

# Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

## Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Malaysia

### Introduction

The pro bono legal services in Malaysia are provided on a voluntary basis primarily through legal aid centers managed by the Malaysian Bar and various private sector initiatives and complement the well-established government-sponsored legal aid scheme. Although legal services in Malaysia have been liberalized to allow foreign lawyers to practice in Malaysia under limited circumstances, representation of pro bono clients in court proceedings are limited to advocates and solicitors qualified to practice in Malaysia. Members of the Malaysian Bar actively participate in pro bono work in the areas of human rights, criminal defence and public interest. Pupils are encouraged to participate in pro bono legal work during their legal training to instill a sense of social responsibility.

### 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?
Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	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 Legal Profession Act 1976 (the “LPA”)<sup>1</sup> consolidates laws relating to the provision of legal services and legal profession in Malaysia, while the Advocates Ordinance Sabah 1953<sup>2</sup> and Advocate Ordinance Sarawak 1953 govern legal services and legal professions in Sabah and Sarawak, respectively.<sup>3</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup>See

[https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload\\_files/document/Legal%20Profession%20Act%201976%20as%20at%201%20August%202018%20\(English\).from%20AGC%20website.pdf](https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload_files/document/Legal%20Profession%20Act%201976%20as%20at%201%20August%202018%20(English).from%20AGC%20website.pdf)

[http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/LOM/EN/Act\\_166.pdf](http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/LOM/EN/Act_166.pdf) (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://sabahlawsociety.org/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>3</sup> See Re: Mohd Mustaqim Muradi [2024] 2 MLRH 712

	<p>The Malaysian Bar<sup>4</sup> oversees the regulation and enforcement of the LPA within the Peninsula Malaysia whereas the Sabah Law Society<sup>5</sup> and the Advocates' Association of Sarawak<sup>6</sup> regulate and enforce the LPA within the states of Sabah and Sarawak, respectively. There is no overarching governmental regulatory body of legal profession in Malaysia. Instead, advocates and solicitors in the federal government sector are governed by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission whereas the private sector is governed through the three main bar associations referenced above.</p>
<b>Regulatory landscape for pro bono</b>	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>Malaysia does not have a standalone statute that specifically regulates pro bono work. Unpaid legal services by advocates and solicitors are generally permitted, provided practitioners comply with the LPA and Malaysian Bar Council rules on practice, ethics, publicity, conflicts and client money.<sup>78</sup></p> <p>The Bar Council Legal Aid Centre's administration and regulation is placed directly under the Bar Council pursuant to the LPA.<sup>9</sup></p> <p>On the other hand, state-funded legal aid is provided under the Legal Aid Act 1971<sup>10</sup> and administered by the Department of Legal Aid.</p>
<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Yes. Only advocates and solicitors<sup>11</sup> who are licensed to practice law in Malaysia can provide legal services, including pro bono legal services, in Malaysia.</p>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>5</sup> See <https://sabahlawsociety.org/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>6</sup> See - <http://www.sarawak-advocates.org.my/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>7</sup> See

[https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload\\_files/document/Legal%20Profession%20Act%201976%20as%20at%201%20August%202018%20\(English\).from%20AGC%20website.pdf](https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload_files/document/Legal%20Profession%20Act%201976%20as%20at%201%20August%202018%20(English).from%20AGC%20website.pdf) and [http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/LOM/EN/Act\\_166.pdf](http://www.agc.gov.my/agcportal/uploads/files/Publications/LOM/EN/Act_166.pdf) (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/article/news/legal-and-general-news/members-opinions/legal-aid-in-malaysia-the-need-for-greater-government-commitment> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>9</sup> See <https://lom.agc.gov.my/act-detail.php?type=amendment&act=A1755&lang=BI&language=BI> (last visited on 4 November 2025)

<sup>10</sup> See [https://www.commonlii.org/my/legis/consol\\_act/laa197164/](https://www.commonlii.org/my/legis/consol_act/laa197164/) (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>11</sup> Section 3 of the LPA defines **advocate and solicitor** as an advocate and solicitor of the High Court admitted and enrolled under the LPA or under any written law prior to the coming into operation of the LPA.

