

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in Pakistan

Introduction

In Pakistan, the legal aid framework has grown over the past decade, expanding the opportunities for lawyers to provide pro bono legal services. Recently, the Law and Justice Authority Act, 2020 was passed to establish an independent statutory entity, the Legal Aid and Justice Authority, to enhance access to justice for underprivileged individuals through panels of lawyers in each district. This is in addition to the existing two-pronged structure for legal aid under the Pakistan Bar Council Free Legal Aid Rules, 1999 and District Legal Empowerment Committee (Constitution & Function) Rules, 2011. While the legal aid regulatory framework has grown, there continues to be a strong need for further practical action amongst the legal community. There is an under-utilisation of funds allocated to legal aid institutions. The gap left by lack of implementation of legal aid processes at a government level, is to some extent filled by local and international organisations, as well as a few domestic law firms, which offer pro bono legal services to the country's underserved population and are engaged in direct representation and broader reform work.

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	Yes

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 practice of law in Pakistan is primarily governed by the Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils Act of 1973, last amended on 01 June 2018 (the "Bar Councils Act").¹ The Bar Councils Act is implemented through elected bodies of lawyers, or "advocates", established thereunder, namely the Pakistan Bar Council, as well as the four provincial bar councils, namely the Punjab Bar Council, the Sindh Bar Council, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council and the Baluchistan</p>

¹ Pakistan Bar Council, "*Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils Act, 1973*", <http://pakistanbarcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/001-052-...-Bar-Council-Act-1.pdf> (last visited on 7 February 2025).

Bar Council (together, the “**Provincial Bar Councils**”) and a bar council for the Islamabad Capital Territory, namely the Islamabad Bar Council.²

The Pakistan Bar Council is generally responsible for supervising the Provincial Bar Councils and the Islamabad Bar Council and regulating the legal profession, which includes entry of advocates into the legal profession.³

The rules of professional conduct and etiquette applicable to all advocates practicing in Pakistan have been prescribed by the Pakistan Bar Council under the Pakistan Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils Rules of 1976, last amended via notification of the Pakistan Bar Council dated 25 June 2020 (the “**Bar Council Rules**”).⁴ The Bar Councils Act, as supplemented by the Bar Council Rules, sets forth the core requirements for qualification and enrolment for advocates, which includes: (i) Pakistani citizenship, or one year of residency in Pakistan and citizenship in a country that allows Pakistani citizens to qualify in the practice of law; (ii) the applicant must be at least 21 years of age; (iii) a law degree from a university recognised by the Pakistan Bar Council; (iv) passing an assessment conducted by an organisation appointed by the federal government of Pakistan; (v) undergoing such training and passing such examination(s) as prescribed by the Pakistan Bar Council; and (vi) payment of related accreditation and other fees.⁵

The legal framework above applies uniformly to all lawyers in Pakistan, and there are no specific laws or rules in relation to qualification or eligibility, nor any additional licensing requirements for lawyers who work as in-house counsel. However, Rule 175 (1) and Rule 108-O of the Bar Council Rules⁶ generally prohibits

² Ibid 1, Section 5.

³ Ibid 1, Section 13.

⁴ Pakistan Bar Council, “Pakistan Legal Practitioners and Bar Councils Rules, 1976”, <http://pakistanbarcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/053-132-...-Bar-Council-Rules-1.pdf> (last visited on 7 February 2025).

⁵ Ibid 1, Section 26.

⁶ Ibid 4, Rule 175 (1) states that “An Advocate shall not join or carry on any other profession, business, service or vocation or shall not be an active partner or a salaried official or servant in or be subject to the terms and conditions of service of the Government, semi-Government or autonomous body or any other organization or institution, public

	<p>advocates from undertaking ‘employment’ or entering into service of any public or private organisation or institution. It further requires an advocate who undertakes such employment or service to have his or her enrolment suspended during the tenure of such employment/service. Accordingly, the enrolment/license of advocates who enter in-house practice is liable to be suspended, and therefore, in the absence of an active license and enrolment, they are precluded from representing clients in a court of law. This bar applies equally to provision of all kinds of legal services on a pro bono basis, including representation on a pro bono basis before a court and advisory pro bono service.</p>
Regulatory landscape for pro bono	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>Pakistan has several rules and committees in place to provide legal aid to indigent individuals which give lawyers opportunities to provide pro bono legal services through such programs.</p> <p><u>Legal Aid Rules:</u></p> <p>Pursuant to Bar Councils Act, the Pakistan Bar Council has been mandated to, inter alia, provide free legal aid⁷ and established rules for the provision of legal aid in 1999 (“Legal Aid Rules”).⁸ The Legal Aid Rules created legal aid committees at the national level (the “Central Free Legal Aid Committee”), provincial level (the “Provincial Free Legal Aid Committee”) and district level (the “District Free Legal Aid Committee”).⁹ The Legal Aid Rules prescribe the source from the which the Central Free Legal Aid Committee shall</p>

