

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in India

Introduction

India has a limited pro bono legal services tradition. While certain pro bono legal services are organized and provided by a number of individual advocates, law firms, non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”), law schools and bar associations across the country, the demand for such services far exceeds the supply.

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	No	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 Constitution of India is the supreme governing law in India. It guarantees certain fundamental rights to all citizens of India, prescribes directive principles of state policy, which are guidelines to be incorporated or taken into account in the framing of legislations and policies and also sets out the fundamental duties for every Indian citizen.</p> <p>The Advocates Act, 1961, as amended (the “Advocates Act”) sets out the law relating to the legal practitioners, including the admission and enrollment of advocates, right to practice, duties of advocates and provides for the constitution of Bar Councils as well as the procedure for undertaking disciplinary proceedings against advocates.¹</p> <p>Amongst other things, the Bar Council of India</p>

¹ Available at: <http://www.barcouncilofindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Advocates-Act1961.pdf> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

	<p>Rules framed under the Advocates Act regulates matters related to the Bar Council of India and State Bar Councils, legal education, standards of professional conduct and etiquette of advocates, conditions for right to practice law in India and procedures for undertaking disciplinary proceedings.²</p>
Regulatory landscape for pro bono	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>India's Constitution, national legislations and Supreme Court jurisprudence collectively articulate the importance of broadly accessible legal services.¹ However, the provision of pro bono legal services is not regulated in India.</p> <p>Private attorneys are not mandated to undertake or report pro bono work. While individual advocates may contribute their time to public service activities, the work tends to be ad hoc and consequently difficult to organise or measure.</p> <p>The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, as amended (the "LSA Act") aims to provide free and competent legal services to indigent individuals.²</p> <p>Rules and regulations framed under the LSA Act include the National Legal Services Authority Rules, 1995; the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee Rules, 2000; the Permanent Lok Adalat (Other Terms and Conditions of Appointment of Chairman and Other Persons) Rules, 2003; the National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010; the National Legal Services Authority (Legal Services Clinics) Regulations, 2011; National Legal Services Authority (Lok Adalat) Regulations, 2009 and the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee Regulations,</p>

² Available at:

https://indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/1631?view_type=search&sam_handle=123456789/1362
(last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹ See e.g. Article 39A of The Constitution of India 1949, Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987, *S.P. Gupta v. Union of India*, (1982) 2 SCR 365.

² Available at: <https://indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/1925/1/198739.pdf> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

	1996, each as amended. ³
3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?	Any lawyer with a valid practicing license registered with any State Bar Council is eligible to volunteer his/her legal services as pro bono. No separate license is required to provide pro bono legal services. ⁴
4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?	<p>The Advocates Act specifies that only advocates (as defined under the Advocates Act) are entitled to practice law in India in any Indian court or before any Indian authority.⁵ To qualify as an advocate, a lawyer must fulfill the conditions prescribed under the Advocates Act and be admitted to the rolls of advocates of any State Bar Council.⁶</p> <p>In 2023, the Bar Council of India introduced new rules which allow foreign lawyers and law firms to practice international law in the country, on a reciprocal basis and under certain limited circumstances. Foreign lawyers/law firms must be registered with the Bar Council of India to practice law in India. However, they are not permitted to appear before any courts, tribunals or regulatory/statutory authorities as their right to practice law is restricted to only non-litigious matters and international arbitration cases.⁷ As the practice is limited to international law, foreign law firms and lawyers cannot develop their own pro bono practices in India.⁸</p>
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	India currently does not have any minimum pro bono requirements to obtain a law degree or for continued licensure. In 2024, a committee constituted for the “Review of the Working of

³ Available at:

https://indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/1925?view_type=search&sam_handle=123456789/1362 (last visited on January 30, 2025).

⁴ “Pro Bono Nyaya Bandhu” (Department of Justice, Government of India), available at <https://probono-doj.in/static/about-probono.php> (last visited on February 20, 2025).

⁵ Sections 29, 30 and 33, Advocates Act, 1961.

⁶ Section 24 of the Advocates Act sets out the eligibility conditions for a person to be admitted as an advocate to a State roll. Section 24 states that, amongst other things, a person will be qualified to be admitted as an advocate on a State roll if he or she is a citizen of India. A national of any other country may be admitted as an advocate on a State roll, if citizens of India, duly qualified are permitted to practice law in that other country.

