

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria's legal aid tradition is guided by the Legal Aid Act 2011 (the "Act"), which established the Legal Aid Council ("LAC"), and general rules regulating the legal profession like the Legal Practitioners Act, 1962 and the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners 2023 (the "RPC"). The LAC is responsible for the provision of free legal assistance and advice to Nigerian citizens who cannot afford the services of a private lawyer. The Act requires, among other things, police officers and courts to inform any accused persons of their entitlement to legal representation and notify the LAC if any persons are eligible for their services. In addition, some State Governments, like the Lagos State Government, have Offices of the Public Defender (established for Lagos by the Office of the Public Defender Law of 2003) which provide free legal services to indigent residents of the States in both civil and criminal cases.

Nigeria's legal ecosystem still faces a number of challenges, such as the lack of funding for the LAC.¹ Various NGOs and law firms have sought to fill this gap, providing pro bono services in a number of important areas including human rights, criminal defense, and civil litigation. As with other countries in Africa, there are an increasing number of ways in which lawyers may participate in pro bono legal work, and the number of lawyers participating is steadily growing. Law firms and legal practitioners continue to dedicate increasing time and resources to their pro bono practices, particularly those based in Lagos.

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

- 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.

It typically takes five years to complete a law degree in Nigeria. Upon completion, graduates are awarded a "Bachelor of Laws" (LL.B.) degree. This is followed by a mandatory one-year period of vocational training at the Nigerian Law School under the supervision of the Council of Legal

¹ <https://blog.nigerianbar.org.ng/2024/08/27/legal-aid-council-chairman-advocates-for-pro-bono-reforms-calls-for-government-support-to-enhance-access-to-justice/> (last viewed on 6 March 2026).

	<p>Education. Upon completion, graduates will obtain their Qualifying Certificates and can then be called to the Nigerian Bar.²</p> <p>Admission to the Nigerian Bar for lawyers who graduated outside Nigeria is permitted after they have first successfully completed a course of introduction to Nigerian law known as the Bar Part One course. After that, like their counterparts who graduated from Nigerian universities, they must complete the one-year vocational training course at the Nigerian Law School before being called to the Nigerian Bar.</p> <p>The process of qualification is the same for both external and in-house counsel.</p>
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Regulatory landscape for pro bono

<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>The general rules of conduct that guide legal practitioners also regulate legal practitioners who provide pro bono services. These rules can be found in the Legal Practitioners Act 1962, the RPC, the Legal Practitioners Remuneration (For Business, Legal Service and Representation) Order 2023.³</p> <p>While there are no specific laws relating to the practice of pro bono, the Legal Aid Act 2011 lays out the current rules and policies of the Legal Aid Council (LAC), and this is summarized below for information.</p> <p>The LAC, under the Federal Ministry of Justice, was set up in 1976 by the Federal Government to provide free legal assistance and advice to Nigerian citizens who could not afford the services of a private lawyer. The Legal Aid Act expanded the scope of the mandate of the LAC to provide free legal aid services to indigent Nigerians. Section 9 of the Legal Aid Act authorizes the Council to pay incentives to legal practitioners who engage in pro bono services. However, this provision appears inactivated due</p>
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² https://placbillstrack.org/pub/Legal-Practitioners-Act-Cap-L11-LFN-2004-%28Repeal-and-Re-Enactment%29-Bill-2021-%28SB.815%29.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

³ These rules can be found in the Legal Practitioners Act 1962, the RPC, the Legal Practitioners Remuneration (For Business, Legal Service and Representation) Order 2023, etc. For example, Rule 14 of the RPC requires all legal practitioners to be dedicated and devoted to the client's case.

