of Foreign Law Firms (2004) Article 32, CN version available at https://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2003/content_62105.htm (last visited on 28 January 2025).

partnership with a private law firm or organization working on the same pro bono project?	
10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?	There are no rules or regulations that prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients in China.
Pro bono practice and culture	
11. What are the main areas of law which require or present opportunities for pro bono? What are the major unmet legal needs?	Though still new in China both as a theory and a practice, pro bono legal assistance can help address the needs left unaddressed by the Chinese legal aid system, especially those of low-income and vulnerable communities. In particular, government legal aid focuses on representation, and there is limited assistance for an individual to obtain early legal advice. Government legal aid also focuses more on the criminal proceeding stage, and individuals face difficulties if their needs are outside this stage or they are required to navigate legal aid or free legal services in China.
12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?	The main providers of pro bono legal services encompass a diverse range of organisations and entities, including but not limited to: Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Clearinghouses NGOs often play a pivotal role in offering pro bono legal services, for example, For NGO, ⁹ Shenzhen Dena Charity Foundation, ¹⁰ Wider Legal Service Center, ¹¹ Equality Women's Rights, ¹² etc. Clearinghouses, such as the Global Network for Public Interest Law (PILnet), ¹³ act as matchmakers between lawyers and NGOs or individual clients seeking pro bono legal services. Through its Hong Kong office, PILnet has developed a clearinghouse that matches pro bono opportunities with law firms. ¹⁴

⁹ See <https://www.fornngo.org.cn/> (last visited on January 13, 2025).

¹⁰ See <http://www.szdena.cn/> (last visited on 13 January 2025).

¹¹ See <https://www.probonochina.org/Home/Index/index.html> (last visited on 13 January 2025).

¹² See <http://www.equality-beijing.org/> (last visited on 13 January 2025).

¹³ See generally PILnet: The Global Network for Public Interest Law, available at <https://www.pilnet.org/> (last visited on 13 January 2025).

¹⁴ See <https://www.pilnet.org/about/> (last visited on 13 January 2025).

	<p>University Legal Clinics</p> <p>Among the few pro bono entities in China are legal clinics in universities, which have been growing at a steady rate. According to the information of the China Clinic Legal Education Network, more than 200 Chinese law schools have^{15,16} allowing both law students and qualified lawyers to engage in pro bono work.</p> <p>Private Law Firms</p> <p>Both local and international law firms are significant contributors to pro bono work. Many firms offer dedicated pro bono programmes that encourage their lawyers to volunteer their time and expertise to assist individuals and organisations that cannot afford legal representation.</p> <p>Other Entities</p> <p>Various other entities, such as bar associations and legal networks, also facilitate pro bono work by coordinating efforts, providing resources, and connecting legal professionals with opportunities to serve.</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>Based on a preliminary review of publicly available information, there appear to be limited examples of innovative technology or AI leveraged specifically to enhance access to pro bono legal services or to support pro bono cases. Nevertheless, there is a developing and desirable trend to apply innovative technology or AI in pro bono legal services. For example, the MOJ has launched an AI-powered legal aid system, providing legal consultant services for users such as individuals and small- and medium-sized companies.¹⁷</p>
Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts	
<p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>	<p>Lawyers looking for opportunities to undertake pro bono work in China could turn first to clearinghouses and organisations dedicated to promoting pro bono legal services (such as those outlined in Q(d)2). Despite restrictions regarding</p>

¹⁶ See <http://cliniclaw.cn/hylm.asp#> (last visited on 13 January 2025).

¹⁷ See <https://ai.12348.gov.cn/pc/> (last visited on 28 January 2025).

	the practice and interpretation of Chinese law, foreign lawyers and law firms can still advise NGOs or non-profit organisations on legal issues they might face in areas with international dimensions. Opportunities for pro bono legal work, though not abundant, are available for both Chinese and foreign lawyers seeking to offer legal assistance.
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?	Lawyers may register with pro bono clearinghouses in China or other organisations mentioned in Q(d)2 to receive pro bono opportunities.
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	There is no official pro bono ranking list or award in China, but there are recognitions (based on public votes or other criteria) for organisations or individuals who have made outstanding contributions to pro bono legal services, which include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro Bono Legal Service Star of the Year¹⁸ • Best Legal Practitioner¹⁹

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Name of lawyer: Yuru Zuo

Learn more

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

¹⁸ See the 2023–2024 list as an example, available at: https://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/fzg/fzgqgflfwx/fzgqgflfw/202407/t20240726_503505.html (last visited on 13 January 2025).

¹⁹ See the 2018 announcement as an example, available at: https://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgwapp/bnywapp/202105/t20210527_422174.html (last visited on 13 January 2025).