

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Guatemala

Introduction

Historically, Guatemala has not had a strong tradition or requirement for the provision of pro bono legal services by individual lawyers or private law firms. The provision of pro bono legal services in Guatemala has been led by non-profit organisations and by special practice programmes included as part of law schools' curricula. However, in recent years there have been more private law firms interested in providing pro bono legal services. An example of this advancement is the incorporation of *Asociación Pro Bono Guatemala*¹, whose incorporation process was started by 12 private law firms in 2018. *Asociación Pro Bono Guatemala* was officially registered in Guatemala in 2024 and has partnered with international and local institutions and has provided greater opportunities for pro bono legal services to be provided by 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	Yes	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>The legal profession in Guatemala is governed by the bar association, <i>Colegio de Abogados y Notarios de Guatemala</i>. The bar provides rules on professional ethics and requirements for admission to the bar.²</p> <p>In addition to the code of ethics provided by the bar association, lawyers are regulated by law under <i>Ley de Colegiación Profesional Obligatoria</i>.³ This law codifies the nature and scope of the legal profession in Guatemala, as well as the requirements for becoming a legal professional. It also codifies the ethical standards and principles to which the <i>Colegiación</i></p>

¹ <https://probonogt.org/> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

² See <https://cang.org.gt/CODIGO%20DE%20ETICA%20PROFESIONAL%20DE%20ABOGADOS%20Y%20NOTARIOS.doc> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

³ Decreto 72-2001. See https://www.oas.org/en/sla/dlc/mesicic/docs/mesicic5_gtm_anexo105.pdf (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

	<p><i>Profesional</i> should adhere.</p> <p>Lawyers' fees in Guatemala are regulated by Decree 111-96.⁴</p> <p>To practice law in Guatemala, lawyers need a legal degree and need to pass an exam.</p> <p>Lawyers will then apply for and be sworn into the bar association, <i>Colegio de Abogados y Notarios de Guatemala</i>, which was established by Decree 72- 2001 (<i>Ley de Colegiación Profesional Obligatoria</i>) of the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala and must register and be sworn in by Guatemala's Supreme Court of Justice.⁵ A lawyer can only practice law in Guatemala if they are licensed by the bar association and Guatemala's Supreme Court of Justice.</p> <p>Under Article 87 of the Guatemalan Constitution, a foreign lawyer's degree can be recognised by the University of San Carlos de Guatemala for purposes of practicing in Guatemala.⁶ A foreign lawyer would then need to take and pass a bar exam in Guatemala or provide 1,600 hours of social service before applying to the bar.⁷</p> <p>The provisions described related to the exercise of the legal profession apply equally for independent lawyers and lawyers working 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>Article 12 of the Constitution says a "defense of the person and his [or her] rights are inviolable" and that each person has a right to be heard in a legal process.⁸</p> <p>The provision of pro bono legal services in</p>

⁴ <https://www.scribd.com/document/953049579/21997-CONGRESS-DECREE-111-96-TARIFF-OF-LAWYERS-ARBITRATORS-PROCURATORS> (Last viewed on 5 March 2026).

⁵ Decree 2-89. Article 196. https://www.oas.org/juridico/pdfs/mesicic4_gtm_org.pdf (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

⁶ See https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guatemala_1993.pdf?lang=en (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

⁷ Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala. Article 87. (https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guatemala_1993.pdf?lang=en (last viewed on 4 November 2025) and <http://rye.usac.edu.gt/index.php?inco=1> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

⁸ Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala. Article 12. (https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guatemala_1993.pdf?lang=en (last viewed on 4 November 2025))

	Guatemala, unlike the right to legal assistance, ⁹ is not specifically accounted for in any regulations, nor is it required. There are no legal limits as to the provision of pro bono legal services.
3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?	<p>No additional licence is required to provide pro bono legal services beyond the requirements for all legal practice.</p> <p>Through authorised institutions such as <i>Bufete Popular</i>¹⁰, students can provide pro bono legal services under the supervision of licensed lawyers. The pro bono legal services provided by law students are limited to labour and family¹¹</p>
4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?	No additional licence is required for foreign lawyers to provide pro bono legal services beyond the requirements for all legal practice.
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	Lawyers in Guatemala 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?	<p>There is no requirement by the bar association for aspiring lawyers to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become licensed lawyers.</p> <p>However, law school programmes of certain universities require aspiring lawyers to handle a number of pro bono cases.</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>The Pro Bono Declaration of the Americas (“Declaration”) has been signed by several legal organisations in Guatemala, including <i>Colegio de Abogados y Notarios de Guatemala</i>.¹²</p> <p>The Declaration commits lawyers to practicing 20 hours of pro bono legal services each year.¹³ At this time, this is a purely aspirational figure and not a requirement for legal practice in Guatemala.</p>