⁷ The Bar Council of India Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms in India, 2022, available at: [https://egazette.gov.in/\(S/lli5otih53rbuyfcrqsk30cj\)/ViewPDF.aspx](https://egazette.gov.in/(S/lli5otih53rbuyfcrqsk30cj)/ViewPDF.aspx) (last visited January 30, 2025).

⁸ K. Shimizu, India Sees Foreign Law Firms Take Baby Steps Toward Outposts, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/business-and-practice/india-sees-foreign-law-firms-take-baby-steps-to-set-up-outposts> (last visited January 30, 2025).

	Legal Aid under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987” submitted its report to the Indian Parliament ⁹ and recommended that the Bar Council of India should require every lawyer to handle at least one pro bono case per year in order for such lawyer to secure any relief fund from All India/State Bar Council.
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	No, aspiring lawyers are not required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers in India.
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?	Neither local bar associations, regulatory bodies nor other bodies set aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers in India
8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?	India currently does not have any CLE requirements. There are also no minimum pro bono requirements to obtain a law degree or for continued licensure.
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 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?	Professional indemnity insurance for lawyers, advocates, solicitors and counsels (including in-house lawyers) is available in India, but it is not mandatory. There is no requirement to obtain a professional indemnity legal insurance cover for pro bono legal services. ¹⁰
10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?	The Standards of Professional Conduct and Etiquette set out under the Bar Council of India Rules prohibit an advocate from soliciting work or advertising, either directly or indirectly, whether by circulars, advertisements, touts, personal communications, interviews not warranted by

⁹ Available at:

https://sansad.in/getFile/rsnew/Committee_site/Committee_File/ReportFile/18/191/143_2024_2_12.pdf?source=rajyasabha (last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹⁰ International Bar Association, IBA International Principles on Professional Indemnity Insurance for the Legal Profession, <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=IBA-International-Principles-on-Professional-Indemnity-Insurance-for-the-Legal-Profession> (last visited on February 20, 2025).

	<p>personal relations, furnishing or inspiring newspaper comments or producing photographs to be published in connection with cases in which he has been engaged or concerned.¹¹ The Standards of Professional Conduct and Etiquette also state that the sign-board, name-plate and stationery of an advocate should not indicate, amongst other things, that he or she is or has been associated with any person or organization or with any particular cause or matter or that he or she specializes in any particular type of work.¹² As the above-mentioned restrictions on advocates extends to both fee-paying and non-fee paying work, advocates entitled to practice law in India are prohibited from advertising pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients.</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 following are the main areas of law which require or present opportunities for pro bono, on the basis set out below:</p> <p>Criminal law – Lack of representation in criminal matters could lead to denial of justice resulting in unjustified imprisonments.</p> <p>Environmental law – Lack of awareness to environmental concerns and the vast demographics of the Indian subcontinent could lead to neglect of environmental resources, making this an area which would benefit from focused pro bono legal services.</p> <p>Matrimonial disputes and family law –matrimonial and family disputes could benefit greatly if more focused pro bono legal services were available.</p> <p>A few more areas which have unmet legal needs include matters concerning caste-based discrimination, recovery of pension and insurance claims of elderly citizens and industrial disputes involving workmen rights. These areas of law would benefit from greater access to pro bono</p>

¹¹ Paragraph 36, Section IV, Chapter II, Part VI of the Bar Council of India Rules framed under the Advocates Act, 1961 available at: <https://bnblegal.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BCIRulesPartItoIII.pdf> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹² Id.

	legal services given the current limited resources and lack of specialized knowledge in such matters.
12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?	<p>A non-exhaustive list of NGOs that provide pro bono legal services in India includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawyers Collective;¹³ • Alternative Law Forum;¹⁴ • i-Probono;¹⁵ • Majlis;¹⁶ • National Campaign for the People’s Right to Information;¹⁷ • ProBono India;¹⁸ • Public Interest Legal Support and Research Center;¹⁹ • Swayam;²⁰ and • Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha.²¹ <p>Other providers of pro bono legal services includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law clinics organized by law schools: Most law schools in India offer clinics and student activities focused on providing legal advice, offering dispute resolution services, and promoting legal awareness among disadvantaged communities.²² • Private law firms: Some law firms work on a pro bono basis with NGOs. However, most law firms in India do not have mandatory pro bono programs or pro bono requirements for their lawyers.²³ • Individual Attorneys: Individual advocates may contribute their time to public service activities voluntarily and on an ad hoc basis. They are currently the major

