

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in France

Introduction

Pro bono practices in France have experienced rapid development in the last decade thanks to various kinds of private initiatives (in particular from international law firms with offices in France) and to the involvement of the French Bar and specifically the Paris Bar. French lawyers are not legally obliged to offer pro bono legal services, and while the Paris Bar (*Barreau de Paris*) itself supports the practice of pro bono through initiatives like legal consultations and *Barreau de Paris Solidarité*, it does not require firms to participate. That said, interest among firms has risen in recent years. According to the *2024 TrustLaw Index of Pro Bono*, while the culture and infrastructure to support pro bono in France had historically lagged behind Anglo-American jurisdictions, this is now improving, with many firms reporting an increase in average hours of pro bono per lawyer and higher participation rates.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	Yes	Yes	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>Only lawyers can provide legal services to third parties.</p> <p>The provision of legal services in France is regulated by the Law No. 90-1259 of 31 December 1990 amending Law No. 71-1130 of 31 December 1971 reforming certain legal and judiciary professions and its implementing Decree No. 91-1197 of 27 November 1991. This law provides for the general framework regulating the legal profession in France.</p>

¹ <https://www.barreausolidarite.org/>

² https://www.trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-TrustLaw-Index-of-Pro-Bono.pdf?utm_
(Last viewed on 23 January 2026).

	<p>The provision of legal services in France is also regulated by the National Internal Regulation of the French Bar (Règlement Intérieur National de la profession d'avocat (RIN)) (in its consolidated version of 12 December 2024), including the European Code of Ethics (Code de déontologie des avocats européens). The National Internal Regulation merges into a single text the various professional rules adopted by local bars.</p> <p>In France, in-house counsels are defined by law as follows: in-house counsels practicing under an employment contract within a company or group of companies may, in the course of their duties and for the exclusive benefit of the company that employs them or any company in the group to which it belongs, provide legal advice and draft private deeds relating to the activities of those companies.³</p> <p>However, in France, only lawyers have a regulated status; there is no formal status for in-house counsels, who are considered employees and generally subject to the same regime as all employees in France.</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 are no specific rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services in France. The provision of pro bono legal services is an exception to the general professional rule whereby the provision of legal services by attorneys is for a fee.</p> <p>A law of 18 December 1998 has created the local councils for access to law (<i>Conseils départementaux d'accès au droit (CDAD)</i>) in order to facilitate the access of marginalized persons to legal services. Local bars participate in such councils as well as public authorities. Attorneys provide pro bono legal advice at different locations within this framework.</p> <p>The provision of pro bono legal services does not benefit from incentives in France. Article 238 bis of the General Tax Code introduces, in case of donation, a tax reduction of 60% of any donation (for any amount less than or equal to €2,000,000</p>

³ See Law of December 31, 1971, No. 71-1130, Art 58.

	<p>then 40% for any amount greater than €2,000,000). However, this does not apply to pro bono initiatives provided by law firms. Not taking into account pro bono activities in a specific tax regime constitutes an incentive to move away from pro bono activities in favor of other economic choices such as endowment funds.</p>
<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>The provision of legal services in private practice in France requires the Attorney Professional Certificate (<i>Certificat d’Aptitude à la Profession d’Avocat (CAPA)</i>), which is delivered by regional Attorneys Training Centers (<i>Centres Régionaux de Formation à la Profession d’Avocat (CRFPA)</i>). In order to obtain the CAPA, French law students must have a 1st year’s master’s degree (<i>Master 1</i>) in law and pass a CRFPA admission exam. They must then follow the CRFPA course which last 18 months, out of which two semesters are dedicated to professional experience. At the end of this course, they must pass the CAPA exam. No specific license requirement is required to become an in-house counsel but a 2nd year master’s degree is highly recommended.</p> <p>Lawyers in France do not require a specific license to provide pro bono legal services. The requirement is the same for pro bono legal services as it is with any other legal work.</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>Foreign attorneys who are EU nationals are given a choice: they can either take the French law exam (<i>Examen d’aptitude en droit français</i>) dedicated to foreign attorneys willing to have their professional title recognized in France or be exempted from taking such exam and instead take the Attorney Professional Certificate exam, as any French law student.⁴</p> <p>Foreign attorneys that are not EU nationals must satisfy two conditions: (i) being an attorney in one’s home country; and (ii) the reciprocity of the procedure for French attorneys in such home country. Foreign attorneys are exempted from taking the Attorney Professional Certificate exam, but they do need to pass the French Law exam.⁵ Foreign lawyers in France do not require a specific license to provide pro bono legal</p>

⁴ See Decree of November 27, 1991, No. 91-1197, Art. 99.