<p>4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Yes. In order to provide pro bono services in Malaysia, foreign-qualified lawyers are required to be registered to practise in Malaysia in the permitted practice areas in an International Partnership, a Qualified Foreign Law Firm or a Malaysian law firm<sup>12</sup></p> <p>Malaysian law has been liberalized to permit foreign lawyers to practice in Malaysia under limited circumstances and in certain permitted areas of practice (for example, a transaction regulated by Malaysian law and at least one other national law, or a transaction regulated solely by any law other than Malaysian law). In the case of a qualified foreign law firm, the Malaysian Bar has stated that there should be a proviso that such aspect of work regulated by Malaysian law shall be undertaken with one or more advocates and solicitors of the High Court of Malaya holding a valid and subsisting practicing certificate.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>However, permitted practice areas for foreign lawyers expressly <b>exclude</b><sup>14</sup> constitutional and administrative law; conveyancing; criminal; family law; succession (wills, probate and administration); trusts (where the settlor is an individual and the law of charities and foundations); retail banking (including loans to small and medium enterprises); registration of patents and trademarks; and any court or quasi-judicial appearances or advice on the conduct of such proceedings.<sup>15</sup></p> <p>As a result of these exclusions and given that pro bono services in Malaysia mainly relate to criminal matters, it is difficult for foreign lawyers to undertake pro bono work.</p>
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<sup>12</sup> See Section 40J of the LPA and Para (1) in [https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload\\_files/document/Guidance%20Notes%20for%20Foreign%20Lawyers%20\(Updated%202022%20July%202020\).pdf](https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload_files/document/Guidance%20Notes%20for%20Foreign%20Lawyers%20(Updated%202022%20July%202020).pdf) (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>13</sup> See Rule (2) in [https://lom.agc.gov.my/act-view.php?type=pua&lang=BI&no=P.U.%20\(A\)%20148/2014](https://lom.agc.gov.my/act-view.php?type=pua&lang=BI&no=P.U.%20(A)%20148/2014) (last visited on 4 November 2025)

<sup>14</sup> See Para (4) in [https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload\\_files/document/Guidance%20Notes%20for%20Foreign%20Lawyers%20\(Updated%202022%20July%202020\).pdf](https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload_files/document/Guidance%20Notes%20for%20Foreign%20Lawyers%20(Updated%202022%20July%202020).pdf) (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/article/members/become-a-member/foreign-lawyer-lawfirm/liberalisation/liberalisation-of-legal-services> (last visited on 4 November 2025) for further information on the liberalization of legal services.

<p>5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?</p>	<p>The LPA does not impose any obligation to do pro bono work in Malaysia.</p>
<p>6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?</p>	<p>Every advocate or solicitor (pupil)<sup>16</sup> aspiring to be a lawyer in Malaysia is required to serve on a pro bono basis at a legal aid center for at least fourteen (14) days during his/her period of pupillage.<sup>17</sup></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>The LPA does not impose any obligation to do pro bono work in Malaysia, so there are no aspirational pro bono hour targets. Generally, advocates and solicitors undertake pro bono work through legal aid centers nationwide on a voluntary basis.</p>
<p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>	<p>The Malaysian Bar has made the Continuous Professional Development (“CPD”) mandatory for the advocates and solicitors who were admitted to the Malaysian Bar from 1 July 1991 onwards and aspiring advocates and solicitors (pupils) who have commenced their pupillage from 1 July 2016 onwards.<sup>18</sup></p> <p>While an advocate and solicitor does not receive CPD points for pro bono work handled independently, those who handle matters through the Malaysian Bar Council’s Legal Aid Centers will earn one CPD point per file upon conclusion.<sup>19</sup></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</p>	<p>Professional indemnity insurance is administered by the Malaysian Bar Council on behalf of every advocate and solicitor. Regardless of the nature of the work conducted by an advocate and solicitor (i.e. legal service or pro bono legal service), all advocates and solicitors are insured under a single master policy before they can be issued their practicing certificates.<sup>20</sup></p>

<sup>16</sup> Section 12(1) of the LPA.