	<p>to insufficient funding.⁴</p> <p>According to the Legal Aid Act, legal aid shall be granted only to people whose income does not exceed the national minimum wage. The Governing Board of the LAC does, however, have discretion to authorize legal aid on a contributory basis to a person whose income exceeds even ten times this amount, provided that where damages and costs are awarded in that person's favour, the LAC shall recover its expenses by retaining the awarded costs plus an additional amount equal to 10% of the damages awarded.</p> <p>The LAC handles both relatively serious criminal cases such as murder, manslaughter, rape, affray and stealing and certain civil cases including claims arising from criminal activities, as well as claims arising from breaches of fundamental rights guaranteed under Chapter IV of Nigeria's Constitution. They also provide alternative dispute resolution for various issues such as landlord/tenant, master/servant, employer/employee, husband/wife, inheritance and family matters.</p> <p>Legal aid provided by the LAC ranges from rendering legal services through consultation, advice or representation in court. The LAC provides such services through either the salaried lawyers staffed in the LAC's offices or private practitioners. If an application for legal aid is approved, the LAC may make referrals to private legal practitioners, whose names are listed on a register of practitioners maintained by the LAC and who may or may not receive a nominal fee, depending on arrangements made with the LAC that vary from lawyer to lawyer and from case to case. Lawyers who are willing to assist persons seeking legal aid are entitled to be included on this panel, unless the LAC has good reason for excluding them.</p>
<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>A lawyer does not need a license to provide pro bono legal services beyond the usual qualification to practice law.</p>

⁴ <https://blog.nigerianbar.org.ng/2024/08/27/legal-aid-council-chairman-advocates-for-pro-bono-reforms-calls-for-government-support-to-enhance-access-to-justice/> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

	<p>With respect to state-provided legal aid, sections 14-18 of the Legal Aid Act require the LAC to maintain a register of legal practitioners who engage in legal aid work. This registry is intended to recognize and coordinate efforts to provide free legal services to those who would otherwise be unable to afford them. Legal practitioners who institute or conduct legal aid cases on behalf of persons entitled to legal aid under the Legal Aid Act should also register such cases with the LAC, albeit registration is not a condition to providing legal aid services.</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>To provide pro bono services in Nigeria, foreign-qualified lawyers would have to be licensed to practice in Nigeria as set forth above.</p> <p>For state-provided legal aid, the LAC may grant licenses to persons who have undergone a prescribed course in paralegal services to render legal aid services in appropriate situations.⁵ This could include foreign-trained lawyers. However, this is not a common occurrence in practice and we are not aware of any case where such a grant has actually been made.</p>
<p>5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?</p>	<p>There is no minimum requirement of pro bono hours for Nigerian lawyers. However, a lawyer cannot be appointed to the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria without showing evidence of diligent conduct of not less than three pro bono cases in the legal year immediately preceding submission of and application to the Legal Practitioners Privileges Committee.</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>There is no requirement for aspiring lawyers to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to become licensed lawyers. However, there have been recent calls for reform by the Chairman of the LAC and others in the Nigerian Bar Association (the "NBA").⁶</p>

⁵ See Section 17(3) of the Legal Aid Act 2011.

⁶ See, for example, <https://blog.nigerianbar.org.ng/2024/08/27/legal-aid-council-chairman-advocates-for-pro-bono-reforms-calls-for-government-support-to-enhance-access-to-justice/> (last visited on 11 September 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>The NBA proactively encourages its members to take on pro bono work. The NBA's Pro Bono Declaration encourages law firms and individual lawyers to provide, on a pro bono basis, legal representation and advice to at least five indigent individuals, group of persons or communities each year. At the time of publication of the NBA's annual report in 2023, there were over 1,671 private legal practitioners registered as lawyers providing pro bono services in partnership with the LAC.⁷</p> <p>As also noted above, lawyers who wish to apply to the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria must demonstrate they are engaged in pro bono legal service, which motivates many experienced lawyers to get involved with pro bono work.</p>
<p>8. Do lawyers receive any "Continuing Legal Education" (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>	<p>In Nigeria, lawyers are required to participate in Mandatory Continuing Legal Education ("MCLE") as part of maintaining their professional competence and retaining their practicing status with the NBA.⁸ Pro bono work is encouraged as a professional responsibility and social obligation, but the NBA does not grant CLE credits for pro bono work. Instead, CLE credits are typically earned by attending approved seminars, workshops and training sessions.</p>
<p>Insurance and advertising</p>	
<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>Lawyers in Nigeria are not required to have professional indemnity ("PI") insurance for pro bono legal services. However, PI insurance is important to protect lawyers' personal and business assets, whether in the provision of pro bono or paid legal services. There is no hard evidence readily available as to the extent to which lawyers carry such insurance. Outside the larger law firms, it is believed that most lawyers in Nigeria do not carry PI insurance whether for fully-paid work or for pro bono work.</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 rules in Nigeria that limit or prohibit the advertising of pro bono successes and the soliciting of new pro bono clients. These</p>

⁷ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_cWE892sFdM_KFB0gFcNQLdRavrwic0/edit (last visited on 11 September 2025).