⁵ See Decree of November 27, 1991, No. 91-1197, Art. 100.

	services. The requirement is the same for pro bono legal services as it is with any other legal work provided by foreign lawyers in France.
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	Lawyers in France are not required to work a minimum number of pro bono hours even though this is often strongly encouraged by private law firms.
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	Aspiring lawyers in France are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become licensed lawyers. However, it can be a component of training in certain regional Attorneys Training Centers (<i>Centres Régionaux de Formation à la Profession d'Avocat (CRFPA)</i>). Students may engage in optional clinical programs or internships, often through legal aid clinics (<i>Maisons de Justice et du Droit</i>) or NGO partnerships (e.g., <i>Droits d'Urgence, Barreau de Paris Solidarité</i>). These experiences can provide exposure to pro bono work.
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?	The Paris Bar has introduced a new Pro Bono Recognition List which recognises lawyers who have delivered over 25 hours of pro bono service in the previous year. These activities may have been carried out in France or abroad.
8. Do lawyers receive any "Continuing Legal Education" (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?	Lawyers in France do not automatically receive any "Continuing Legal Education" or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked. ⁶ If a pro bono engagement includes a structured training component that is accredited (e.g., a workshop recognised by the Bar), that particular training could count but the pro bono service itself does not count simply by virtue of being pro bono.
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	Lawyers require the same professional insurance for providing pro bono legal services as they do for providing any other legal services in France. ⁷ In-house counsels are usually considered employees and generally subject to the same

⁶ https://www.trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/downloaded_file-88.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 26 January 2026).

⁷ https://www.avocatparis.org/responsabilites-et-assurances?utm_source (Last viewed on 24 January 2026).

<p>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>regime as all employees in France. They are only allowed to provide advice to their employer and are covered by their employer's insurance. However, if the in-house counsel maintains Bar membership, they can do pro bono but must avoid conflicts with their employer's interests. Some corporates have CSR or pro bono policies which allow this.⁸ Pro bono legal work is generally covered under the same professional liability insurance if the lawyer is Bar-registered, because it is considered part of their professional activity.</p>
<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 rules that prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients. Lawyers may inform the public about pro bono activities or free legal aid for informational purposes, not to solicit clients.</p> <p>The restriction on legal advertising which ended in 2014 undoubtedly impeded effective communication of pro bono activities in France. Until then, it was illegal to solicit legal work in any form, either by going to the residence or workplace of a potential client or by sending a personalized proposition of work without having been properly invited beforehand. Advertising was only permissible in order to convey strictly necessary information to the public.</p> <p>In addition, attorneys in France should comply with their other ethical obligations and, in practice, the client should agree to the advertisement of any pro bono matter.</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 which require or present opportunities for the provision of pro bono legal services in France are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration & asylum law • Access to justice and legal information • Civil disputes for low-income individuals (housing, employment, consumer debt) • Human rights and public interest litigation (NGOs, environmental associations) • Nonprofit / charity legal support

⁸ https://www.trust.org/impact-story/pro-bono-in-france-is-taking-hold-amid-crises/?utm_ (Last viewed on 23 January 2026).

	<p>(governance, compliance)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social economy and entrepreneurship (entity formation, contracts) <p>The major unmet legal needs come from marginalized populations that are not able to access legal aid due to a lack of information and in some cases, language barriers.⁹ NGOs also require the provision of pro bono legal services as they do not always have the funds to afford the services of private law firms.</p>
<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>In France, most large-scale pro bono initiatives are developed by private law firms and NGOs. Pro bono programs carried out by law firms generally take the form of direct assistance and legal advice provided by attorneys to associations. Pro bono projects can concern economically oriented activities such as social entrepreneurship or the development of French local entrepreneurship. Pro bono projects can also relate to international human rights in France, for example, representing individual clients before international authorities, assisting asylum seekers or victims of human trafficking. When involved in pro bono programs, initiatives by NGOs can take two forms: collaborations with law firms or companies, or within the framework of their own activities.</p> <p>Law students can participate in pro bono legal work, particularly through university legal clinics and volunteer programmes where they provide free legal services under supervision by qualified lawyers.¹⁰</p> <p>State legal aid is available and is the primary system for free legal support in France. The government pays for lawyers' fees and costs for eligible applicants so that they can receive free legal advice at the point of service. Individuals with insufficient resources are covered in civil, criminal, and administrative matters.¹¹ France's Ministry of Justice supports a network of legal access centres that provide free legal information, guidance and basic help, for example: Maisons de Justice et du Droit (Houses</p>

⁹ https://www.trust.org/impact-story/delivering-pro-bono-legal-services-in-france/?utm_ (last viewed on 24 January 2026).

¹⁰ https://psl.eu/en/psl-dauphine-legal-clinic?utm_source (Last viewed on 24 January 2026).

¹¹ https://e-justice.europa.eu/topics/taking-legal-action/legal-aid/fr_en?utm_source (Last viewed on 26 January 2026).

