

# Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

## Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Hungary

### Introduction

Hungary's tradition of pro bono dates back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although free legal services have a longstanding European tradition. The introduction of state-sponsored legal aid in the 20<sup>th</sup> century shifted responsibility from lawyers to the state. During the communist period, lawyers were compelled to provide free aid on "communist Saturdays." After transitioning to democracy, Hungary established a dual-track legal aid system in 2003, separating criminal defence from other legal assistance.<sup>1</sup> Since the end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s, Hungary has had a slow but positive uptake in the availability and provision of pro bono legal services by attorneys around the country. According to a PILnet report, the increasing presence of international law firms and lawyers in Hungary has brought with it a more proactive approach towards the provision of pro bono legal services and has assisted in "laying the groundwork for a renewed pro-bono mindset"<sup>2</sup>. Organisations such as PILnet and its Hungarian pro bono clearinghouse have also played an important role in increasing collaboration amongst law firms, NGOs and charities.

### 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  | Yes                                       | No                                      | Yes  |

### The landscape

| Professional regulation   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ol> | <p>The provision of legal services in Hungary is regulated by Act LXXVIII of 2017 on Legal Practice ("<b>Attorneys Act</b>"). Attorneys at Law (<i>ügyvéd</i>) are independent professionals who can provide legal representation in all cases before all authorities. Certain activities can only be performed by attorneys, including representation and defence in criminal cases, legal consulting, and preparing</p> |

<sup>1</sup> Zsuzsanna Rutai, "Practice of Pro Bono Legal Service in Hungary", available at [https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Practice-of-pro-bono-legal-services-in-Hungary\\_-FINAL\\_English-FORMATTED.docx.pdf](https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Practice-of-pro-bono-legal-services-in-Hungary_-FINAL_English-FORMATTED.docx.pdf) (last visited on January 15, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Zsuzsanna Rutai, "Practice of Pro Bono Legal Service in Hungary", available at [https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Practice-of-pro-bono-legal-services-in-Hungary\\_-FINAL\\_English-FORMATTED.docx.pdf](https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Practice-of-pro-bono-legal-services-in-Hungary_-FINAL_English-FORMATTED.docx.pdf) (last visited on January 15, 2025).

and editing legal documents.<sup>3</sup>

Attorneys must be members of a Hungarian bar association to provide legal services. To be admitted to the Hungarian Bar, an applicant must meet various criteria, including (among others): (a) citizenship in a member state of the European Economic Area; (b) university degree in law;<sup>4</sup> and (c) passing the Hungarian professional (bar) examination in law.<sup>5</sup>

#### **European Community Lawyers**

Attorneys from other EU member states may practice and give legal advice as “European Community Lawyers” under their respective professional designation given by their home countries.<sup>6</sup> After three years’ permanent practice in Hungary, European Community Lawyers may choose to become admitted as a Hungarian lawyer by demonstrating their experience with the Hungarian rules of law and legal terminology at a hearing organised by the Bar Association.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Foreign legal counsels (Outside EU)**

In Hungary, the practice of foreign legal counsel who are from outside the territory of the EU falls under different rules of law with a more limited scope of activities. Foreign legal counsel may only provide legal advice concerning the law of their home country and international law (but not Hungarian or European Community law) on the basis of a cooperation agreement entered into with a Hungarian attorney or law firm.<sup>8</sup>

#### **In-house**

In Hungary, “legal counsel” refers to *in-house lawyer* or *in-house counsel*. The membership of legal counsels in the bar association is voluntary. However, legal representation and document certification can only be undertaken by legal

<sup>3</sup> See [https://e-justice.europa.eu/topics/find-legal-professional/types-legal-professions/hu\\_en](https://e-justice.europa.eu/topics/find-legal-professional/types-legal-professions/hu_en) (last visited on October 30, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> The university degree does not have to be from a university in Hungary; however, recognition of the foreign university certificates and degrees is required for legal practice and the professional examination in law. There are no other pro bono specific rules and requirements in order to obtain the degree.

<sup>5</sup> Section 58 of the Attorneys Act.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter XIV of the Attorneys Act.

