

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in the Philippines¹

Introduction

It is ingrained in the 1987 Philippine Constitution that “free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty.”² As such, Republic Act No. 9406 or the Act Reorganizing and Strengthening the Public Attorney’s Office (“**PAO**”) provides that the PAO shall “render, free of charge, legal representation, assistance, and counselling to indigent persons in criminal, civil, labor, administrative and other quasi-judicial cases.”³

However, due to widespread poverty and frequent human rights violations, the Philippines present numerous opportunities for private lawyers to engage in pro bono work. The national bar association (Integrated Bar of the Philippines), non-governmental organizations, and university clinics are some of the of the active providers of such services.

Just last year, the Supreme Court *En Banc* has approved *The Rules on Unified Legal Aid Service* (“**ULAS Rules**”) which mandates covered lawyers to render at least 60 hours of *pro bono* legal aid every three years in favour of indigent Filipinos, as defined in the *ULAS Rules*.⁴

Under the ULAS Rules, any person who has no sufficient means to afford adequate legal services, as assessed by a covered lawyer in accordance with guidelines to be issued by the ULAS Board, may be a qualified beneficiary entitled to pro bono legal services. The legal service itself will be free for such qualified beneficiary and the necessary expenses for the rendering of the service will be borne by the Court through the ULAS Fund, which will be set up for this purpose. Additionally, the qualified beneficiary shall be exempt from payment of docket and other fees.⁵

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	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

The landscape

¹ This chapter was drafted with the support of Czarina G. Quintanilla-Raz and Ranulfo G.V. Payos, Jr. of PunoLaw

² Constitution of the Philippines, Article III (Bill of Rights), available at <https://lawphil.net/consti/cons1987.html> (last visited on 21 January 2026).

³ Amending for the Purpose Pertinent Provisions of Executive Order No.292, Otherwise Known as the “Administrative Code Of 1987”, as amended, Granting Special Allowance to Pao Officials and Lawyers, and Providing Funds Therefor. Republic Act No. 9406, available at https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2007/ra_9406_2007.

⁴ <https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/AM-22-11-01-SC.pdf?utm>

⁵ <https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/sc-approves-the-rules-on-unified-legal-aid-service/>

Professional regulation

1. 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.

The practice of law in the Philippines is primarily regulated by the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (“**IBP**”). The IBP is a mandatory Bar Association created by the Philippine Supreme Court in the 1970s.⁶ All Philippine lawyers are required to join the IBP and cannot practice law in the Philippines without doing so.⁷

All Philippine lawyers are also subject to the Code of Professional Responsibility for Lawyers (the “**Code**”).

All persons who wish to practice law in the Philippines must be admitted to the Bar. After successfully fulfilling the academic requirements, the candidate can file an application to take the Bar examinations, provided he or she is a citizen and resident of the Philippines, at least 21 years of age and of good moral character.⁸ After passing the Bar examinations, the successful candidate is entitled to take the oath of office, receive his or her certificate of membership to the Philippine Bar and finally, sign the roll of attorneys at the Supreme Court. Only then does the candidate officially become a lawyer and can use the title of “Attorney”. Once admitted, the lawyer must remain in good standing by maintaining membership in the IBP and by complying with the requirements on Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (“**MCLE**”).⁹

There is no distinction between solicitors and barristers, or between lawyers and inhouse counsels, as all candidates who wish to practice law must take the Bar examinations to be admitted. Paralegals are not recognized as legal professionals under Philippine law.

Regulatory landscape for pro bono

2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.

The Constitution of the Philippines and the Code both reflect the principle that attorneys should

⁶ Integrated Bar of the Philippines, IBP Brief History, available at <http://www.ibp.ph/about.html>

⁷ Rules of Court, Rule 138, Section 1, available at http://www.lawphil.net/courts/rules/rc_138_bar.html

⁸ Rules of Court, Rule 138, Section 2, available at http://www.lawphil.net/courts/rules/rc_138_bar.html

⁹ Mandatory Continuing Legal Education, Rules 1 and 2, Bar Matter No. 850.

provide legal representation to indigent individuals.¹⁰

The Constitution states that “free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty.”¹¹ In a section of the Code entitled “A Lawyer Shall Not Refuse His Services to the Needy,” the Code requires that absent serious and sufficient cause to decline representation, lawyers must accept certain pro bono cases assigned to them.¹²

In 2009, the Supreme Court introduced a requirement that all “practicing lawyers” provide a minimum of 60 hours per year of free legal aid or pro bono legal services in all cases involving “marginalized and poor litigants” (the “**Rule on Mandatory Legal Aid Service**”).¹³

In 2017, the Supreme Court introduced the Rule on Community Legal Aid Service (the “**CLAS Rules**”) and the IBP published the relevant implementing rules in 2018.¹⁴ The CLAS Rules applied to new lawyers who were admitted to the Bar in 2018 and onwards, with some exceptions (for example to those with prior pro bono experience). Organizations and groups, as well as individuals, could receive free legal assistance under the CLAS Rules.¹⁵

The terms “pro bono” and “free legal aid service” were the same under the CLAS Rules.