	<p>of Justice and Law).¹²</p> <p>The Paris Solidarity Bar promotes the voluntary work of Parisian lawyers and coordinates consultations provided in the Solidarity Bus, within various charities and in other spaces, thus connecting lawyers wishing to provide pro bono legal services with those in need.¹³</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 publicly available innovative examples of lawyers using AI in pro bono matters. However, AI is being used in legal settings and reshaping how lawyers work. Lower-cost AI-enabled tools like chatbots may offer new ways technology could support broader access to legal services, including for underserved individuals in France.¹⁴</p> <p>AI and technology tools have the potential to greatly enhance legal pro bono work across Europe by utilizing the framework set by the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689). This regulation requires transparency, risk assessments, and human oversight for high-risk AI systems, while prohibiting certain "unacceptable risk" uses. AI and innovative legal technologies can make pro bono work more efficient by automating routine tasks like document drafting, intake, and legal research, allowing lawyers to concentrate on more complex client needs. Furthermore, these technologies could increase access to justice by providing scalable, low-cost tools such as multilingual chatbots and rights checkers, which could help empower vulnerable groups to understand and assert their legal rights.</p>
<h3>Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts</h3>	
<p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>	<p>Information on legal aid and pro bono opportunities in France can be found on the websites of the following public bodies and NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paris Bar¹⁵ (including the Barreau de Paris)

¹² <https://www.paris.fr/lieux/maison-de-la-justice-et-du-droit-secteur-paris-nord-est-m-j-d-1219> last viewed on 26 January 2026).

¹³ https://www.avocatparis.org/services-de-l-ordre/barreau-de-paris-solidarite?utm_source (Last viewed on 24 January 2026).

¹⁴ https://www.lemonde.fr/emploi/article/2025/04/14/c-est-un-metier-chez-les-avocats-l-ia-est-deja-la_6595713_1698637.html?utm_source (Last viewed on 26 January 2026).

¹⁵ <https://www.avocatparis.org/> (Last viewed on 23 January 2026).

	<p>Solidarité¹⁶;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Justice¹⁷; • Paris City Hall¹⁸; • Défenseur des droits¹⁹; • AADH²⁰ • Droits d'urgence²¹; • Adie²². • Avocats Sans Frontières France²³ • Association Franck Joffo²⁴ <p>There are also global pro bono clearinghouses and legal services providers such as TrustLaw, PILnet, A4ID or Lex Mundi Pro Bono Foundation.²⁵</p> <p>University-based legal clinics involve students and lawyers in pro bono research and advice, often matching students and supervising attorneys with public-interest work.²⁶</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>The European Pro Bono Initiative is an informal group made up of pro bono managers, lawyers managing pro bono practices for law firms, pro bono associations and companies in Europe. It identifies growth opportunities for pro bono in Europe by supporting existing clearinghouses, encouraging the establishment of new clearinghouses, organising meetings and roundtables and building structures to establish standards and quality management of pro bono legal work in Europe.</p> <p>There is also an informal Paris Pro Bono roundtable group that pro bono managers at law</p>

¹⁶ <https://www.barreausolidarite.org/> (last viewed on 24 January 2026).

¹⁷ <https://www.justice.fr/?lang=en> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

¹⁸ https://accueil-integration-refugies.fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Depliant_3volets_EN.pdf#:~:text=District%20city%20halls%20for%20free%20legal%20advice%20at%20the%20town%20hall%2C%20online%20appointments%20www.paris.fr/aidejuridique. (Last visited on 27 January 2026).

¹⁹ <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/demander-de-laide-au-defenseur-des-droits-146> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

²⁰ <https://aadh.fr/> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

²¹ <https://www.droitsdurgence.org/> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

²² <https://www.adie.org/> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

²³ <https://www.avocatssansfrontieres-france.org/en/> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

²⁴ <https://www.franckjoffo.fr/> (last viewed on 27 January 2026).

²⁵ See <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/>, <https://www.pilnet.org/>, <https://a4id.org/> and <https://www.lexmundiprobono.org/?utm> (Last viewed on 14 October 2025).

²⁶ <https://droit.u-paris.fr/en/legal-clinic/> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

	firms can register with. ²⁷
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	<p>The Trophées Pro Bono is a pro bono award that acknowledges individual lawyers, teams, and initiatives for their contributions to providing free legal services or enhancing access to justice. It is organized annually by Barreau de Paris Solidarité in collaboration with the Bar of Paris and is supported by the City of Paris.²⁸</p> <p>There are also global pro bono awards offered by TrustLaw, PILnet and the International Bar Association.²⁹</p>

Acknowledgements

In connection with this chapter, we are grateful for the support and insight of local counsel: Latham & Watkins (Paris) LLP

Learn more

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

²⁷ <https://www.europeanprobonoinitiative.com/home> (Last viewed on 27 January 2026).

²⁸ https://www.barreausolidarite.org/le-trophee-pro-bono/trophees-pro-bono-2025/presentation.html?utm_ (Last viewed on 22 January 2026).

²⁹ <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>.