⁸ See Rule 11 of the RPC.

	<p>restrictions are primarily governed by the RPC, which prohibits lawyers from advertising, touting or soliciting professional employment directly or indirectly through various means, including self-promotion or announcements, whether pro bono or otherwise. Lawyers may not publicize pro bono successes as a means of soliciting clients or enhancing their professional image.</p> <p>However, the sharing of general information about pro bono work in a professional and non-solicitous manner, by way of law firm annual reports or newsletters, may be permissible if it adheres to the rules of professionalism and confidentiality, and does not target specific individuals or groups in a way that could be interpreted as solicitation. Lawyers can also work with NGOs, the NBA, the LAC or other legal aid providers to offer pro bono services. These organizations may refer cases to lawyers without violating the rules on solicitation.</p>
<p>Pro bono practice and culture</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>The areas that are in most need of pro bono services in Nigeria are criminal law⁹ and family law.¹⁰</p> <p>Other areas also include child welfare and protection, employment law, civil claims for victims of motor accidents, consumer rights protection, small tenant eviction claims, probate law and human rights (specifically, women's rights).</p> <p>The major unmet legal needs include: (a) access to justice for indigent and marginalized populations; (b) legal representation for pre-trial detainees; (c) support for victims of domestic violence and gender-based abuse; (d) adequate protection against forced evictions; (e) awareness and enforcement of labour and employment rights; and (f) public interest</p>

⁹ https://www.criminalawjournal.org/article/10/t-2-5-951.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 9 March 2026).

¹⁰ https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/national/90-of-nigerians-faced-at-least-one-legal-issue-in-four-years-report/?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

	litigation addressing systemic injustices.
12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?	<p>As described above, the LAC provides free legal assistance and advice to Nigerian citizens who cannot afford the services of a private lawyer. The LAC has entered into several partnerships with other providers of pro bono services, including non-governmental organizations such as the Criminal Justice Project, the One Stop Claims Shop for Victims of Motor Accidents (“OSCAR”), Partners West Africa Nigeria (“PWAN”) and the Police Duty Solicitors Scheme (“PDSS”).</p> <p>These and other providers of pro bono services are NGOs. The LAC is required to maintain a register of these NGOs and “partner” with them whenever necessary. For example, the Public Interest Law Partnership (PILP) provides free legal advice and representation in criminal, civil and administrative matters, with over 200 partner law firms and non-governmental organisations.</p> <p>A non-exhaustive list of other pro bono providers is set out below:¹¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network of Pro Bono Lawyers (NetProLaw)¹² • Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP)¹³ • Public Interest Law Partnership (PILP)¹⁴ • Partners West Africa of Nigeria (PWAN) and the Police Duty Solicitors Scheme (PDSS)¹⁵ • Women Empowerment and Legal Aid (WELA)¹⁶ • Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA)¹⁷ • Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI-Nigeria)¹⁸

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¹¹ See Statutory Report of the LAC 2023: <https://legalcouncil.gov.ng/annual-nba-reports-2/> (last visited on 11 September 2025). <https://nigeria.action4justice.org/about/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

¹² <https://netprolaw.com/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

¹³ <https://ledapnigeria.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

¹⁴ <https://www.pilp.ng/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/partnersnigeria> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

¹⁶ <https://welaonline.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

¹⁷ <https://prawa.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

¹⁸ <https://nulai.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative (IWEI)¹⁹ • Attorney General Alliance-Africa²⁰ • Hope Behind Bars Africa²¹ • Human Rights Law Service (HURILAWS)²² • Headfort Foundation for Justice²³ • Cece Yara Foundation²⁴ <p>Under the Legal Aid Act, law clinics are authorised to provide legal aid or assistance to persons who are entitled to legal aid.²⁵ There are several law clinics in Nigeria that offer legal assistance to pre-trial detainees and various services to the public, and promote community justice programmes. Their services include: client counselling and interview, assistance and rehabilitation of prisoners, observation and assessment of prison conditions, obtaining data on prisoners' welfare.²⁶</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>Citizens' Gavel Foundation for Social Justice ("Gavel") is a not-for-profit NGO focused on using technology to connect Nigerians to pro bono services.²⁷ Established in 2017, Gavel uses an online platform called Podus to connect inmates to a Police Duty Solicitors Scheme ("PDSS") lawyer near their location. Podus is referred to as the "uber for justice" for pre-trial detainees because it allows remote access to lawyers.</p> <p>Gavel is also using technology to improve court performance by deploying a National Case Management System ("NCMS") in certain Nigerian states. The NCMS, developed in partnership with the National Judicial Council's Committee on Information Technology, is a digital platform designed to streamline and improve the management of court cases in Nigeria. Gavel has also launched a court ranking system which uses data gathering and analysis to measure court</p>