<sup>7</sup> Section 58(2) of the Attorneys Act.

<sup>8</sup> Section 82 of the Attorneys Act. See also Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) publication, Legal Profession in Hungary, p.5, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/36305?download=true> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>counsel with bar registration and membership.</p> <p>Therefore, registered <i>bar-certified legal counsels</i> can only represent their employer since legal counsels are employed under employment contracts, as opposed to attorneys who operate under retainer agreements.<sup>9</sup></p>   |
| <b>Regulatory landscape for pro bono</b>   |  |
| 2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.  | There are no specific laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services in Hungary. <sup>10</sup>   |
| 3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?                            | <p>Attorneys in Hungary do not require a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law).</p> <p>However, for in-house counsels, only bar-certified legal counsels can provide pro bono legal services, and this is done within a framework of a voluntary legal relationship. For example, these services can be provided as a volunteer for a civil organisation or another public-interest organisation, but the organisation that accepts such voluntary legal counsel must, in certain respects, be treated as an employer.</p> |
| 4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)? | Foreign-qualified lawyers do not require any additional licenses to provide pro bono legal services, other than their foreign qualification to practice law and the requirements set out in (a)(1) above relating to European Community Lawyers and foreign legal counsels from outside the EU.  |
| 5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?   | Attorneys in Hungary 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 attorneys in Hungary are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become licensed lawyers.   |

<sup>9</sup> Section 66 (1) of the Attorneys Act

<sup>10</sup> Zsuzsanna Rutai, "Practice of Pro Bono Legal Service in Hungary", available at [https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Practice-of-pro-bono-legal-services-in-Hungary\\_-FINAL\\_English-FORMATTED.docx.pdf](https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Practice-of-pro-bono-legal-services-in-Hungary_-FINAL_English-FORMATTED.docx.pdf) (last visited on January 15, 2025).

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <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 aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers set by the local bar association, regulatory body or other body.</p>  |
| <p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>   | <p>Attorneys in Hungary do not receive any “Continuing Legal Education” or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked.</p>   |
| <b>Insurance and advertising</b>  |   |
| <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>All attorneys are obliged to take out liability insurance and the Hungarian Bar Association (<i>Magyar Ügyvédi Kamara</i>) (“<b>MUK</b>”) must, upon request, admit as an attorney anyone who, among others, is a member of the Hungarian Attorneys Insurance and Assistance Association (<i>MÜBSE</i>) or has other liability insurance that is accepted by the bar association.<sup>11</sup> Such insurance would cover pro bono services.</p> <p>Bar-certified legal counsel do not need to take out liability insurance if they are working on a voluntary basis with a legal aid organisation or an organisation providing 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>General rules passed by MUK apply in the case of advertising pro bono successes, for instance, the advertisement must not contain any comparison with other attorney’s successes or any reference to the successful cases.<sup>12</sup></p>  |
| <b>Pro bono practice and culture</b>  |   |
| <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>Traditionally, there has been demand for pro bono legal services in a variety of areas in Hungary, with strong demand for legal services relating to fundamental human rights, property, data protection and prisoner rights.</p> <p>Currently, the main areas of law in which pro bono work is needed or presents opportunities in Hungary include:</p> <p>(a) human rights and civil liberties: (i) refugees and asylum seekers; (ii) discrimination and</p>   |

<sup>11</sup> Sections 14 and 15 of the Attorneys Act.

<sup>12</sup> Section 9 of the Rules No 6/2018 of the Hungarian Bar Association.

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>equal rights; and (iii) freedom of speech and press;</p> <p>(b) family law: (i) domestic violence; and (ii) child custody and welfare;</p> <p>(c) labour and employment law: (i) employees' rights; and (ii) employment discrimination; and</p> <p>(d) environmental protection.</p> <p>In general, there is a need for free legal assistance for low-income people. According to a recent report<sup>13</sup>, only people with very low income qualify for state-supported legal counsel as Hungary's income threshold for civil legal aid is among the lowest in the EU. This means that many who are above the poverty line still cannot afford a lawyer but do not qualify for legal aid.</p> |
| <p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>  | <p>In Hungary, providers of pro bono legal services include private law firms and lawyers (particularly well-known international law firms who have begun to establish Hungarian offices)<sup>14</sup>, NGOs and charities<sup>15</sup>.</p> <p>In 2006, several private law firms drafted and signed the Public Interest Law Initiative's Pro Bono Declaration in which they affirmed their commitment to advancing the public good by working for more clients on a pro bono basis.<sup>16</sup></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>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</p>   |