or private.” Rule 108-O provides that “An Advocate having his name on the Roll of a Bar Council shall apply to the later that his certificate be suspended because he intends to join some other profession, business, service or vocation...Provided further that if he fails to seek such suspension within one month of such engagement or employment in such other profession or service he shall be guilty of professional misconduct under the Legal Practitioners & Bar Councils Act, 1973 and his name shall also be removed from the roll of Advocates”. The engagement of an advocate as an in-house counsel would fall within the domain of Rule 175 (1) and Rule 180-O; See the judgment of the Lahore High Court in the case of *Muhammad Farooq Warind vs. Pakistan Bar Council* [PLD 2009 Lahore 572]. See also the order of the Enrollment Committee of Pakistan Bar Council in the matter titled *RE-Consideration of Applications of Advocates for Enrollment as Advocates for the Supreme Court of Pakistan* [PLJ 2001 Tr.C. (E.C.) 461].

⁷ Ibid 1, Section 13 (1)(la).

⁸ Pakistan Bar Council, “*The Pakistan Bar Council Free Legal Aid Rules, 1999*”, Notification dated September 8, 1999 S.R.O. 1095(1)/99, <http://pakistanbarcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/135-143-...-Free-Legal-Aid-Rules.pdf> (last visited on 28 January 2025).

⁹ Ibid 9, Rule 4.

collect funds¹⁰, which only it is authorised to utilise and disburse to provide free legal aid in accordance with the Rules.¹¹

The Legal Aid Rules require that each free legal aid committee maintain a panel of lawyers willing to provide pro bono services or work for reduced fees.¹² The Legal Aid Rules also set forth maximum legal fees by type of level of the judiciary; for example, a maximum fee of PKR 5,000 is imposed on fees for legal aid cases litigated at the Supreme Court.¹³

Legal Empowerment Rules:

Additionally, pursuant to the Law & Justice

Commission of Pakistan Ordinance, 1979, the Law & Justice Commission of Pakistan established the District Legal Empowerment Committee (Constitution & Functions) Rules, 2011 (“**Legal Empowerment Rules**”).¹⁴ The District Legal Empowerment Committee formed under the Legal Empowerment Rules provides legal aid services to deserving litigants including, paying for professional fees for lawyers, court fees and process fees.¹⁵ Funds for the District Legal Empowerment Committee have been earmarked under the government’s Access to Justice Development Fund.

The District Legal Empowerment Committee maintains a list of practitioners to be appointed to perform the functions under the Legal Empowerment Rules. A legal practitioner having at least three years of standing at the Bar would be eligible for appointment. The District Legal Empowerment Committee determines the legal practitioners’ fees; however, in accordance with the Legal Empowerment Rules, this may not be

¹⁰ As per Rule 9 of the Legal Aid Rules, funds for the Central Free Legal Aid Committee are collected from, inter alia, the Pakistan Bar Council, voluntary contributions, the relevant Bar Councils and associations government grants and other contributions. Under Rule 10, the funds collected are controlled, utilised and disbursed only by the Central Free Legal Aid Committee for providing free legal aid in accordance with the Legal Aid Rules.

¹¹ Ibid 9, Rule 9 and 10.

¹² Ibid 9, Rule 8.

¹³ Ibid 9, Schedule.

¹⁴ Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan – District Legal Empowerment Committee, “*District Legal Empowerment Committee (Constitution & Functions) Rules, 2011*”, <http://ljcp.gov.pk/nljcp/assets/dist/pdf/D.pdf> (last visited on 3 January 2025).

¹⁵ Ibid 15, Rule 5.

more than PKR 40,000.¹⁶

Legal Aid and Justice Authority¹⁷

The Legal Aid and Justice Authority (“**Legal Aid Authority**”) was recently established under the Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act, 2020 (“**Legal Aid Act**”)¹⁸ with the aim to provide legal, financial and other assistance for access to justice to applicants who are charged with a criminal offence and are unable to afford such assistance, representation and access to justice.¹⁹ The Legal Aid Authority is required to prescribe eligibility criteria for applicants, and in this regard, preference is required to be given to disadvantaged women and children, especially in relation to matters of sexual offences.²⁰

Per the Legal Aid Act, the Legal Aid Authority must approve a panel of advocates in each district or, if necessary, in any *tehsil* for provision of legal, financial or other assistance either on pro bono or on a fee basis.²¹ The panel must include a Free Representation Unit, comprising advocates and volunteers to provide legal or other social services on a pro bono basis.²²

The Legal Aid Act further establishes the Legal Aid and Justice Authority Fund²³ to be utilised by the Legal Aid Authority to, inter alia, cover fees and charges in connection with its function of providing legal, financial or other assistance, such as payment to meet bail amounts, penalties or fines of the applicants and payment of fees to advocates or volunteers.²⁴

¹⁶ Ibid 15, Rule 8.

