

Global Pro Bono Guide 2026

Pro Bono Practices and Opportunities in the United Arab Emirates

Introduction

In the Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM), Dubai and the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), pro bono initiatives are increasing and becoming more established. Although there is no formal regulation of pro bono, the evident growth of dedicated pro bono practices and infrastructure amongst firms, indicates a clear commitment to expanding access to legal services for those who cannot afford them. This development seems to be bolstered by the presence of international firms with offices in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where TrustLaw reported that international firms increased their pro bono hours in the last two years.¹ These firms, including regional firms, meet regularly at the Dubai Pro Bono Roundtable², an informal network of firms who discuss pro bono activities and explore opportunities for collaboration across the Middle East. While challenges still exist in the shape of regulatory hurdles, cultural barriers and a lack of available pro bono opportunities in the region³, overall, the outlook for pro bono work is positive. As legal communities become more engaged, and non-profit organisations become more aware of available pro bono services, the scope and reach of pro bono services are likely to increase.

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	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

The landscape

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>The United Arab Emirates (the UAE) is a constitutional federation of seven emirates. The constitution allocates governing and executive powers between the federal government and the local governments of each Emirate. The legal profession is generally regulated at the federal level; however, all lawyers providing legal</p>

¹ https://www.trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-TrustLaw-Index-of-Pro-Bono.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 2 March 2026).

² <https://www.globalprobonohub.com/export/sites/pro-bono/resource/downloads/Global-PB-Hub-Article-Pro-Bono-Professional-Networks.pdf#:~:text=In%20the%20Middle%20East%2C%20the%20Dubai%20Pro,and%20Pro%20Bono%20Committee%20Member%2C%20Gowling%20WLG>. (Last viewed on 5 March 2026).

³ https://www.arablawyersassociation.co.uk/post/the-future-of-pro-bono-in-the-middle-east-a-call-to-action?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

services must be licensed in the Emirate in which they choose to practice, and licence requirements vary depending on nationality, type of practice, and office location.⁴ This survey focuses on the ADGM, Dubai, and the DIFC, which are the three largest legal markets within the UAE.

ADGM

Practising lawyers working in a law firm that is not registered in Dubai or the DIFC must be licensed by the UAE Ministry of Justice to represent clients before the ADGM Courts, including providing pro bono work, public prosecution, and other judicial committees. Lawyers that are not representing clients in the ADGM Courts must be either licensed by the UAE Ministry of Justice or must hold a law degree from a university recognised in the UAE.⁵

Dubai

Practising lawyers, advocates and non-practising lawyers are required to register with the Government of Dubai Legal Affairs Department in order to practise law and provide pro bono legal services.⁶ No person may provide legal services to third parties unless they are registered or licensed to do so by The Government of Dubai Legal Affairs Department.⁷

DIFC

The requirements for the Emirate of Dubai also apply to lawyers, advocates, and non-practising lawyers practising within the DIFC.⁸

In-house lawyers in the ADGM, Dubai, and the DIFC

In-house lawyers and legal professionals in the UAE must hold a legal consultant work permit⁹

⁴ https://www.probonoconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Global-Map-for-Corporate-Pro-Bono-TrustLaw-2017.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

⁵ See Federal Decree Law No. (34) of 2022, Regulating the Legal Profession and Legal Consultation Profession, (<https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1566/download>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

⁶ See Federal Decree Law No. (34) of 2022, Regulating the Legal Profession and Legal Consultation Profession. (<https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1566/download>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

⁷ See Executive Council Resolution No. (22) of 2011 Concerning Fees and Fines Prescribed for the Advocacy and Legal Consultancy Profession in the Emirate of Dubai. (<https://legal.dubai.gov.ae/en/Documents/aExecutiveCouncilResolution.pdf>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

⁸ See Regulations Concerning the Registration of Attorneys and Legal Consultants in the Emirate of Dubai. ([https://legal.dubai.gov.ae/Bylaw/Administrative%20Resolution%20No.%20\(51\)%20of%202022.pdf](https://legal.dubai.gov.ae/Bylaw/Administrative%20Resolution%20No.%20(51)%20of%202022.pdf), last accessed 24 February 2025).

