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the legal profession®

IBA Pro Bono Declaration

29 July 2025



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The International Bar Association (IBA), the global voice of the legal profession, affirms the vital role of the legal profession in achieving a just world, where there is access to justice for all, and declares and resolves that:

1. The legal profession reaffirms its commitment to pro bono legal service as an integral part of the profession and the strengthening of legal institutions and the rule of law.
2. The legal profession is called upon to devote a proportion of time or resources to pro bono legal service each year.
3. The delivery of pro bono legal service is understood as:
 - a. quality and ethical legal work without expectation of remuneration;
 - b. complementary to legal aid;
 - c. principally to assist marginalised persons or communities who demonstrate meritorious matters; and
 - d. activities that are distinct to the legal profession which may include:
 - i. legal assistance for persons, communities or organisations who otherwise could not exercise or assert their rights or obtain access to justice;
 - ii. support for the administration of justice, improvement of the law or legal system and strengthening of the rule of law;
 - iii. legal matters of public interest that otherwise might not be pursued; and
 - iv. support for pro bono legal practice and culture.
4. Governments are called on to realise and protect access to justice as a human right, including through the allocation of sufficient resources to make legal aid available to meet the legal needs of the marginalised and not to rely on pro bono legal service to reduce publicly funded legal aid.
5. This declaration confirms the IBA's determined effort to promote a pro bono culture and public service in the legal profession, to appreciate the meaning and the importance of pro bono legal service, to identify and support best practices including specific commitments of time and resources, and to deepen consensus and make further progress in this field.
6. The IBA recognises and expresses its gratitude for the efforts of the legal profession towards pro bono legal service. The IBA is committed to actively encouraging the legal profession to

participate in pro bono legal service and invites the use of and contribution to information and resources as compiled on the Pro Bono Committee webpage.¹

7. The IBA affirms that the legal profession must be able, without improper interference, to counsel and assist pro bono clients in accordance with the law and recognised professional standards and ethical practice.
8. The Pro Bono Committee is charged with continuing and expanding its work in this field and with monitoring and reporting on the application of this declaration.

IBA Guide to the Pro Bono Declaration

Why does the IBA have a pro bono declaration?

Pro bono is derived from the Latin phrase '*pro bono publico*', which refers to work or actions carried out 'for the public good'.

The legal profession has a particular role in achieving a just world, where there is access to justice for all. This includes access to effective legal assistance. As the global voice of the legal profession, the IBA supports pro bono legal service as a contribution to access to justice for all, especially marginalised people and communities.

The IBA's Pro Bono Declaration is part of its work to advocate for the removal of barriers to justice and to strengthen public confidence in legal institutions. The delivery of pro bono services by the legal profession helps to fulfil unmet legal needs and instil public confidence in the efficacy of legal institutions.

Resources:

- IBA Pro Bono Declaration (2008)

What is access to justice?

The United Nations (UN) helps define access to justice as ensuring that legal and judicial outcomes are just and equitable.

Access to justice is a basic human right, with responsibility placed on governments to respect, protect and fulfil this right through measures such as state-funded legal aid. International instruments underscore this responsibility, such as in Article 10 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 14(3)(d) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, other major international, regional and national instruments, as well as the Legal Aid Resolution, adopted by the IBA Council in 1996.

¹ Pro Bono Committee, International Bar Association, www.ibanet.org/unit/Section+on+Public+and+Professional+Interest/committee/Pro+Bono+Committee/3122 last accessed on 28 July 2025.

Access to justice is also a component of the rule of law and a means to address issues such as the need to combat poverty and prevent and resolve conflicts. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognise this important link in several goals and targets.

To achieve a just world for everyone, it is important that barriers to achieving access to justice are removed. These barriers are many and can include systemic issues, as well as a lack of access to legal assistance, especially for marginalised people and communities. This makes the availability of legal aid and pro bono legal services all the more important.

Resources:

- [Access to Justice \(UN\)](#)²
- [Access to Legal Aid \(UN\)](#)³
- [Sustainable Development Goals \(UN\)](#)⁴

IBA Resources:

- [IBA Legal Aid Resolution \(1996\)](#)⁵
- [IBA International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession \(2019\)](#)⁶
- [IBA Guidelines on Legal Aid Principles on Civil, Administrative and Family Justice Systems and its Commentary \(2019\)](#)⁷

Who are marginalised people and communities?

In the context of pro bono work, marginalised people and communities are understood as those most in need of legal aid or legal assistance and who are least able to access it or afford it without incurring financial hardship. This often includes people or communities who are poor or indigent, underprivileged, disadvantaged, discriminated against, or vulnerable, and who experience marginalisation in accordance with international human rights law.