¹⁷ The Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act 2020 was recently passed. News reports confirm that the Legal Aid Authority envisaged under the Legal Aid Act has been established, however, limited information is publicly available with respect to further functioning of the Legal Aid Authority.

¹⁸ Ministry of Human Rights, “*Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act, 2020*”, <https://mohr.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/laag.pdf> (last visited on 31 January 2025).

¹⁹ Ibid 20, Section 9.

²⁰ Ibid 20, Section 9.

²¹ Ibid 20, Section 11.

²² Ibid 20, Section 2 and 11.

²³ In pursuance of Section 17 of the Legal Aid and Justice Act, the Legal Aid and Justice Authority Fund shall be financed from the following sources, namely: (a) grants from the Federal Government, Provincial and Local Governments; (b) aid and assistance from local, provincial, national and international authorities or agencies; (c) contributions from the statutory bodies, corporations, private organizations and individuals; (d) income and earnings from the moveable and immovable properties acquired or leased by the Authority; and (e) any income from the investment of the amount credited to the Fund.

²⁴ Ibid 20, Section 17.

<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>Legal services, including pro bono legal services, can be provided by qualified and licensed advocates who are enrolled as per the requirements set out in II.(a)(1) above. There is no requirement to obtain a separate or additional license to specifically provide pro bono legal 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>Foreign-qualified lawyers are not permitted to provide legal advice, including on a pro bono basis, in Pakistan, unless they are duly licensed to practice law in Pakistan. A foreign-qualified lawyer who is recognised by the Pakistan Bar Council under Section 26(c)(iii) of the Bar Councils Act and who is otherwise qualified under the Bar Councils Act read with the Bar Council Rules for admission as an advocate and has secured such admission and entered in any roll of advocates, does not require additional or separate license to provide pro bono services in Pakistan.</p>
<p>5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?</p>	<p>While the Legal Aid Rules do not require lawyers to offer pro bono services as a general matter, any of the free legal aid committees may request a member of the Pakistan Bar Council and Provincial Bar Councils to conduct at least one case in a year, free of charge.²⁵</p> <p>The Legal Empowerment Rules do not obligate lawyers to work on a pro bono basis. Lawyers are appointed by the District Legal Empowerment Committee in accordance with the Legal Empowerment Rules in consultation with the President of the District Bar Association.</p> <p>The Legal Aid Act also does not obligate lawyers to work on a pro bono basis. The Authority establishes and maintains a panel of advocates in each district for provision of legal aid under the act²⁶, and is mandated by the act²⁷ to make payment to the advocates as prescribed by the Legal Aid Act.²⁸</p>

²⁵ Ibid 9, Rule 8 (e) and (f).

²⁶ Ibid 20, Section 11.

²⁷ Ibid 20, Section 8 (h).

²⁸ Ibid 20, Section 13.

<p>6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?</p>	<p>The Bar Councils Act, as supplemented by the Bar Council Rules, sets forth the core requirements for qualification and enrolment for advocates as discussed above at section II.(a)(1). These do not currently include a requirement to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services in order to qualify and enrol as advocates.</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>No, currently 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>There is no continuing legal education or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked by lawyers in Pakistan.</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>There is no mandatory legal requirement in Pakistan for professional indemnity legal insurance cover to be obtained by lawyers (whether in-house or otherwise) for providing legal service.</p> <p>However, professional indemnity insurance is available for lawyers and law firms, should they choose to be covered.</p>
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>Rule 135 of the Bar Council Rules generally prohibits advocates from soliciting professional employment by advertisement. While there is no direct precedent as to whether advertising pro bono success and soliciting new pro bono clients would fall within the scope of the above rule, given the broad language of the provision, a strict interpretation of the rule suggests that advertisement and/or solicitation mentioned above may also be restricted.</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>While the legal aid framework set up by the state provides extensive opportunities for pro bono legal services, various segments of the population continue to face barriers to access</p>
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	justice and legal remedies in Pakistan. These segments include Afghan refugees ²⁹ , the scores of stateless individuals ³⁰ , religious minorities ³¹ , victims of domestic and child abuse and vulnerable labour groups such as domestic workers, miners and sanitation workers ³² .
12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?	Many government-funded organisations and NGOs, as well as a handful of domestic law firms, offer pro bono legal services. The main providers of pro bono legal services would be, as discussed above at II.(a)(1), the legal aid committees at the national, provincial and district level, the District Legal Empowerment Committee formed by the Law & Justice Commission of Pakistan and the Free Representation Unit as well as the panel of advocates and volunteers at the district level formed and managed by the Legal Aid Authority.
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?	The Legal Aid Society (“LAS”), a not-for-profit NGO has recently launched Pakistan’s first multilingual legal advisory chatbot named NAZ Assist. The chatbot has statedly been trained on the insights gathered from over 450,000 calls for legal assistance logged by the LAS since 2014, with the aim to provide free legal advice in multiple languages understood in Pakistan. ³³