⁹ See Federal Decree by Law No. (33) of 2021 Regulating Labour Relations. (<https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1541/download>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

	<p>and a law degree from a university recognised in the UAE to provide any type of legal services (excluding representation of clients (other than employer) before UAE courts, public prosecution, and other judicial committees).¹⁰</p>
<h2 style="background-color: #1a2b3c; color: white; padding: 5px;">Regulatory landscape for pro bono</h2>	
<p>2. Describe the laws or rules that regulate the provision of pro bono legal services.</p>	<p>There is no overarching federal requirement or comprehensive legal framework mandating or regulating pro bono work for all lawyers or law firms in the UAE. However, legal services are tightly regulated: whether paid or pro bono, and they must be provided by lawyers/legal consultants licensed in the relevant jurisdiction (federal courts, local emirate courts, DIFC Courts, or ADGM Courts), as mentioned above. Non-licensed individuals may not provide legal advice to the public.</p> <p>There are also no rules which regulate the provision of pro bono services by in-house lawyers or legal consultants in Abu Dhabi or in the Emirate of Dubai. The draft Charter of Conduct for Advocates and Legal Consultants also does not address the provision of pro bono services.¹¹</p> <p>However, there are certain guidelines lawyers need to follow to participate in some formal pro bono schemes:</p> <p><u>ADGM</u>¹²</p> <p>Law firms, lawyers, and legal professionals that want to participate in the ADGM Courts Pro Bono Scheme need to submit an application via email to probono@adgmcourts.com. The ADGM Courts Pro Bono Scheme maintains a register of volunteers that is used to refer pro bono clients to volunteers with the relevant expertise and skill. Individuals seeking pro bono assistance must submit an application via the ADGM eCourts Platform.</p>

¹⁰ See Federal Decree Law No. (34) of 2022, Regulating the Legal Profession and Legal Consultation Profession. (<https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1566/download>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

¹¹ https://www.probonoconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Global-Map-for-Corporate-Pro-Bono-TrustLaw-2017.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

¹² See details

(<https://assets.adgm.com/download/assets/ADGM+Courts+Pro+Bono+Scheme+Information+for+Volunteers.pdf/6b17eba445f71ef8763ae00860b11ec>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

	<p><u>Dubai</u>¹³</p> <p>Registered advocacy and legal consultancy firms must register on the Voluntary Legal Services Smart Portal to provide pro bono legal services. Individuals wishing to benefit from those services must register on the portal.</p> <p><u>DIFC</u>¹⁴</p> <p>Law firms and lawyers that want to participate in the Pro Bono Programme should submit an application via the DIFC Courts eRegistry Portal. Individuals can receive advice either face to face or online.</p>
3. Do lawyers need a license to provide pro bono legal services (beyond usual local qualification to practice law)?	No, there is no additional license needed to provide pro bono legal services beyond the usual qualification to practice law.
4. Do foreign-qualified lawyers need any additional license to provide pro bono services (beyond their foreign qualification to practice law)?	No. Foreign lawyers can do pro bono (including in the above-mentioned pro bono programmes) but only if properly licensed in the relevant jurisdiction and within scope of permitted practice. Legal consultants may register with the relevant emirate authority (e.g., Dubai Legal Affairs Department ¹⁵) to provide licensed legal advice, including pro bono and foreign-law advice within the scope of their licence, but they may not appear before UAE onshore courts (rights of audience are generally limited to UAE-national advocates) or provide UAE legal advice without a local licence. ¹⁶
5. Are lawyers required by such rules to work a minimum number of pro bono hours? If so, how many?	No.
6. Are aspiring lawyers required to complete a minimum number of hours of pro bono legal services to become licensed lawyers?	No.