In 2019, the Supreme Court suspended the implementation of the CLAS Rules.¹⁶

On 20 August 2024, the Supreme Court *En Banc* issued the ULAS Rules which mandates covered lawyers to render at least 60 hours of *pro*

¹⁰ Code of Professional Responsibility, Canon 14, Rule 14.02.

¹¹ Constitution of the Philippines, Article III (Bill of Rights), available at <https://lawphil.net/consti/cons1987.html>

¹² Code of Professional Responsibility, Canon 14.

¹³ Rule on Mandatory Legal Aid Service, Bar Matter No. 2012 dated February 10, 2009 at Section 5.

¹⁴ The Implementing Rules and Regulations of A.M. No. 17-03-09-SC otherwise known as the “Rule on Community Legal Aid Service”.

¹⁵ Section 5(c), The Implementing Rules and Regulations of A.M. No. 17-03-09-SC otherwise known as the “Rule on Community Legal Aid Service”.

¹⁶ <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/708473/supreme-court-suspends-rule-on-pro-bono-legal-aid/story/> (last visited on March 7, 2025).

	<p>bono legal aid every three years in favour of indigent Filipinos, as defined in the <i>ULAS Rules</i>.¹⁷ This Circular also repealed the Rule on Mandatory Legal Aid Service and the CLAS Rules.¹⁸</p>
3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?	<p>Lawyers who are admitted to the Bar in the Philippines may provide pro bono legal services and do not require a separate license to do so.</p>
4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?	<p>Foreign lawyers cannot offer pro bono legal services in the Philippines since non-Filipino lawyers are not permitted to offer advice as to Philippine law, and foreign law firms are not allowed to have offices in the Philippines.</p> <p>While international firms have increasingly entered into tie-ups with local firms in recent times, it may also be noted that very few domestic law firms have associations with large foreign firms or foreign lawyers.¹⁹</p>
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	<p>Under the Rule on Mandatory Legal Aid Service, continuation of practice by an attorney depended on being issued a compliance certificate by the IBP attesting to the minimum of 60 pro bono hours.²⁰</p> <p>The services under the CLAS Rules included representation of qualified parties in litigation, legal counselling in negotiations, developmental legal assistance, certain judiciary or government services and services to marginalized sectors of society. Non-compliance with these rules may lead to the lawyer being disqualified from receiving a certificate of good standing from the IBP.</p> <p>ULAS Rules mandates covered lawyers to render at least 60 hours of pro bono legal aid every three years in favour of indigent Filipinos, as defined in the <i>ULAS Rules</i>.</p>

¹⁷ The Rules on Unified Legal Aid Service, A.M. No. 22-11-01-SC, dated 20 August 2024, available at

https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/A_M_No_22_11_01_SC_RESOLUTION_Re_The_Rules_on_Unified_Legal_Aid.pdf

¹⁸ Section 35 of the Rules on Unified Legal Aid.

¹⁹ <https://www.law.com/international-edition/2024/05/21/international-law-firms-see-opportunity-in-the-philippines-as-the-country-attracts-global-investors/?sreturn=2025030334140>

²⁰ Rule on Mandatory Legal Aid Service (n72) at Sections 5 and 7.

	<p>Pro bono legal aid services can come in many forms, such as representation in court, legal counselling, drafting legal documents, developmental legal assistance, and participation in accredited legal outreach programs.</p> <p>The ULAS Rules allows lawyers to extend financial contributions instead of performing pro bono legal aid service. Such contributions will go directly and exclusively to the ULAS Fund which, as mentioned, will be covering reasonable expenses of covered lawyers in performing pro bono legal aid services. However, the financial contribution may only cover a maximum of 50% of the minimum hours required. The ULAS Board is set to issue a schedule of rates per hour for purposes of the financial contributions.</p> <p>The ULAS Rules also allow registered organisations — corporations, partnerships, associations, or any other groups of persons duly registered with the appropriate government agency, including law firms — to aggregate the required minimum hours of its lawyers for purposes of compliance. However, only 75% of each lawyer’s mandatory minimum hours can be aggregated by a registered organisation. The remaining 25% — or 15 hours of the 60 hours minimum — will have to be personally satisfied by the individual lawyer.²¹</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>Beginning in 2023, the Supreme Court requires applicants for the bar exam to have satisfactorily completed the clinical legal education program, as required by the Law Student Practice Rule.²² Under this Rule, law students are required to complete a clinical practice course, either through a law clinic or an externship. While this Rule does not require such clinical legal education program to offer pro bono services, several law schools, including the University of the Philippines College of Law²³, Ateneo de</p>