International human rights law identifies that marginalisation results in diminished access to rights, resources and opportunities that are otherwise available to the wider population or community and is often due to factors such as ethnicity, race, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, nationality, or other protected status. Marginalisation is generally characterised by exclusion from decision-making, public institutions, or basic services and citizenship, leading to increased

2 United Nations and the Rule of Law, [Access to Justice](http://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/access-to-justice-and-rule-of-law-institutions/access-to-justice/), www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/access-to-justice-and-rule-of-law-institutions/access-to-justice/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

3 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, [Access to Legal Aid](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/legal-aid.html), www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/legal-aid.html, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

4 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [The 17 Goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals), https://sdgs.un.org/goals, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

5 IBA, [Legal Aid Resolution, 1996](#) (archived).

6 IBA, [IBA International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession](http://www.ibanet.org/document?id=International-Principles-on-Conduct-for-the-Legal-Profession-2018), www.ibanet.org/document?id=International-Principles-on-Conduct-for-the-Legal-Profession-2018, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

7 IBA Council, [IBA Guidelines on Legal Aid Principles on Civil, Administrative and Family Justice Systems and its Commentary](http://www.ibanet.org/document?id=Guide-on-legal-aid-principles-2019), www.ibanet.org/document?id=Guide-on-legal-aid-principles-2019, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

vulnerability to poverty, violence, exploitation, and discrimination. The UN has highlighted that marginalised persons and communities are those most at risk of having their rights denied due to structural barriers, social stigma, or institutional discrimination.

Pro bono work also includes work for charities and not-for-profit organisations whose sole or primary purpose is to work in the interests of marginalised people or communities for the public good or the realisation of rights such as the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment that advance the public interest.

What is legal aid and legal assistance?

Legal aid is legal assistance funded by states or governments to support access to justice. Legal assistance can take many forms, including legal education, legal information, legal advice, legal representation and legal advocacy.

What is pro bono legal service?

Pro bono legal service is professional legal work provided where legal aid is not available or is underfunded. It is voluntary, free and provided principally to benefit marginalised persons or communities, for instance those who demonstrate a need for legal assistance but cannot obtain legal aid or otherwise access the legal system without incurring financial hardship. Pro bono service is to the same standard of quality and ethics as compensated legal work.

Pro bono legal service is distinct from general volunteering, which can encompass any kind of work, as it utilises the specific knowledge and skills of the legal profession. It is also distinct from business development or marketing activities that legal organisations may undertake.

The IBA Pro Bono Declaration provides examples of pro bono legal service, focused on helping marginalised people or communities through the practice of law or strengthening the legal system, including through law reform, education and the promotion of pro bono activities within the legal profession or in the public interest.

Resources:

- IBA Pro Bono Committee⁸
- Association of Pro Bono Counsel⁹
- Global Pro Bono Hub¹⁰
- Pro Bono Institute¹¹
- Pro Bono Net¹²

8 See n 1.

9 The Association of Pro Bono Counsel, <https://apbco.org>, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

10 The Global Pro Bono Hub, www.globalprobonohub.com/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

11 Pro Bono Institute, www.probonoinst.org/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

12 Pro Bono Net, www.probono.net/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

Who can participate in pro bono legal service?

All members of the legal profession are encouraged to participate as appropriate to their role and relevant regulations. This can include members of the judiciary, lawyers, in-house counsel, legal academics, paraprofessionals in law and law students.

Additionally, law firms, law schools, bar associations, governmental and non-governmental organisations and other organisations, whether non-profit or for-profit, can have important roles in the delivery of pro bono legal services, including collaboration and coordination among legal organisations. The importance and practice of pro bono legal service is also emphasised and promoted in legal education.

How can legal professionals participate in pro bono legal service?

There are many ways to participate in pro bono legal service, for all types of legal professionals across all practice areas. Pro bono legal service can be provided in all manner of criminal, civil and administrative matters on a national and international level.

Pro bono legal service can be provided through law firm activities, legal clinics, bar association initiatives, committees, clearinghouses, community legal centres, civil society organisations and through education and training related to supporting pro bono practice and service within the legal profession. This includes the application of appropriate technological competence.¹³

The legal profession can also organise, attend and support pro bono and access to justice initiatives and conferences, so that awareness and the design and delivery of pro bono legal service can be improved and coordinated and for those involved in pro bono legal service to have access to relevant resources including best practices.