¹³ See <http://www.lawyerscollective.org/> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹⁴ See <http://www.altlawforum.org/> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹⁵ See <https://i-probono.com/> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹⁶ See <http://www.majlislaw.com/> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹⁷ See <http://righttoinformation.info/> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹⁸ See <http://www.probono-india.in/about-probono-india.php> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

¹⁹ See <http://www.unhcr.org/48fdeca72.html> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

²⁰ See <http://www.swayam.info/> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

²¹ See <http://www.masum.org.in/> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

²² Jane Schukoske & Roopali Adlakha, Enhancing Good Governance in India: Law Schools and Community-University Engagement, J. Indian L. & Soc’y 206 Vol. 3 (2012), <http://www.smsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ENHANCING-GOOD-GOVERNANCE-IN-INDIA-LAW-SCHOOLS.pdf> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

²³ Arpita Gupta, “Pro Bono and Corporate Legal Sector in India” (2012) HLS Program on the Legal Profession Research Paper No. 2013-4, available at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2344257 , (last visited on January 30, 2025).

	<p>contributors towards pro bono practice in India. An individual lawyer can participate in the legal aid schemes undertaken by the bar association in which such individual is enrolled. Lawyers can also be empanelled on the legal service committee constituted by the relevant state's LSAs.²⁴</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>The Department of Justice has partnered with the National Legal Services Authority ("NALSA") and the Common Service Centres (CSC) to create Tele-Law, which provides access to lawyers through video conferencing or telephone capabilities.²⁵</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 Department of Justice under the Government of India retains a database of pro bono matters for eligible attorneys interested in performing pro bono work. The Department of Justice also runs a pro bono legal services program called Nyaya Bandhu (which translates to "friend of justice").²⁶</p> <p>The Nyaya Bandhu is the Government of India's primary initiative to establish a framework for dispensation of pro bono legal services across the country. Under the program, practicing advocates, interested in undertaking legal pro bono work, are connected, via mobile technology, with eligible marginalised beneficiaries, after due scrutiny for delivery of pro bono legal services.²⁷</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 Department of Justice provides advocates a platform to register in order for them to provide pro bono legal services.²⁸ NALSA was constituted by the Central Government under the LSA Act as a public organization where lawyers can empanel</p>

²⁴ National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010, as amended.

²⁵ See <https://www.tele-law.in/overview-of-tele-law.html> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

²⁶ See <https://probono-doj.in/about.html> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

²⁷ See <http://doj.gov.in/page/pro-bono-legal-services> (last visited on February 19, 2025).

²⁸ Id.

	<p>themselves to provide free legal services²⁹ to indigent individuals and organize Lok Adalats (an out-of-court dispute resolution forum) for settlement of disputes.³⁰ However, please note that foreign attorneys cannot enroll with these organizations.</p>
<p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p>	<p>Some Indian legal publications have recently started to cover pro bono work in India. For example, the Legal Era recognizes Professional Social Responsibility Award of the Year for Pro Bono Initiatives.³¹</p> <p>Internationally, the International Bar Association (IBA) has an annual IBA Pro Bono award honouring lawyer across jurisdictions (including India) for outstanding commitments to pro bono work.³²</p> <p>Further, Legal 500 also recognizes Indian Law Firms for their pro bono services.³³</p>

Acknowledgements

Name of Local Counsel: S&R Associates

Name of Individual at Local Counsel: Jabarati Chandra and Radhika Ghosh

Learn more

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

²⁹ <https://nalsa.gov.in/about-us> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

³⁰ The application form for availing legal aid from NALSA is available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiXo9DSwuiKAxXzQEEAHQLFF8QQFnoECAsQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fnalsa.gov.in%2Fservices%2Flegal-aid%2Fclaiming-free-legal-aid-application-procedure&usg=AOvVaw0e3R-Twh3I8Atp3uTwX_xT&opi=89978449 (last visited on January 6, 2025).

³¹ Available at: <https://www.legaleraonline.com/legal-era-tv/awards/legal-era-indian-legal-awards-2024-recognising-legal-finesse-accomplishments-celebrating-the-constant-striving-towards-legal-excellence-908613> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

³² Available at: <https://www.ibanet.org/India-Vineetha-MG-receives-2024-IBA-Pro-Bono-Award> (last visited on January 30, 2025).

³³ Available at: <https://www.legal500.com/firms/238367-agrud-partners/c-india/international-capabilities> (last visited on January 30, 2025).