

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Costa Rica

Introduction

The legal community in Costa Rica is increasingly recognising the value of pro bono culture and the significant impact it can have on society, meaning pro bono legal services have increased steadily in the last few years. Although the pro bono movement is not yet fully developed, there have been great strides in recent years in the promotion of pro bono legal activities in Costa Rica. This has been aided by the Pro Bono Declaration for the Americas (PBDA), which has helped institutionalise pro bono activities by lawyers in Costa Rica over the last decade. As part of these advances, the Pro Bono Commission of the Bar Association (*Comisión Pro Bono del Colegio de Abogados*) was founded in 2010, and some of the top Costa Rican law firms have committed themselves to devoting a percentage of their time to providing pro bono legal services and have established programmes for doing so. In spite of these advances, much work remains to be done, including developing a greater pro bono culture in private law firms.

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	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 Law No. 13, dated 28 October 1941 (<i>Ley Orgánica del Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Costa Rica</i>), requires every practicing lawyer (including in-house counsel) to be registered with the Costa Rica Bar Association (<i>Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Costa Rica</i>) (the Bar Association), which, among other functions, oversees their professional conduct and ethical behaviour.¹ Foreign lawyers who want to practice law in Costa Rica (including providing pro bono services) are required to apply to the University of Costa Rica to have their law degree assessed as being equivalent to a Costa Rican law degree and to sit for a legal ethics exam. Once in receipt of all required documentation (including proof of</p>

¹ <https://www.abogados.or.cr/> (last visited on 27 January 2026).

	<p>residency), the foreign lawyer can apply for registration with the Bar Association.²</p> <p>The legal profession in Costa Rica is also regulated by the Bar Association. Lawyers in Costa Rica must comply with a Code of Conduct (<i>Código de Deberes Jurídicos, Morales y Éticos del Profesional en Derecho</i>)³ and the rules of the Bar Association (<i>Reglamento Interior del Colegio de Abogados</i>)⁴. Lawyers in Costa Rica must at all times preserve absolute independence, comply with confidentiality rules, serve clients' interests diligently, conscientiously and promptly, and cannot act in situations in which a conflict of interest exists.</p>
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>There are no specific rules or requirements for lawyers in Costa Rica regarding pro bono legal services. The principal barrier to the proliferation of pro bono legal services in Costa Rica is a lack of explicit legal regulations and public cooperation. Additionally, minimum fees for legal services are regulated by the Government in the Decree on Professional Fees for Legal Services (<i>Arancel de Honorarios por Servicios Profesionales de Abogacía y Notariado</i>),⁵ which requires those providing legal services to charge fees for their services with an express prohibition against reducing or eliminating such fees. The Bar Association enforces these regulations.</p> <p>However, Article 68 of the Bar Association's Professional Code of Conduct provides for an exception to this minimum fee rule in respect of "social projection" matters allocated to lawyers by the Bar Association, which may include certain pro bono legal matters. Accordingly, "private" pro bono initiatives are not covered under this exception, and (in theory) lawyers in Costa Rica can only provide pro bono legal services if they have authorisation from the Bar Association for the specific pro bono legal matter in question.</p>

² See further detail in <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=ITLS-Latin-America-and-Caribbean-2019> (last visited on 22 December 2024).

³ See <https://www.abogados.or.cr/normativa/> (last visited on 27 January 2026).

⁴ See <https://abogados.or.cr/uploads/CMS/Articulo/19.0Reglamento-interior-del-Colegio-de-Abogados-y-Abogadas-de-Costa-Rica.pdf> last visited on 27 January 2026).

⁵ Decreto N° 41457. Available at <http://www.pgrweb.go.cr/> (last visited on 20 January 2026).

<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Lawyers in Costa Rica do not require a specific licence or permit to provide pro bono legal services.</p>
<p>4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>There are no additional rules or requirements placed on foreign lawyers who are registered with the Bar Association to provide pro bono legal services.</p>
<p>5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?</p>	<p>Lawyers are not required to work a minimum number of pro bono hours in Costa Rica. However, the Bar Association encourages the legal community to engage in pro bono legal work as part of their professional responsibility and commitment to social justice.</p>
<p>6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?</p>	<p>Aspiring lawyers are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>There are no specific aspirational pro bono hours set by the Bar Association.</p>
<p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>	<p>Lawyers in Costa Rica are not required to earn any CLE or equivalent credit. Thus, there is no CLE credit given for pro bono hours worked.</p>
<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>Lawyers in Costa Rica do not require professional indemnity legal insurance coverage for any pro bono legal services that they provide. The same applies for in-house lawyers.</p>
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>If the pro bono legal matter is assigned by the Pro Bono Commission of the Bar Association, any initiative of disclosing the results or its</p>