²¹ <https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/sc-approves-the-rules-on-unified-legal-aid-service/>

²² Amendment to Section 5, Rule 138, in Relation to the Revision of Rule 138-A of the Rules of Court, A.M. No. 19-03-24-SC, dated 29 November 2022, available at <https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/19-03-24-SC.pdf> (last visited on March 7, 2025)

²³ <https://law.upd.edu.ph/office-of-legal-aid/> (last visited on March 7, 2025)

	Manila School of Law ²⁴ , and the DLSU School of Law ²⁵ offer pro bono services to indigent clients.
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?	There are no aspirational pro bono hours targets for lawyers set by the local bar association, regulatory body or other body.
8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?	<p>Newly qualified lawyers in the Philippines who were subject to the CLAS Rules could receive full MCLE credits for qualifying pro bono hours.²⁶</p> <p>Under the ULAS Rules, meeting the 60 hours minimum for every compliance period automatically entitles the covered lawyer to 15 credit units of MCLE.</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>Professional indemnity insurance is not required in the Philippines (including for providing pro bono legal services). It is uncommon for law firms to take out professional indemnity insurance.</p>
10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?	<p>As a general rule, lawyers cannot advertise their services in the Philippines. There are exceptions to the prohibition against advertising, these are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication in reputable law lists; • Use of professional / business card; • Simple announcement of the opening of a law firm; and • Telephone directory listing.

²⁴ <https://www.ateneo.edu/law/centers-institutes/alsc/services> (last visited on March 7, 2025)

²⁵ <https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/dlc/> (last visited on March 7, 2025)

²⁶ Section 17, The Implementing Rules and Regulations of A.M. No. 17-03-09-SC otherwise known as the “Rule on Community Legal Aid Service”.

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 absence of effective access to justice by the poor and marginalized presents one of the most prominent opportunities for pro bono work in the Philippines. One such example is marginalized farmers.</p> <p>In the field of environmental law, urgent legal issues include large-scale mining, destruction of marine resources, and indiscriminate logging due to the increasing demand for land and natural resources. These practices frequently occur to the detriment of the poor and marginalized, causing community displacement, increasing urban migration, usurpation of indigenous people's ancestral rights, illegal land conversion, dwindling food production and depletion of freshwater resources, militarization and other human rights abuses, air and water pollution, and other environmental disasters.</p> <p>Gender equality issues also present pro bono opportunities. While the Philippine government has passed a number of laws addressing women's development and gender equality issues, the recognition of certain rights – particularly in the realm of reproductive health – is still unresolved and is an area for potential advocacy.²⁷</p> <p>Additionally, extra-judicial executions have become an increasingly significant problem in the Philippines.²⁸ The surge of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines have prompted reports and campaigns extensive investigations by the United Nations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.²⁹</p> <p>Finally, criminal defense is an area of law which requires more pro bono lawyers.</p>
<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>A number of NGOs committed to empowering the poor and marginalized have emerged to help meet the needs for pro bono in the Philippines,</p>

²⁷ International Labour Organization, Gender Equality in the Philippines (November 2014), available at

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-manila/documents/publication/wcms_i73283.pdf

²⁸ Felipe Villamor, International Criminal Court Will Investigate Duterte Over Drug War, New York Times, February 8, 2006, available at <https://nyti.ms/2BhtGms>.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2017, Philippines (<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/philippines>).

	<p>such as the Legal Aid Society of the Philippines.³⁰ For example, one project aims to help farmers obtain access to justice where they have been falsely and arbitrarily accused of crimes by wealthy landowners or elite land claimants.³¹ The same project also seeks to provide paralegal training to local women so that they may monitor court cases, gather evidence, write affidavits, and help farmers navigate the legal system.³²</p> <p>At times sole lawyers have provided pro bono legal services. For example, a pro bono environmental lawyer helped climate change activists take their fight against flooding to the Philippines Supreme Court.³³</p> <p>A number of law schools regularly provide pro bono legal services. The law schools include the University of Makati Law School, the Ateneo de Manila Law School in Makati City and the University of Philippines College of Law.³⁴</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 digital platform <i>Pro Bono Portal</i> was launched by the Integrated Bar of the Philippines in April 2024. This has immensely enhanced access to legal aid as it offers free courtroom representation, legal counselling, document preparation and developmental legal assistance to the disadvantaged community.³⁵</p>
<h3>Sources of Pro Bono Opportunities and Key Contacts</h3>	
<p>14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.</p>	<p>There are a number of governmental programs offering legal assistance to indigent persons in the Philippines.</p> <p>The PAO, an agency under the Department of Justice, was established to provide free access to courts, due process and equal protection of the</p>

³⁰ Aurora E. Bewicke, *Asian Developments in Access to Counsel: A Comparative Study*, 10 NW. U. J. INT'L HUM. RTS. 27 (2011), available at <http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1124&context=njihr> (last visited on May 1, 2019). See, for example, the Humanitarian Legal Assistance Foundation (HLAF): <http://home.hlaf.org.ph/> (link not working).