¹³ See details (<https://probono.legal.dubai.gov.ae/en/probono.aspx>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

¹⁴ See details (<https://www.difccourts.ae/difc-courts/pro-bono-programme/lawyers>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

¹⁵ https://legal.dubai.gov.ae/en/AboutDepartment/Pages/FAQ.aspx?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

¹⁶ https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/1566?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

<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>There are no aspirational pro bono targets; however, participation is encouraged by the Director General of the Government of Dubai Legal Affairs Department.¹⁷ Many law firms also have internal aspirational targets ranging from 20 hours to 60 hours per year.</p>
<p>8. Do lawyers receive any “Continuing Legal Education” (CLE) or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked?</p>	<p>Yes, voluntary legal services provided by legal consultants to the public through schemes approved by The Government of Dubai Legal Affairs Department are considered an accredited Continuing Legal Professional Development Activity in Dubai and the DIFC.¹⁸</p> <p>For example, lawyers can receive CLPD Points from pro bono legal work undertaken through the Voluntary Legal Services Smart Portal, an online pro bono platform launched by the Department that connects members of the public seeking legal assistance to volunteering advocates and legal consultants in Dubai.¹⁹</p> <p>However, lawyers in the ADGM do not receive CLE or equivalent credit for pro bono hours worked.</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>ADGM, Dubai, and DIFC</p> <p>A lawyer representing clients before the courts, public prosecution, and other judicial committees in the ADGM, Dubai, and the DIFC requires professional indemnity insurance either individually or through an extension of the law firm’s professional indemnity insurance.</p> <p>Lawyers do not need professional indemnity insurance if they are providing pro bono services that do not require representing clients before courts, public prosecution, and other judicial committees in the ADGM, Dubai, and the DIFC.</p> <p>In-house lawyers and legal consultants do not</p>
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¹⁷ See Circular No. (2) of 2024 Concerning Invitation of Advocates and Legal Consultants to Register in the Voluntary Legal Services Platform. ([https://legal.dubai.gov.ae/Bylaw/Circular%20No.%20\(2\)%20of%202024.pdf](https://legal.dubai.gov.ae/Bylaw/Circular%20No.%20(2)%20of%202024.pdf), last accessed 24 February 2025).

¹⁸ See Administrative Resolution No. (29) of 2024 Adopting Voluntary Legal Services as an Accredited Continuing Legal Professional Development Activity ([https://legal.dubai.gov.ae/Bylaw/Circular%20No.%20\(2\)%20of%202024.pdf](https://legal.dubai.gov.ae/Bylaw/Circular%20No.%20(2)%20of%202024.pdf), last accessed 24 February 2025).

¹⁹ <https://training.legal.dubai.gov.ae/clpd-programme/pro-bono/?lang=en> (Last viewed on 4 March 2026).

	<p>need to maintain professional indemnity insurance if they are not providing legal services to the public.</p> <p>However, since pro bono services are provided to the public, in-house advocates and legal consultants may need to maintain professional indemnity insurance to enable them to provide certain pro bono services such as legal opinions and advice, drafting contracts, registering and liquidating companies, concluding settlements, representing clients before arbitration panels and centres, conciliation commissions and other entities and any other legal service except, in the case of legal consultants only, pleading and representing clients before the Dubai courts.²⁰</p>
<p>10. Are there any rules that limit or prohibit advertising of pro bono successes or soliciting new pro bono clients?</p>	<p>No. The UAE Code of Ethics permits lawyer self-promotion across all media so long as communications are truthful and not deceptive, protect client confidentiality, and uphold the dignity and honour of the profession.²¹</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 main areas of law that present opportunities for the provision of pro bono legal services are employment and residential matters. TrustLaw's Index of Pro Bono also indicates that international firms are focusing their pro bono efforts on access to justice, immigration, domestic abuse²², refugees and asylum, and human rights.²³</p> <p>The ADGM Courts Pro Bono Scheme does not provide assistance with criminal, family, or inheritance law issues.²⁴</p> <p>The DIFC's Pro Bono Programme also does not provide assistance with any criminal or family law issues.²⁵</p>

²⁰ https://www.probonoconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Global-Map-for-Corporate-Pro-Bono-TrustLaw-2017.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

²¹ https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/2794?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

²² https://www.arablayersassociation.co.uk/post/the-future-of-pro-bono-in-the-middle-east-a-call-to-action?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

²³ https://www.trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-TrustLaw-Index-of-Pro-Bono.pdf?utm_source (Last viewed on 3 March 2026).