¹⁹ <https://iwei-ng.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

²⁰ <https://www.agalliance.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

²¹ <https://hopebehindbarsafrica.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

²² <https://hurilaws.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

²³ <https://www.headfortfoundation.com/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

²⁴ <https://ceceyara.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

²⁵ See Section 17 of the Legal Aid Act 2011.

²⁶ See for example: Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI-Nigeria) <https://vsl.nulai.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

²⁷ <https://citizensgavel.org/> (last visited on 11 September 2025); <https://qz.com/nigeria-app-gavel-justice-system-pro-bono-lawyers-1851291252/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

performance.²⁸

Another noteworthy example is the Headfort Foundation, which developed the Lawyers NowNow mobile application following a reported surge in police brutality and arbitrary arrests in Nigeria. Originally an extension of the Foundation's Lawyers Without Borders project, which established mobile offices for pro bono lawyers within court premises, the application provides a platform to connect users with lawyers near to their location, facilitating contact via a phone call, SMS or WhatsApp message.²⁹

The Network of Pro Bono Lawyers (NetProLaw) also has a platform on its website through which individuals can report cases requiring legal attention.³⁰

Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts

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

A non-exhaustive list of key pro bono providers and NGOs is set out above.

In addition, the LAC as established under the Legal Aid Act provides pro bono services to indigent Nigerians in certain circumstances as outlined above. However, due to the lack of government funding for the LAC, the provision of legal aid through this source has faced challenges.

By virtue of Section 17 of the Legal Aid Act, law clinics are authorised to provide legal aid or assistance to persons who are entitled to legal aid. There are several law clinics in Nigeria that offer legal assistance to pre-trial detainees and diverse services to the public, and promote community justice programmes. Their services include: client counselling and interview, assistance and rehabilitation of prisoners, observation and assessment of prison conditions, obtaining data on prisoners' welfare. See for example: Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI-Nigeria), also mentioned

²⁸ <https://files.gavel.ng/Uploads/Reports/2022-Annual-Report.pdf> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

²⁹ <https://www.headfortfoundation.com/access-justice> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

³⁰ <https://netprolaw.com/our-programs> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

	<p>above.</p> <p>A number of international organisations also provide training to those in Nigeria providing pro bono legal services. For example, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) has trained Legal Aid Officers on defending those charged with terrorism offences, sexual and gender-based violence offences among others. The Attorneys-General Alliance-Africa (AGA-Africa) has also trained lawyers and other staff at the LAC.</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>They can register with PILP, which operates a one-stop centre that matches referrals with registered pro bono counsel across a network of partner law firms, NGOs and lawyers; or NetProLaw, civil society network focused on building a platform for lawyers and legal aid providers to offer pro bono legal services to underprivileged persons.</p> <p>Lawyers wishing to be made aware of other pro bono opportunities may register with the LAC or with any of the other NGOs referred to above.</p> <p>The LAC also maintains a registry of lawyers who wish to provide free legal services.</p>
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	<p>Organisations like the NBA and the LAC typically recognise individuals for their outstanding contributions to pro bono work.</p> <p>There are also global pro bono awards, such as the TrustLaw Awards organised by the Thomson Reuters Foundation³¹, and the IBA Pro Bono Awards³², which celebrate outstanding pro bono contributions globally, including Nigerian firms or lawyers.</p>

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Acknowledgements

Name of law firm: G.Elias

Name of lawyers: Gbolahan Elias and Kanzullahi Hibatullahi

³¹ <https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/awards/the-2025-awards/> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

³² <https://www.ibanet.org/Annual-IBA-Pro-Bono-Award> (last visited on 11 September 2025).

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