

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in South Africa

Introduction

Before 2003, there was no formal initiative for pro bono practice in South Africa, and legal practitioners engaged in pro bono work informally. Post-2003, recognising the inadequacy of the government's legal aid system to meet the legal needs of the South African public, especially the poorest, the Cape Law Society implemented a mandatory pro bono rule for its members. Subsequently, all regional law societies in South Africa mandated their members to provide pro bono legal services. Additionally, some large commercial law firms in the country developed innovative pro bono policies, though their strategic approaches and focus differ. In November 2018, the Legal Practice Act came into force. One of the purposes of the Act was to broaden access to justice by putting in place measures to provide for the rendering of community service by candidate legal professionals and practising legal professionals. Community service includes pro bono service. According to recently amended regulations under the Legal Practice Act, practising legal practitioners are now required to complete a minimum number of community service hours each year (which can include pro bono service) to remain in good standing with the Legal Practice Council.¹

South Africa now has one of the strongest pro bono markets in sub-Saharan Africa, with relatively high levels of pro bono participation by lawyers compared with other African jurisdictions. The pro bono sector in South Africa benefits from a more structured pro bono culture compared with many other African markets. This includes formal expectations tied to professional or bar regulations (e.g., minimum service commitments²), and the presence of clearinghouses and organisations such as ProBono.Org and bar associations that help integrate pro bono into legal practice.³

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	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No

The landscape

¹ https://www.financialinstitutionslegalsnapshot.com/2023/11/02/for-the-public-good-legal-practice-act-regulations-on-community-and-pro-bono-services-by-legal-practitioners/?utm_

² https://www.financialinstitutionslegalsnapshot.com/2023/11/02/for-the-public-good-legal-practice-act-regulations-on-community-and-pro-bono-services-by-legal-practitioners/?utm_

³ https://www.probonoconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2024-TrustLaw-Index-of-Pro-Bono.pdf?utm_

Professional regulation

<p>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.</p>	<p>Section 4 of the Legal Practice Act 28 of 2014 (the Act) establishes the South African Legal Practice Council, granting it full legal authority and jurisdiction over all legal practitioners, i.e., attorneys and advocates, both practising and non-practising (including in-house counsel), and candidate legal practitioners.</p> <p>Section 26 of the Act specifies that a Bachelor of Laws degree is necessary to practise law in South Africa. This degree must be obtained from a South African law school. If the degree is acquired outside of South Africa, the South African Qualifications Authority must confirm that it is equivalent to the South African Bachelor of Laws degree. Additionally, candidates must be South African citizens or permanent residents. To be admitted and enrolled as a legal practitioner, candidates must complete all practical vocational training requirements and pass a competency-based examination, regardless of whether their law degree was obtained in South Africa or abroad.</p> <p>Legal practitioners are admitted by the High Court and enrolled by the Legal Practice Council.</p>
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>The Act stipulates that one of the requirements for admission and enrolment is that practical vocational training that candidate legal practitioners must undergo should include community service. The Act provides that regulations must prescribe the community service requirements to be undertaken by candidate legal practitioners as a component of their training and the minimum period of recurring community service by legal practitioners upon which continued enrolment as a legal practitioner is dependent.</p>
<p>3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?</p>	<p>No.</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>In terms of the Act, foreign lawyers need to qualify as legal practitioners in South Africa in order to provide pro bono legal services if the nature of those services is one restricted to</p>

	<p>practising legal practitioners.</p> <p>No person other than a practising legal practitioner may, in expectation of any fee, commission, gain, or reward, appear in any court or before any board or tribunal in which only legal practitioners may appear, or draw up or execute any document relating to or required for use in any court proceedings.</p> <p>A foreign lawyer could therefore provide pro bono services in any other area of law where such activities are not required.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the wording of the Act, South African courts will not permit anyone who is not a legal practitioner to represent anyone else in court, even if no fee is to be charged.</p>
<p>5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?</p>	<p>On 11 August 2023, amendments to the regulations under section 94(1) of the Legal Practice Act, 2014, were published. These amendments aim to broaden access to justice and enhance the protection provided by section 34 of the Constitution, which ensures the right to a fair public hearing for dispute resolution. Under the new regulations, legal practitioners, including practising and candidate legal practitioners, must complete a specified number of community service hours (pro bono is included in this) to maintain good standing with the Legal Practice Council (LPC). From 1 January 2024, practising legal practitioners are required to perform a minimum of 40 community service hours annually, while candidate legal practitioners must complete at least 8 community service hours each year.⁴</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>The Legal Practice Council expects candidate attorneys to complete eight hours of community service (which includes pro bono) per year.</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.</p>