	<p>development in the media must be previously authorised by the Pro Bono Commission.⁶ In the case of pro bono initiatives directly established and procured by law firms, advertising rules and restrictions applicable to a regular attorney-client relationship shall apply.</p>
<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 areas of law that require or present opportunities for the provision of pro bono legal services vary depending on the expected reach of the programmes and the end users. For instance, in terms of individuals, the main areas of law that may present major unmet legal needs are family law, immigration law, human rights law, and elder law. Conversely, with respect to foundations, NGOs, nonprofit organisations, etc., the main areas of law that may present greater opportunities are the ones related to the management of such organisations and day-to-day projects (e.g., corporate law, insurance law, labour law, administrative law, civil law, etc.).</p>
<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>The Pro Bono Commission of the Bar Association is Costa Rica's leading centre for pro bono legal work, which focuses on finding and distributing pro bono opportunities to private lawyers. Founded in 2010, it does not provide direct legal services to clients, but rather serves as an intermediary or link between law firms or individual lawyers in Costa Rica and non-profit entities, NGOs, and individuals who have requested free legal services in matters of public interest, general impact, or that have an important social or legal impact.</p> <p>On the other hand, BLP was the first Costa Rican signatory of the PBDA. The firm provides most of its pro bono legal aid through its popular BLP Pro Bono Foundation, which it established in late 2008. The organisation, set up by the firm, is one of the biggest providers of pro bono legal services in the country.⁷</p> <p>Founded in 2017, HIAS Costa Rica (HIAS) offers, in partnership with the United Nations High</p>

⁶ See <https://comisionprobono.wordpress.com/faq%C2%B4s/> (last visited on 22 December 2024).

⁷ See <https://latinlawyer.com/rankings/latin-lawyer-250/directory-area/costa-rica> (last visited 22 December 2024).

	<p>Commissioner for Refugees, legal guidance to refugees and asylum seekers on the administrative procedures for the refugee status determination, as well as for access to basic rights, such as health, education, and work. HIAS also provides legal orientation to people with a need for immediate attention, such as unaccompanied and separated children, gender-based violence survivors, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and elderly people.</p> <p>Finally, the Bar Association and some universities provide free legal assistance and pro bono clinics for individuals with limited financial resources and with special legal needs. Unfortunately, none of those clinics can assist people from rural areas. Specifically, university legal clinics (<i>consultorios jurídicos</i>) are offered in a few law degrees as an optional subject (except in the case of the University of Costa Rica), although they are neither a degree requirement nor a condition to join the Bar Association.</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>In Costa Rica, the use of AI in legal services, including pro bono work, is still in its early stages. While there are no well-documented cases of AI being directly applied to pro bono legal services, some initiatives highlight the potential of AI to improve access to justice. There is also a growing awareness and exploration of AI in the Costa Rican legal sector, with the potential to enhance efficiency and accessibility in legal services, including pro bono work.</p>
<p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>	<p>As of today, Costa Rica does not have a pro bono clearinghouse.</p>
<p>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>	<p>As discussed above, the main non-governmental source of pro bono in Costa Rica is the Pro Bono Commission of the Bar Association, which acts as an intermediary.⁸</p> <p>Other sources of pro bono legal matters are international organisations, such as:</p> <p>(a) TrustLaw, the pro bono programme from</p>

⁸ See <http://www.probono.org.ar/> (last visited 22 December 2024).

	<p>Thomson Reuters Foundation, which connects law firms and corporate legal teams around the world, including Costa Rica, with high-impact NGOs and social enterprises working to create social and environmental change;⁹ and</p> <p>(b) the Inter-American Bar Association (<i>Federacion Interamericana de Abogados</i>), which launched a pro bono programme where it connects lawyers throughout the American region, including Costa Rica, with people who are willing to exercise their rights of information in cases of public interest related to transparency of governmental entities.¹⁰</p> <p>Other international organisations that promote the pro bono culture in Costa Rica include the Cyrus R. Vance Center, the Pro Bono Network of the Americas (<i>Red Pro Bono de las Americas</i>), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.</p>
<p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p>	<p>Lawyers may register with the Pro Bono Commission of the Bar Association. The Pro Bono Commission manages a registry of private law firms and individual attorneys willing to provide pro bono legal services and that comply with the requirements and conditions set forth by the Pro Bono Commission in order to be registered.¹¹</p> <p><i>Latin Lawyer</i> awards the Pro Bono Project of the Year Award and recognises noteworthy contributions towards strengthening the culture of pro bono in Latin America on the list of Leading Lights.</p>

Acknowledgements

Name of Law Firm: BLP

Name of lawyer: Eduardo Calderon

Learn more

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

⁹ See <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/> (last visited 22 December 2024).

¹⁰ See <http://www.iaba.org/comunicado-y-reglamentacion-pro-bono-fia-de-interes-publico-vinculado-con-elderecho-a-la-informacion/> (last visited 22 December 2024).

¹¹ See <http://www.probono.org.ar/> (last visited 22 December 2024).