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.amnesty.hu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/HUN\\_CS0\\_contribution\\_EC\\_RoL\\_Report\\_2026.pdf?utm\\_source](https://www.amnesty.hu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/HUN_CS0_contribution_EC_RoL_Report_2026.pdf?utm_source) (Last viewed on 20 February 2026).

<sup>14</sup> Firms include, among others, Allen & Overy Iroda, Köver Clifford Chance and Siegler Law Office/Weil, Gotshal & Manges: [http://www.probonocentrum.cz/\\_files/file/podklady%20pro%20kulat%C3%BD%20st%C5%AFI/Promoting%20Pro%20Bono%20in%20Hungary%20and%20World%20wide\\_PILI.pdf](http://www.probonocentrum.cz/_files/file/podklady%20pro%20kulat%C3%BD%20st%C5%AFI/Promoting%20Pro%20Bono%20in%20Hungary%20and%20World%20wide_PILI.pdf) (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>15</sup> Organisations include the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (<https://www.helsinki.hu/en/>) (last visited on December 26, 2024), PILnet (<https://www.pilnet.org>) (last visited on 3 November, 2025) and the Street Lawyer Association (<http://utcajogasz.hu/>) (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>16</sup> Public Interest Law Initiative, "Hungarian Lawyers' Role in Advancing the Public Good (Pro Bono Publico)," (2006), available at: [https://www.probonobook.org/?media\\_dl=350](https://www.probonobook.org/?media_dl=350) (last visited on December 26, 2024) (p.73). See more at [http://www.probonocentrum.cz/\\_files/file/podklady%20pro%20kulat%C3%BD%20st%C5%AFI/Promoting%20Pro%20Bono%20in%20Hungary%20and%20World%20wide\\_PILI.pdf](http://www.probonocentrum.cz/_files/file/podklady%20pro%20kulat%C3%BD%20st%C5%AFI/Promoting%20Pro%20Bono%20in%20Hungary%20and%20World%20wide_PILI.pdf) (last visited on December 26, 2024).

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. Some examples of emerging access to justice tools include:

- In 2020, in response to the fast-growing demand for legal advice, the Child’s Rights Centre of the Hintalovon Foundation set up a chatbot with artificial intelligence software to respond to queries.<sup>17</sup>
- The i-ACCESS MyRights project leverages AI to help children navigate complex legal processes. The project aims to improve access to both information and legal assistance for child victims in the European Union.<sup>18</sup>

## Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts

14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.

In Hungary, pro bono legal services are not as institutionalised as in some common law jurisdictions, but there are several organisations and initiatives that function similarly to pro bono clearing houses or legal clinics. The following list contains the key players in Hungary:

### 1. Organisations that are similar to pro bono clearing houses:

These organisations connect volunteer lawyers with individuals or NGOs in need of free legal help:

- (a) **Budapest Bar Association (*Budapesti Ügyvédi Kamara – BÜK*)**: The Budapest Bar Association has been organising “Pro Bono

<sup>17</sup> Zsuzsanna Rutai, “Review of practices and gaps in the legal aid system for children in Hungary”, available at <https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Rutai-2022-Review-of-practices-and-gaps-in-the-legal-aid-system-for-children-in-Hungary-final.docx.pdf> (last visited on December 27, 2024).

<sup>18</sup> [https://justicewithchildren.org/en/i-access-my-rights?utm\\_source](https://justicewithchildren.org/en/i-access-my-rights?utm_source) (Last viewed on 19 February 2026).

Day” annually since 2019, where participating lawyers will provide free legal advice on one day of the year.<sup>19</sup> BÜK maintains a list of attorneys who have volunteered to provide pro bono services, especially for matters involving public interest or disadvantaged clients. BÜK is more like a registry than a true clearing house, but serves a matchmaking function when requests arise.