⁹ Decree 129-97. Article 3. https://www.idpp.gob.gt/images/Biblioteca-virtual/Leyes_y_Reglamentos/LEY_DE_SERVICIO_PBLICO_DE_DEFENSA.pdf (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

¹⁰ <https://principal.url.edu.gt/acerca-de/servicios/bufete-popular/> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

¹¹ <https://www.scribd.com/document/897920782/21469-Decreto-Ley-206> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

¹² See https://www.vancecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Signatarios_1-17-18.pdf (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

¹³ See <https://www.vancecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/english.pdf> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

<p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>	<p>There is no “Continuing Legal Education” or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked in Guatemala.</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>Neither independent lawyers nor in-house lawyers are required to have special indemnity insurance for the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>Articles 10 and 11 of the Lawyer’s Professional Code of Ethics prohibit directly or indirectly soliciting clientele and limit the publication of legal services and business cards.¹⁴ Thus, lawyers or law firms in Guatemala are unable to directly advertise pro bono legal services.</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 law¹⁵ that require or present opportunities for the provision of pro bono legal services in Guatemala include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration, asylum and other matters relating to migrants. • Labour matters. • Family matters. • Violence against women and children.¹⁶ • Criminal matters. • Legal reforms. • Assisting underserved poorer communities with legal needs, such as obtaining birth certificates and supporting the creation of small NGOs to help local farmers collaborate and market their products.

¹⁴ See <https://cang.org.gt/CODIGO%20DE%20ETICA%20PROFESIONAL%20DE%20ABOGADOS%20Y%20NOTARIOS.doc> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

¹⁵ https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/rule-of-law/guatemala-2022/Guatemala_Report_WJP.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

¹⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr34/7912/2024/en/> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>The main providers of pro bono legal services in Guatemala are NGOs, private and public institutions, universities and private law firms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some local NGOs and other non-profit institutions in Guatemala provide legal services for refugees, migrants and immigrants.¹⁷ There are also private and public institutions providing legal services on labour, civil, family, violence against women and criminal matters. Additionally, there are non-profit institutions that provide pro bono legal services for matters relating to corruption and the promotion of legal reforms. • These institutions include: <i>Casa del Migrante Nazareth</i>; <i>Pastoral de Movilidad Humana</i>¹⁸; <i>Acción Ciudadana</i>¹⁹; <i>Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo</i>²⁰; <i>Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales</i>²¹; <i>Fundación Sobrevivientes</i>²²; <i>Bufete Popular Universidad Rafael Landívar</i>²³; <i>Bufete Popular Universidad Mariano Gálvez</i>²⁴; <i>Bufete Popular Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala</i>; <i>Bufete Popular Universidad Rural</i>²⁵; and Institute of Criminal Public Defense²⁶. • The <i>Bufete Popular</i> is a compulsory student programme at the four universities named above where students provide pro bono legal services to those who cannot afford to pay for legal services and often in conjunction with regional or international NGOs. The main legal services provided by these programmes are labour, civil and family matters.²⁷ • Regional organisations that help asylum-seekers and refugees include the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights,²⁸
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¹⁷ <https://institutodelavictima.gob.gt/reddederivacion/> and <https://help.unhcr.org/guatemala/en/unhcr-in-guatemala/national-institutions-we-work-with/> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

¹⁸ See <https://movilidadhumana.com/index.php/sobre-nosotros/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

¹⁹ See <https://accionciudadanagt.org/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

²⁰ See <http://grupodeapoyomutuo.org.gt/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

²¹ See <https://iccpq.org.gt/> (last viewed on 4 March 2026).

²² See <http://www.sobrevivientes.org> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

²³ See <http://principal.url.edu.gt/index.php/academia/bufete-popular> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

²⁴ See <https://derecho.umg.edu.gt/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

²⁵ See <https://urural.edu.gt/#sede> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

²⁶ See <http://www.idpp.gob.gt/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

²⁷ See <https://www.sigrid-rausing-trust.org/grantee/asociacion-bufete-juridico-popular/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025)

²⁸ See <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/Default.asp> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