²⁹ Relief Web, “Afghan Refugees Ordered to Leave Pakistan or Face Deportation”, October 5, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/afghan-refugees-ordered-leave-pakistan-or-face-deportation#:~:text=More%20than%20600%2C000%20are%20estimated,1.4%20million%20are%20unregistered> (last visited on 3 February 2025) (reporting that there are estimated 3.7 million Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, 1.4 million of them are unregistered, thereby making them more susceptible to harassment at the hands of multiple actors, and further alienated from access to formal institutional framework and services).

³⁰ A stateless individual is one “who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law”; See UNHCR, “About statelessness”, <https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/about-statelessness/> (last visited on 2 January 2025). See also Hajira Maryam, “Stateless and helpless: The plight of ethnic Bengalis in Pakistan”, Al Jazeera, September 29, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/9/29/stateless-ethnic-bengalis-pakistan> (last visited on 6 February 2025) (reporting that in Pakistan, stateless individuals include thousands of ethnic Bengalis and Burmese persons who as a result, continue to be deprived access to basic services and fundamental human rights).

³¹ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, “A Culture of Hate-Mongering – Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2022/23”, <https://hrqp-web.org/hrqpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2024-A-culture-of-hate-mongering-EN.pdf> (last visited on 6 January 2025) (documenting the incidence and various forms of persecution of and violence against citizens of minority faiths in Pakistan, and highlighting the lack of state response to curb it and the resulting impunity for the perpetrators in this regard).

³² Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, “Seeking Redressal – Access to Justice for Vulnerable Workers”, <https://hrqp-web.org/hrqpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2024-Seeking-redressal.pdf> (last visited on 6 January 2025) (documenting the various forms of rights violations faced by a host of workers groups, and their inability to seek and receive redressal and justice in this regard; as well as recommending increased availability of legal aid for workers and improvement in the quality of legal representation available to them).

³³ ProPakistani, “Pakistan Launches its First Legal Advice Chatbot with Free Verification from Human Lawyers”, October 8, 2024, <https://propakistani.pk/2024/10/08/pakistan-launches-its-first-legal-advice-chatbot-with-free-verification-from-human-lawyers/> (last visited on 2 January 2025). See also <https://las.org.pk/naz-assist/>

Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts

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

Amongst government sources of pro bono, the main sources are the legal aid committees at the national level, in each provincial bar council and in each bar council at the district level created pursuant to the Legal Aid Rules.

The Government of Pakistan has established a 1.5 billion PKR Access to Justice Development Fund³⁴, of which 13.5% is reserved for legal empowerment and legal aid.³⁵

There are multiple non-governmental organisations that provide pro bono opportunities. Some of the well-known organisations include:

- Established in 1980 by Asma Jahangir, AGHS Legal Aid (“**AGHS**”) is the first pro bono legal services organisation in Pakistan. AGHS focuses on the rights of women, children and minorities in Pakistan. AGHS is involved in litigation, awareness raising, publication, domestic and international lobbying, organizing and abuse documentation projects.³⁶
- The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (“**HRC**”) provides pro bono legal services in cases of collective complaints pertaining to grave human rights violations. HRC further offers referrals to other organisations that provide pro bono legal services, in relation to complaints of human rights violations which include police violence, gender-based violence, minorities’ rights, forced marriages, forced conversions, enforced disappearance and cybercrimes.³⁷

³⁴ Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, “*Access to Justice Development Fund*”, <http://ljcp.gov.pk/nljcp/ajdf/pages/2> (last visited on 3 January 2025). See also “*Legal Empowerment Window*”, <http://ljcp.gov.pk/nljcp/ajdf/pages/11#>. (last visited on 22 January 2026).

³⁵ Rule 9(1) of the Access to Justice Development Fund Rules, 2002, available at <http://ljcp.gov.pk/nljcp/assets/dist/pdf/B.pdf> (last visited on 3 January 2025).

³⁶ AGHS Legal Aid Cell, “*About Us*”, <https://aghslaw.net/overview/> (last visited on 6 February 2025).

³⁷ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, “*Complaints Cell*”, <https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/complaints-cell/> (last visited on 3 January 2025).

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?	There are no public or private organisations with which a local or foreign attorney can register in order to be made aware of pro bono opportunities in Pakistan.
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	No. There are no awards, lists or ranking related to pro bono work in Pakistan.

Acknowledgements

Name of Local Counsel: Kabraji & Talibuddin

Name of Individual at Local Counsel: Syed Ali Bin Maaz, Marriam Rauf

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