- (b) **HCLU Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ)**: HCLU is a non-profit human rights watchdog NGO that provides free legal services through its telephone hotline service, online counselling and in-person legal aid service.<sup>20</sup>
- (c) **The Cordelia Foundation for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims**: The foundation assists torture survivors and traumatised asylum seekers, refugees and their family members arriving in Hungary. The foundation assists clients with legal proceedings, namely assistance with documenting the evidence of torture.<sup>21</sup>
- (d) **Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Magyar Helsinki Bizottság)**: Ensures access to free legal counselling and representation in all places where persons are in need of international protection and are accommodated or detained in Hungary (reception centres, community shelters, asylum policing jails).<sup>22</sup>
- (e) **Háttér Society (Háttér Társaság)**: Provides free legal counselling and representation for LGBTQI victims of discrimination, harassment and violence or legal matters concerning sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>23</sup>
- (f) **PILnet (The Global Network for Public Interest Law)**: Through its pro bono clearinghouse, PILnet connects NGOs with law firms and attorneys to provide pro bono services.<sup>24</sup>
- (g) **Street Lawyer Association (Utcajogász)**:

---

<sup>19</sup> See <https://bpugyvedikamara.hu/dijmentes-segitseg-es-jogi-tanacs-budapesti-ugyvedektol/> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>20</sup> See <https://hclu.hu/en/about-us-page> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.cordelia.hu/index.php/en/> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.helsinki.hu/en/> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>23</sup> See <http://en.hatter.hu/> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.pilnet.org/opportunities-for-lawyers/> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>The Street Lawyers Association has been fighting for the right to housing, for the enforcement of social and housing rights, and for improving the situation of homeless people and people living in housing poverty.<sup>25</sup></p> <p>(h) <b>Patent Association:</b> The Association provides free legal advice service including crucial legal and psychological information to women living in abusive relationships in order to be aware of their human rights and the relevant laws.<sup>26</sup></p> <p>(i) <b>Child’s Rights Centre of the Hintalovon Foundation:</b> The Child’s Rights Centre of the Hintalovon Foundation, a children’s rights NGO, provides information to parents who require legal advice in relation to custody, divorce, school issues or sexual abuse.<sup>27</sup></p> <p><b>2. Legal Clinics in Hungary</b></p> <p>Hungarian law faculties have been slowly developing legal clinic programs, often modelled after U.S.-style clinical legal education:</p> <p>(a) <b>ELTE Faculty of Law – Legal Clinic Program (ELTE Jogklinika):</b> Focuses on practical legal education for students and offers limited free legal advice under supervision (including on property law matters).</p> <p>(b) <b>Pázmány Péter Catholic University – Legal Aid Clinic:</b> Offers supervised legal assistance in selected areas. Primarily educational but serves the public in some cases.<sup>28</sup></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>Attorneys may reach out to pro bono clearinghouses such as PILnet. PILnet helped to introduce the concept of pro bono practice in Central Europe through its Hungarian Pro Bono Clearinghouse, and later through a network of additional PILnet and partner clearinghouses.<sup>29</sup></p>   |

<sup>25</sup> See <http://utcajogasz.hu/> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.patent.org.hu/en/how-we-can-help> (last visited on December 26, 2024).

<sup>27</sup> See <https://hintalovon.hu/en/home/> (last visited on December 27, 2024).

<sup>28</sup> <https://pte.hu/hu/egyetemi-elet/jogklinika>

<sup>29</sup> See <https://www.pilnet.org/our-work/europe-eurasia/hungarian/> (last visited on February 22, 2026).

16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?

Since 2011, PILnet has been presenting the annual Hungarian Pro Bono Award to an independent lawyer and a law firm respectively.<sup>30</sup>

### Acknowledgements

In connection with this chapter, we are grateful for the support and insight of local counsel:

#### **Szecskey Attorneys at Law**

### Learn more

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

---

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.pilnet.org/our-work/europe-eurasia/hungarian/hungarian-pro-bono-awards/> (last visited on February 22, 2026).