	<p>the Inter-American Court of Human Rights,²⁹ and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.³⁰</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private law firms provide pro bono legal services when contacted directly by non-profit entities. Since 2018, the <i>Asociación Pro Bono Guatemala</i>³¹ (even before being officially registered as such) has acted as a clearinghouse for pro bono legal services and has made alliances with local and international organisations, such as The Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice and <i>La Red Pro Bono de las Américas</i>.³² Through <i>Asociación Pro Bono Guatemala</i>, many private law firms in Guatemala have been able to provide pro bono legal services, mainly for refugees, migrants and immigrants. • Private lawyers (acting individually) may provide pro bono legal services, though it is difficult to find information on what services can be provided if at all.³³
<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 recent years, some public institutions have developed online platforms to access certain determined information. This has made it possible to access certain certificates, such as birth certificates, death certificates and marriage certificates, instantly, which has been useful for immigration-related cases.</p> <p>While there are no specific examples of AI usage in pro bono matters in Guatemala, more generally, it was reported that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) helped Guatemala's Constitutional Court and Judicial Branch expand equal access to justice for vulnerable groups by designing a policy to improve services for people in vulnerable conditions, deploying an integrated IT system with performance dashboards, enabling virtual hearings in five remote Alta Verapaz</p>

²⁹ See <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

³⁰ See [https://www.acnur.org/guatemala-abre-la-puerta-un-nuevo-comienzo#:~:text=La%20agencia%20de%20la%20ONU%20para%20los%20Refugiados%20\(ACNUR\)%20es,personas%20en%20un%20tercer%20pa%C3%ADs](https://www.acnur.org/guatemala-abre-la-puerta-un-nuevo-comienzo#:~:text=La%20agencia%20de%20la%20ONU%20para%20los%20Refugiados%20(ACNUR)%20es,personas%20en%20un%20tercer%20pa%C3%ADs) (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

³¹ See <https://probonogt.org/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

³² See <https://www.vancecenter.org/> and <https://www.redprobono.org/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

³³ See e.g. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guatemala-list-of-lawyers> (UK government's list of local counsel in Guatemala, which also provides for whether the lawyers will engage in pro bono services; however, the type of service is not specified and are only done on "case-by-case" basis) (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

	<p>municipalities, training judicial personnel, and supporting 112 Mayan-language interpreters.³⁴</p> <p>Regionally, UNDP, in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development through its Infosegura initiative, launched “Sara” in Central America, a free and confidential chat that aims to prevent violence against women, girls and adolescents. Sara provides information and guidance for those who may be at risk of violence and is part of UNDP’s efforts in the region to promote safer and more inclusive societies.³⁵</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>The government in Guatemala is focused on providing legal assistance for indigent persons, rather than providing pro bono legal services.</p> <p>The right to legal assistance for indigent persons is established under Article 12 of the Constitution³⁶ and Article 89 of the Civil and Commercial Code³⁷.</p> <p>The Institute of Criminal Public Defense (“IDPP”) is the country’s public criminal defender’s office.³⁸ An article suggests that IDPP is woefully understaffed for the amount of work it receives.³⁹</p> <p>The main sources of pro bono in Guatemala are NGOs, private non-profit entities and legal clinics run through universities.</p> <p>Private lawyers also provide pro bono legal services. Since 2018, <i>Asociación Pro Bono Guatemala</i> has acted as a clearinghouse and connected national and international organisations, such as the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice and <i>La Red Pro Bono de las Americas</i>, with private law firms.</p>

³⁴ https://rolhr.undp.org/annualreport/2021/latin-america-the-caribbean/guatemala.html?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

³⁵ https://www.undp.org/es/guatemala/comunicados-de-prensa/sara-la-nueva-herramienta-de-inteligencia-artificial-para-combatir-la-violencia-de-genero-en-centroamerica?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

³⁶ See https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guatemala_1993.pdf?lang=en (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

³⁷ See <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/es/gt/gt007es.pdf> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

³⁸ See <http://www.idpp.gob.gt/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

³⁹ See <https://www.soy502.com/articulo/357-defensores-publicos-atendieron-69-mil-casos-ano-100930> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

<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>Local and foreign lawyers can register with <i>Asociación Pro Bono Guatemala</i> in order to be made aware of pro bono opportunities. The relevant email address is: guatemala@probonogt.org.⁴⁰</p>
<p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p>	<p>Directories such as Latin Lawyer and the Vance Center's Pro Bono Leading Lights,⁴¹ IFLR1000,⁴² Chambers & Partners, and Legal 500⁴³ provide lists of Pro Bono practice in Guatemala by private firms or a description of such firms' pro bono activities.</p>

Acknowledgements

Name of law firm: Arias Law

Name of lawyer: Cindy Gabriela Arrivillaga Meza

Learn more

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

⁴⁰ See <https://probonogt.org/> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

⁴¹ See <https://latinlawyer.com/survey/pro-bono/2024/article/pro-bono-leading-lights> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

⁴² See <https://www.iflr1000.com/Jurisdiction/Guatemala/Rankings/93#rankings> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).

⁴³ See <https://www.legal500.com/c/guatemala> (last viewed on 4 November 2025).