⁴ https://www.financialinstitutionslegalsnapshot.com/2023/11/02/for-the-public-good-legal-practice-act-regulations-on-community-and-pro-bono-services-by-legal-practitioners/?utm_

<p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>	<p>Lawyers do not receive any CLE or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked.</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>There is no statutory requirement that lawyers in South Africa should have professional indemnity legal insurance cover for any pro bono legal services that they provide. However, every attorney who practises for their own account or as a partner or who is a director of a practice that is a juristic entity, and every advocate who is entitled to take instructions directly for a client, must be in possession of a Fidelity Fund certificate, and through this a first layer of professional indemnity insurance is automatically provided, presently at no cost. There are certain exclusions (such as cybercrime) and excesses in some cases, and the cover provided is on a sliding scale, depending on the number of partners or directors in the practice, which currently ranges from ZAR1,562,500 for one practitioner to ZAR3,125,000 for 14 practitioners and above.</p>
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>Not expressly, but the Code of Conduct published by the Legal Practice Council has general provisions relating to publicity, and these also apply to pro bono services.</p> <p>These include requirements that any advertising or other publicity is made in a manner that does not bring the legal profession into disrepute, is not offensive or inappropriate, does not misrepresent the nature of the service offered, and does not refer to a client by name in any publicity or advertisement published unless the prior written consent of the client had been obtained.</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>Criminal law is the primary focus, and given the socio-economic challenges in South Africa, there is a significant need for representation in civil proceedings as well. While Legal Aid South Africa believes it has met its targets regarding new and concluded cases in both civil and criminal legal services, the rising demand for civil legal services challenges its civil practitioners to deliver client-</p>

	<p>centred services while also adhering to the stringent time requirements of civil practice. The private sector is starting to complement the services offered by Legal Aid South Africa, although funding and capacity remain limited in both areas.</p> <p>In addition, while historically South African firms reported involvement in areas like economic development, microfinance, education and employment, the most recent TrustLaw Index of Pro Bono suggests some decline in these specific focus areas, indicating evolution in the types of pro bono work being undertaken.⁵</p>
12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?	The main providers of pro bono legal services are law firms and individual legal practitioners, law clinics (mainly operated by universities), and Legal Aid South Africa. In addition to these opportunities, legal practitioners may also provide pro bono legal services through legal NGOs and clearing houses, which source and allocate work, such as ProBono.Org.
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>The Empire Partner Foundation has developed a digital case management solution for ProBono.Org to enhance access to justice, streamline operations, and support underserved communities, reinforcing their commitment to using technology for social change.⁶</p> <p>Justice Lab Africa works at the intersection of law, access to justice, and technology. They build free digital legal tools designed to help ordinary people understand and enforce their rights. Law firms and lawyers can contribute pro bono hours by providing legal expertise to help develop or review these tools which makes legal AI more accurate and impactful for underserved users.⁷</p>
14. Describe notable sources of pro bono matters or resources in your jurisdiction.	<p>The main non-governmental sources of pro bono and/or other pro bono resources in South Africa are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ProBono.Org, for example, focuses specifically on connecting individuals seeking pro bono representation with

⁵ https://www.probonoconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2024-TrustLaw-Index-of-Pro-Bono.pdf?utm_

⁶ <https://probono.org.za/probono-orgs-digital-case-management-system/>

⁷ https://justicelab.africa/en/partners/?utm_source

	<p>attorneys⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Legal Resources Center⁹ • Lawyers for Human Rights¹⁰ • Center for Child Law¹¹ • Socio Economic Rights Institute of South Africa¹² • The Southern Africa Litigation Center¹³ • Section 27¹⁴
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?	ProBono.org, Legal Aid South Africa, and the Legal Practice Council offer the best resources for local and foreign lawyers interested in providing pro bono representation in South Africa.
16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?	<p>ProBono.org has multiple legal awards for pro bono work.</p> <p>The Legal Practice Council, as regulator of the profession, will in due course have records of all community service hours worked (and this will include pro bono services), but it is not known whether any of this information will be made public, by way of rankings or otherwise.</p>

Acknowledgements

Name of Law Firm: Bowmans

Name of lawyer: Fatima Laher

Learn more

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

⁸ www.probono.org.za/

⁹ www.lrc.org.za/

¹⁰ www.lhr.org.za/

¹¹ www.centreforchildlaw.co.za/

¹² www.seri-sa.org/

¹³ www.southernafricalitigationcentre.org/

¹⁴ www.section27.org.za/