

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Ecuador

Introduction

In Ecuador, there are no records or experiences that reflect a tradition of pro bono legal work by lawyers. Pro bono work remains limited and largely ad hoc because most firms do not have institutionalized pro bono programs.¹ With very few and honourable exceptions², it was the Vance Center's Pro Bono Declaration for the Americas that introduced the term "pro bono" in the country. Prior to the Declaration, some lawyers and law firms provided "free legal work," but never in the volumes or with the continuity necessary to become a tradition. Currently, pro bono legal work is limited and carried out by a few law firms, particularly those with international clients, as can be seen in the list of signatories of the Declaration³.

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? |
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| No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No | No |

The landscape

| Professional regulation | |
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| <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 Ecuador, the professional practice of lawyers is governed by the Organic General Code of the Judiciary (COFJ). The COFJ stipulates that to represent a client in a judicial process, the following requirements must be met⁴:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hold a law degree granted by a faculty of jurisprudence, law, or legal sciences from a legally recognized university and registered with the Higher Education Council; Enjoy political participation rights; Be a member of the Bar by being registered in the registry maintained by the |

¹ https://www.trust.org/impact-story/pro-bono-in-ecuador-transforming-lonely-stars-into-a-galaxy/?utm_source

² One of the honorable exceptions is the law firm *Pérez Bustamante & Ponce*, which since 1987 established the *Fabián Ponce Ordóñez Foundation* to carry out, unify, and optimize pro bono work as well as the firm's social action initiatives.

³ The list of signatories of the Pro Bono Declaration for the Americas can be consulted at: (last visited on 13 February 2025).

⁴ *Código Orgánico de la Función Judicial* (Organic General Code of the Judiciary)(COFJ)

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| | <p>Judiciary Council through its regional offices; and</p> <p>4. Not be subject to the incompatibilities for legal representation established in Article 328 of the same COFJ, which, in general, prohibits public servants from acting as lawyers representing clients due to their official positions.</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 Ecuador, there are no regulations that promote pro bono work, nor are there regulations that limit it. Lawyers who engage in pro bono work must meet the requirements established for all lawyers, as outlined in the response to the previous question.</p> |
| <p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p> | <p>No. Lawyers in Ecuador do not need a special license 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>No. For foreign lawyers, the COFJ stipulates in Article 332 that, to practice law, their degree must meet the requirements established in the international treaties and agreements signed by Ecuador⁵. They must obtain recognition, validation, or equivalency of their degree in the manner and under the conditions provided by law. Additionally, prior to their admission to the Bar, they must complete one year of pre-professional practice in the agencies and entities that make up the public sector or in the free legal clinics of a public or private university.</p> |
| <p>5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?</p> | <p>Since there are no regulations governing pro bono legal activities for lawyers, there is no minimum number of pro bono hours required. However, the law firms that are signatories of the Pro Bono Declaration for the Americas (seven in Ecuador) have committed to ensuring that all their lawyers perform a minimum of 20 pro bono hours per year.</p> |

⁵ Article 332, COFJ

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| <p>6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?</p> | <p>Article 339 of the COFJ stipulates that, as a requirement to obtain a professional law degree, graduates of law or legal sciences programs must complete a mandatory academic year of free legal assistance for the public⁶. This assistance may be provided within the agencies and entities of the public sector or in indigenous communities, that exercise jurisdictional functions.</p> <p>Graduates may be exempted from the mandatory year of free legal assistance for the public if they can demonstrate having provided services for at least two years in a free legal clinic at a university or having completed an internship of the same duration in a judicial unit⁷.</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>No, in Ecuador there are no aspirational pro bono hour targets established by the bar association, regulatory bodies, or any other entity. Membership in bar associations is not mandatory to practice law, and these associations do not have regulations that promote or oversee pro bono work. To practice as a lawyer, the only requirement is to be registered with the “Foro de Abogados” of the Judiciary Council, as established by the COFJ.</p> |
| <p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p> | <p>Since there are no regulations governing pro bono legal work in Ecuador, there are no credits for pro bono hours worked.</p> |
| 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>In Ecuador, lawyers are not legally required to have professional liability insurance; therefore, there is also no such obligation when performing pro bono legal work.</p> |

⁶ Article 339, COFJ

⁷ Article 342, COFJ

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| <p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p> | <p>There are no specific regulations that limit or prohibit the advertising of pro bono legal work.</p> |
| Pro bono practice and culture | |
| <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 requiring pro bono assistance are those related to the basic needs of individuals or groups at risk or in vulnerable situations, such as people experiencing poverty or displacement. In family law, these include issues such as child support, custody, visitation, domestic violence, and child abuse. Nonprofit organizations also require pro bono legal assistance to comply with legal requirements to carry out their work for the benefit of communities or to address matters of common interest.</p> |
| <p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p> | <p>In Ecuador, there are some free legal services available. The State provides these services through the Public Defender's Office, and universities offer them through their free legal clinics, which they are legally mandated to establish. Law firms that are signatories of the Pro Bono Declaration for the Americas offer their pro bono services either directly or through their foundation.</p> <p>There is also the possibility of seeking pro bono assistance through online platforms such as TrustLaw and PILnet.</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 no known notable examples of innovative technology or artificial intelligence being used to access pro bono legal services.</p> <p>In general, law firms are using AI (Chat GPT) for the analysis of legal documents, drafting and reviewing documents, as well as for legal research. Tools, research and discussions are also emerging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LegalBot-EC, a large language model-based chatbot was developed to help people with legal questions, grounded in Ecuadorian law. It uses an LLM combined with legal knowledge (e.g., the Constitution and Criminal Code |

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| | <p>of Ecuador) to deliver contextual legal answers.⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNESCO has promoted multisectoral dialogue on the ethical regulation of AI in Ecuador in order to foster a human rights-based approach and inter-institutional cooperation.⁹ |
| Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts | |
| <p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p> | <p>In Ecuador, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and law firms that provide pro bono services receive cases from individuals who previously accessed pro bono legal assistance or learned about these services through social media. They also receive referrals from other NGOs working in areas such as human rights, gender-based violence, protection of vulnerable populations, and assistance to refugees and migrants. Most international cases come from nonprofit organizations that connect lawyers providing pro bono services with social organizations or individuals in need of legal support, such as TrustLaw, the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, or the Pro Bono Network of the Americas.</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>Pro bono collaboration with foreign lawyers and clients is mostly carried out through the online platforms TrustLaw and PILnet or directly upon request from foreign law firms. In Ecuador, the <i>Fabián Ponce Ordóñez Foundation</i> provides pro bono legal assistance in collaboration with lawyers from the United States of America through the Vance Center's Keep Families Together initiative and the Pro Bono Network of the Americas¹⁰.</p> |
| <p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p> | <p>In Ecuador, there are no specific local recognitions for pro bono work by lawyers. However, at the international level, organizations such as Latin Lawyer, together with the Vance Center, Chambers and Partners, and TrustLaw,</p> |

⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392823761_LegalBot-EC_An_LLM-based_Chatbot_for_Legal_Assistance_in_Ecuadorian_Law

⁹ https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-fosters-ethical-dialogue-artificial-intelligence-ecuador?utm_source

¹⁰ More information can be found at: <https://www.vancecenter.org/keep-families-together/> and <https://www.redprobono.org/> (last visited on 13 February 2025).

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| | among others, recognize the pro bono work carried out in the country. For example, since 2020 to 2024, some law firms have received the “Leading Light” recognition for pro bono work awarded by Latin Lawyer and the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice. |
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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.