¹³ See IBA International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession (2018), Principle 9 and Explanatory Note 9.2, updated May 2024, recognising competence includes relevant technological understanding and application, www.ibanet.org/document?id=International-Principles-on-Conduct-for-the-Legal-Profession-2018, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

Resources:

- IBA Pro Bono Committee¹⁴
- Global Pro Bono Survey¹⁵
- Advocates for International Development¹⁶
- Babseacle¹⁷
- International Senior Lawyers Project¹⁸
- PILnet¹⁹
- Pro Bono Week (UK)²⁰
- TrustLaw Pro Bono Initiative²¹
- Vance Center for International Justice²²

What are pro bono policies and targets?

There are many innovative pro bono standards and practices associated with different legal systems and traditions, as well as valuable declarations at domestic, regional and international levels. The adoption and implementation of more declarations is encouraged to help create the necessary conditions and incentives, so that pro bono work is encouraged, valued and rewarded.

To professionalise and offer quality pro bono legal services, it is helpful for the legal profession to formalise policies and identify a proportion of time or set targets regarding the provision of pro bono services. For instance, law firms can include pro bono as part of billable targets or require dedicated hours to pro bono practice.

Policies and targets can take different forms, but share a commitment to pro bono service, whether during legal training, upon entry to the profession or to maintain a certain standing within the profession. Examples of both mandatory and voluntary policies and targets exist, helping to set standards and incentives for effective contributions by the legal profession to pro bono legal service.

Care should be taken to ensure that any policies or targets are configured in a way that enables the delivery of high quality and ethical legal services.

14 See n 1.

15 Global Pro Bono Survey, www.lw.com/en/global-pro-bono-survey, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

16 Advocates for International Development (A4ID), www.a4id.org/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

17 Babseacle, www.babseacle.org/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

18 International Senior Lawyers Project, <https://islp.org/>, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

19 PILnet, www.pilnet.org/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

20 Pro Bono Week (UK), Guides to Pro Bono and Other Free Advice, <https://probonoweek.org.uk/guide>, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

21 TrustLaw Pro Bono Initiative, www.trust.org/trustlaw/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

22 Vance Center for International Justice, www.vancecenter.org/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

Resources:

- Aspirational Pro Bono Target (United Kingdom Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono)²³
- Hours Pro Bono Target (Pro Bono Declaration of the Americas)²⁴
- Model Rule 6.1 (American Bar Association)²⁵
- National Pro Bono Target (Australian Pro Bono Centre)²⁶

How can pro bono legal service be monitored and reported?

To professionalise and conduct effective pro bono services, it is helpful to monitor and report on pro bono activities within the legal profession and on the extent to which access to justice is being facilitated by pro bono measures.

This can include individual and organisational recording of pro bono time spent and activities carried out, collating and reporting on these efforts through annual reports or pro bono clearinghouses or studies, and regularly connecting with the beneficiaries of pro bono services to understand their needs and the impact of pro bono legal services. Data capturing both quantitative and qualitative measures is important.

How can the impact of pro bono legal services be measured?

This is an evolving field that considers the change (positive/negative) that can result from pro bono legal services at individual, community or organisational, sectoral or regional, and international or global levels. Impacts can be captured among those delivering pro bono legal services, as well as from the beneficiaries of pro bono legal services.

Resources:

- The impact of pro bono: interview series (IBA)²⁷
- Measuring Pro Bono Impact (Thomson Reuters Foundation)²⁸

How can governments support pro bono legal service?

Governments have a primary responsibility to fund legal aid and must always respect the independence of the legal profession and the rule of law, including in pro bono matters.

23 Global Pro Bono Hub, UK Collaborative Plan for Pro Bono, www.globalprobonohub.com/resource/gpbh/uk-collaborative-plan-for-pro-bono, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

24 Vance Centre for International Justice, Pro Bono Declaration for the Americas, www.vancecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/english.pdf, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

25 American Bar Association, Rule 6.1: Voluntary Pro Bono Publico Service, www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/rule_6_1_voluntary_pro_bono_publico_service/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

26 Australian Pro Bono Centre, National Pro Bono Target, www.probonocentre.org.au/provide-pro-bono/target/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

27 IBA Pro Bono Committee, The impact of pro bono: interview series, www.ibanet.org/The-impact-of-pro-bono-interview-series, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

28 Thomson Reuters Foundation, Measuring Pro Bono Impact, www.trust.org/resource/measuring-pro-bono-impact/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

Governments can support pro bono legal service by ensuring that there are no barriers to the delivery of pro bono legal services by legal professionals. This can include removing barriers or providing incentives to encourage the provision of pro bono legal services. For instance, governments should assist and encourage the provision of pro bono legal services through measures such as treating such services as not being subject to tax and, where such services are presently taxed, such taxes should be rescinded.