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See [http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/bc\\_rulings/10.06\\_compulsory\\_attendance\\_of\\_pupil\\_at\\_a\\_legal\\_aid\\_centre.html](http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/bc_rulings/10.06_compulsory_attendance_of_pupil_at_a_legal_aid_centre.html) (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>18</sup> See <https://cpd.malaysianbar.org.my/cpd-scheme/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>19</sup> See [CPD-Guidelines.amendmentsFeb2023.v1.pdf](https://www.praktis.com.my/about-us/history-of-pii)

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.praktis.com.my/about-us/history-of-pii> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<p>partnership with a private law firm or organization working on the same pro bono project?</p>	
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>The Legal Profession (Publicity) Rules 2001 (“LPPER 2001”) which provides the rules for general publication by advocates and solicitors, prohibits the advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients. These rules prohibit.<sup>21</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) making any claim that an advocate or solicitor or any other advocate and solicitor practicing in his or her firm is a specialist or expert in any area of practice; and</li> <li>(ii) making any direct or indirect reference to the number or proportion of cases that have been successfully undertaken by an advocate or solicitor or their firm, or to the advocate’s or solicitor’s earnings or the earnings of any other advocates and solicitors practicing in the same firm.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pro bono practice and culture</b></p>	
<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>Human rights law in Malaysia presents significant opportunities for pro bono engagement, in areas concerning freedom of expression, the rights of refugees and migrants, and issues related to detention.</p> <p>Challenges such as restrictive legislation limiting free speech, the use of oppressive laws to stifle dissent, and the mistreatment of refugees, manifested through prolonged detention and forced repatriation highlight critical gaps in legal protection. These issues reflect major unmet legal needs in Malaysia, where vulnerable communities often lack access to adequate legal representation and advocacy.<sup>22</sup></p>

<sup>21</sup> Rule 5(1)(b) of the LPPER 2001.

<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/malaysia/report-malaysia/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>Publicly funded legal aid remains the primary, institutional channel for access to justice in Malaysia. The main providers include the Legal Aid Department (a government agency under the purview of the Prime Minister’s Department),<sup>23</sup> the Malaysian Bar Council and the National Legal Aid Foundation (the <i>Yayasan Bantuan Guaman Kebangsaan</i> or “YBGK”).<sup>24</sup></p> <p>Apart from the government’s legal aid program, pro bono legal services are also offered by NGOs and bar associations to individuals in need.<sup>25</sup> Examples include DHRRA (Malaysia’s pro bono legal counselling program for statelessness and community matters)<sup>26</sup> and global pro bono clearinghouses and legal services providers such as TrustLaw or PILnet.<sup>27</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>Malaysia’s first Digital and Artificial Intelligence Legal Aid Centre was set up in Sabah in 2021. While the legal advice as part of the service provided is on a pro bono basis, users will have to pay for the computer services which entitles access to statutes, case law, textbooks, agreements, forms and precedents.<sup>28</sup></p> <p>The integration of AI is expected to enhance the efficiency and reach of pro bono legal services in the region, but this has yet to be incorporated in its entirety.</p>
<p><b>Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts</b></p>	
<p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>	<p>The YBGK is a government legal aid center governed by the Legal Aid Act 1971 (as described above) through which advocates and solicitors can provide pro bono legal services.</p> <p>The Legal Aid Centre established by the Malaysian Bar Council in 1982 is the main non-</p>