²⁴ See details

(<https://assets.adgm.com/download/assets/ADGM+Courts+Pro+Bono+Scheme+Information+for+Volunteers.pdf/6b17eba445f711ef8763ae00860b11ec>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

²⁵ See details (<https://www.difccourts.ae/difc-courts/pro-bono-programme/lawyers>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

<p>12. Who are the main providers of pro bono legal services?</p>	<p>The main providers of pro bono legal services are: (1) private law firms; and (2) the Dubai Legal Affairs Department through its Voluntary Legal Services Smart Portal.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>The DIFC Courts Pro Bono Programme announced in 2022 that it was developing a purpose-built online portal that matches requests to suitable volunteer lawyers based on language, specialization, and availability, and uses machine learning and AI to index advice and responses so it can evolve into a Pro Bono Digital Assistant that offers immediate recommendations and faster access to justice.²⁷</p> <p>In the ADGM, Dubai, and the DIFC, there is an option for pro bono services to be provided via video conference.</p> <p>More generally, we can expect to see increased use of AI tools in legal practice as the UAE has adopted a proactive regulatory and policy framework that encourages innovation while ensuring ethical, responsible AI development. These measures support AI integration across sectors and create conditions for emerging technologies to thrive, with ongoing government guidance and initiatives to facilitate AI deployment.²⁸</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>As mentioned above, the notable governmental source of pro bono services in Dubai is the Voluntary Legal Services Smart Portal hosted by the Government of Dubai Legal Affairs Department.</p> <p>In the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), DIFC's Pro Bono Programme aims to provide access to free legal advice to individuals on civil</p>

²⁶ <https://training.legal.dubai.gov.ae/clpd-programme/pro-bono/?lang=en> (Last viewed on 4 March 2026).

²⁷ https://www.difccourts.ae/media-centre/blogs/difc-courts-pro-bono-programme-leading-changing-landscape?utm_source (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

²⁸ <https://www.lw.com/en/insights/ai-in-the-uae-understanding-the-regulatory-landscape-and-key-authorities#:~:text=The%20UAE%27s%20National%20Strategy%20for%20Artificial%20Intelligence,Shaping%20global%20onms%20for%20responsible%20AI%20deployment> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

	<p>matters that fall within the DIFC's jurisdiction.²⁹</p> <p>In the ADGM, the ADGM Courts Pro Bono Scheme facilitates pro bono legal advice provided by lawyers who volunteer their time and expertise to assist individuals with limited financial means in regard to civil and commercial disputes or other legal issues that fall within the jurisdiction of ADGM Courts.</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>In addition to the above initiatives, the main non-governmental sources of pro bono and/or other pro bono resources in the United Arab Emirates are: (i) TrustLaw, a pro bono legal service that matches lawyers with non-profit organisations and social enterprises around the world, hosted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation;³⁰ and (ii) Global Network for Public Interest Law (PILnet) which also offers a global pro bono clearinghouse listing opportunities.³¹</p> <p>Lawyers can also join the Dubai Pro Bono Roundtable, an informal network of firms who meet to discuss pro bono activities and explore opportunities for collaboration across the Middle East.³²</p>
<p>16. Are there any awards, lists or rankings related to pro bono work?</p>	<p>Yes, there are the following awards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro Bono Firm of the Year at the IFLR Middle East Awards³³ • Law Middle East Awards – Pro Bono Initiative of the Year³⁴

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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.

²⁹ <https://www.difccourts.ae/difc-courts/pro-bono-programme> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

³⁰ See details (<https://www.trust.org/trustlaw/>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

³¹ See details (<https://www.pilnet.org/>, last accessed 24 February 2025).

³² <https://www.globalprobonohub.com/export/sites/pro-bono/resource/downloads/Global-PB-Hub-Article-Pro-Bono-Professional-Networks.pdf#:~:text=In%20the%20Middle%20East%2C%20the%20Dubai%20Pro,and%20Pro%20Bono%20Committee%20Member%2C%20Gowling%20WLG.> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

³³ <https://www.iflr.com/iflr-middle-east-awards-2025-winners-hub> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).

³⁴ <https://www.law-middleeast.com/law-middle-east-awards-2025> (Last viewed on 6 March 2026).