³¹ *Ibid.* (referencing Rosselynn Jae de la Cruz, Legal Consultant, AKBAYAN Citizens Action Party).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Purple S. Romero, *Pro Bono Lawyer Leads Landmark Court Challenge in Philippines*, TRUSTLAW, June 29, 2010, available at <http://news.trust.org/item/20100629094500-4631k>

³⁴ Ateneo Legal Service Center: <http://www.ateneo.edu/aps/law/ateneo-law-center/ateneo-legal-services-center>. University of Philippines College of Law: <http://law.upd.edu.ph/office-of-legal-aid/>

³⁵ https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-urges-lawyers-to-uphold-truth-and-fairness/

laws to individuals who either have no income or are below certain income thresholds in cases ranging from civil and criminal to administrative cases.³⁶ To qualify for free legal representation, individuals must qualify under “the double M tests.” Such tests consider the “merits” of the case and the indigency (or “means”) of the individual.³⁷

The PAO fulfils its mandate by providing legal advice, trial preparation, court representation, mediation, forensics, amongst other services.³⁸

Other government-based agencies provide free legal assistance in specific areas of the law, such as agrarian reform.³⁹

The Philippine courts may appoint lawyers to provide free representation to indigent defendants in criminal cases.

The IBP provides legal assistance to indigent Filipinos.⁴⁰ The IBP’s National Committee on Legal Aid supervises the IBP’s legal aid program, which consists of numerous local chapter clinics throughout the Philippines.⁴¹ The services include consultations and counselling to those who qualify.⁴²

Sentro Ng Alternatibong Lingap Panligal: Provides litigation support, legal literacy and alternative legal education, paralegal information, policy advocacy, research and publication, and internships for law students.⁴³

Balay Mindanaw Group: Provides legal services to marginalized sectors and communities in Mindanao, conducts capacity building interventions on local legislation and dispute resolution, and advances legal issues of different

³⁶ Public Attorney’s Office, About PAO, available at <http://www.pao.gov.ph/page.php?id=10>. Republic Act No. 9406, Section 1, available at http://www.pao.gov.ph/UserFiles/Public_Atorney's_Office/file/PAO-Law.pdf

³⁷ Public Attorney’s Office, Persons Qualified for Legal Assistance, available at <http://www.pao.gov.ph/page.php?id=28>

³⁸ Public Attorney’s Office, Services, available at <http://www.pao.gov.ph/page.php?id=13>.

³⁹ Department of Agrarian Reform, available at <http://www.dar.gov.ph/>

⁴⁰ Integrated Bar of the Philippines, Contact, available at <http://www.ibp.ph/contact.html>.

⁴¹ Judge Eliza B. Yu, Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) In A Nutshell, available at http://www.academia.edu/30925204/Integrated_Bar_of_the_Philippines_IBP_in_a_Nutshell.

⁴² Integrated Bar of the Philippines Makati Chapter, Legal Aid Assistance Flowchart, available at <http://www.ibpmakati.com/legal-aid-services.do?id=16312>

⁴³ See <http://www.saligan.org/>

	<p>marginalised sectors and communities.⁴⁴</p> <p>University of the Philippines College of Law: Provides free legal assistance to indigent litigants and is actively involved in public interest cases.⁴⁵</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>Apart from the above listing of non-governmental organizations offering pro bono legal services, the following organizations also offer pro bono legal services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IBP Legal Aid Department (+63 2 631-3013) • National Union of People’s Lawyers⁴⁶ • Ateneo Legal Service Center⁴⁷ • Humanitarian Legal Assistance Foundation⁴⁸
<p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p>	<p>None.</p>

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Learn more

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

⁴⁴ See <http://balaymindanaw.org/main/> (last visited on March 7, 2025).

⁴⁵ See <http://law.upd.edu.ph/office-of-legal-aid/> (last visited on March 7, 2025).

⁴⁶ See <https://nupl.net/> (last visited on March 7, 2025).

⁴⁷ See <https://www.ateneo.edu/law/centers-institutes/alsc> (last visited on March 7, 2025)

⁴⁸ See <http://hlaf.org.ph/> (last visited on March 7, 2025).