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.jbg.gov.my/index.php/en/information/the-historical-background> (last visited on 4 November 2025)

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/article/public/legal-aid/yayasan-bantuan-guaman-kebangsaan-ybgk/about-ybgk/about-ybgk> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>25</sup> See <https://guaman.my/legal-advice-in-malaysia/#is-there-legal-aid-in-malaysia> (last visited on 4 November 2025)

<sup>26</sup> See <https://dhrmalaysia.org.my/initiatives/pro-bono-legal-counselling/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>27</sup> See <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/> and <https://www.pilnet.org/> (Last viewed on 4 November 2025).

<sup>28</sup> See <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2019/08/18/digital-ai-based-legal-aid-centre-to-open-doors-in-sabah> (last visited on 4 November 2025)

	governmental source of pro bono in Malaysia. <sup>29</sup> It is fully staffed (on a pro bono basis) and funded by Malaysian Bar Council members. <sup>30</sup>
<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><u>In Peninsular Malaysia</u></p> <p>The Malaysian Bar Council legal aid center is the main organization which coordinates pro bono opportunities.</p> <p>Suaram – a non-governmental organization established in 1989 to monitor and advocate for the respect of human rights in Malaysia.<sup>31</sup></p> <p>UNHCR – a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.<sup>32</sup></p> <p>United Nations Development Program<sup>33</sup></p> <p>Tenaganita – a Malaysian human rights organization dedicated in assisting, building, advocating and protecting migrants, refugees, women and children from exploitation, abuse, discrimination, slavery and human trafficking.<sup>34</sup></p> <p>Women’s Aid Organization – seeks to end violence against women and promote gender equality in Malaysia.<sup>35</sup></p> <p>AWAM – an independent feminist organization in Malaysia committed to ending gender-based violence and upholding equality and rights for all.<sup>36</sup></p> <p><u>In Sarawak</u></p> <p>Advocates Association of Sarawak.<sup>37</sup></p>

<sup>29</sup> See <https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Legal-Aid-Memo-MALAYSIA.pdf> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.pilnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Legal-Aid-Memo-MALAYSIA.pdf> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.suaram.net/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>32</sup> See <https://www.unhcr.org/en-my/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.my.undp.org/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.tenaganita.net/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>35</sup> See <https://wao.org.my/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.awam.org.my/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.sarawak-advocates.org.my> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

	<p><u>In Sabah</u></p> <p>Sabah Law Society’s Legal Aid Clinic.<sup>38</sup></p>
<p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p>	<p>In Malaysia, there are no specific awards, lists or rankings related pro bono work.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, lawyers who make notable contributions to the legal field, including pro bono activities, are recognized through various esteemed awards. One such accolade is the Malaysian Bar Lifetime Achievement Award, which honors individuals who have significantly influenced the legal profession. For instance, Datuk Haji Sulaiman Abdullah, who received this award in both 2023 and 2024, is particularly distinguished for his pro bono initiatives, including providing legal assistance to the Academic and Administrative Staff Association of Universiti Sains Malaysia (PKAPUSM) and the Penang Malay Association (PEMENANG).<sup>39</sup></p> <p>Beyond national recognition, several Malaysian lawyers have garnered international awards for their pro bono endeavors.</p> <p>Although Malaysia lacks a specific award for “pro bono lawyers,” these instances demonstrate that pro bono efforts are highly valued both domestically and globally.</p>

## Acknowledgements

**Name of Local Counsel:** Zaid Ibrahim & Co

**Name of Individual at Local Counsel:** Joan Ting

## Learn more

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

<sup>38</sup> See <https://www.sabahlawsociety.org/> (last visited on 4 November 2025).

<sup>39</sup> See [https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload\\_files/document/MBLAA%202023-24%20CB.pdf](https://www.malaysianbar.org.my/cms/upload_files/document/MBLAA%202023-24%20CB.pdf) (last visited on 4 November 2025).