Additionally, governments can support pro bono legal service through policies that support and promote a pro bono culture, including through procurement policies and practices that request and consider information on pro bono policies and practice, while assuring independence of the profession and no improper interference in pro bono practice.²⁹

Resources:

- Government Tender Arrangements (Australian Pro Bono Centre)³⁰

How can other organisations support pro bono legal services?

Organisations can support a pro bono culture, inquiring about and investigating the pro bono practice carried out by law firms and other legal organisations. This can include conducting audits as part of a supply and distribution network review and considering the provision of pro bono legal services as a factor in selecting and evaluating the quality and social commitment of legal services providers.

Law firms and other legal service providers can include pro bono services – including targets – in their sustainability strategies or environmental, social and governance (ESG) policies. In this way, as well as supporting access to justice for individuals and communities in need, pro bono services can help firms achieve broader organisational sustainability objectives and build their sustainability expertise and service offerings.

Legal organisations including law societies, bar associations, private and public interest law firms, law schools, foundations, and other governmental and non-governmental organisations can also all support pro bono legal service activities.

Universities and academia can contribute by making pro bono opportunities a part of academic or practical programmes for law students and by giving credit to legal professionals undertaking continuing legal education or professional development or working in this field.

Where can I find more information on pro bono legal service?

The IBA Pro Bono Committee collates resources on pro bono organisations and effective pro bono practice on its website. Suggestions for resources can be made by contacting the Pro Bono Committee website officer. Please refer to the IBA Terms and Conditions.³¹

²⁹ The legal profession has a fundamental role in upholding the rule of law, securing access to justice and ensuring the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. See Council of Europe, Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer, <https://rm.coe.int/1680b4c6be>, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

³⁰ Australian Pro Bono Centre, Government Tender Arrangements, www.probonocentre.org.au/provide-pro-bono/government-tender-arrangements/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

³¹ IBA, Terms and Conditions, www.ibanet.org/terms-and-conditions, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

IBA Guide to Pro Bono in Action

Climate change and pro bono

The adverse impacts of escalating climate change disproportionately affect marginalised groups, amplify existing inequalities and undermine sustainable development.³² For example, many poor communities, especially in regions with high levels of vulnerability and inequality, are less resilient to climate impacts.³³ Planned responses to climate change, such as large-scale adaptation projects, can also increase vulnerability through reinforcing inequalities and further marginalisation.³⁴ At the same time, Indigenous peoples and poor communities are likely to be disproportionately affected by biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, due to their strong dependency on nature for subsistence, livelihoods and health.³⁵

Pro bono support is often the only path to access to justice for resource-constrained individuals and communities who are adversely impacted by climate change.³⁶ Pro bono legal services can also be critical for enabling governments, civil society, individuals and organisations to effectively address climate change, whether through legal mobilisation, law reform, capacity building or other means.

There are many ways that pro bono legal services can support access to justice for climate-affected communities, and broader climate change and sustainability initiatives that promote human rights and positive environmental outcomes. Examples include:

- Supporting those negatively affected by climate change to engage in dispute resolution mechanisms (eg, strategic litigation and non-judicial dispute resolution mechanisms).³⁷
- Supporting law reform through assistance with legislative drafting and/or submissions that advocate for strong environmental and climate protections, consistent with best available science and fundamental principles of good lawmaking (eg, rule of law, accountability, access to justice and robust consultation processes in planning approvals).
- Supporting initiatives that embed climate and nature considerations in private law instruments, such as model contracts and contract clauses.

32 J Birkmann, E Liwenga, R Pandey, E Boyd, R Djalante, F Gemenne, W Leal Filho, P F Pinho, L Stringer and D Wrathall (2022) Poverty, Livelihoods and Sustainable Development, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, H-O Pörtner, DC Roberts, M Tignor, E S Poloczanska, K Mintenbeck, A Alegria, M Craig, S Langsdorf, S Löschke, V Möller, A Okem, B Rama (eds), Cambridge University Press, pp 1171–1274, www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/chapter-8/, last accessed on 29 July 2025.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*

35 IPBES, Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services (2019) <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3553579>, last accessed on 28 July 2025. See also: Australian Pro Bono Centre, Pro Bono Guide to the Climate Crisis (2020) www.probonocentre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pro-Bono-Guide-to-the-Climate-Crisis-FINAL-27-August-2020-1.pdf, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

36 Australian Pro Bono Centre, Pro Bono Guide to the Climate Crisis (2020) www.probonocentre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pro-Bono-Guide-to-the-Climate-Crisis-FINAL-27-August-2020-1.pdf, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

37 See IBA Climate Crisis Statement (2020) www.ibanet.org/document?id=822C1967-F851-4819-8200-2FE298164922, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

- Offering legal advice and services to climate or nature-focused non-profit organisations (eg, in relation to charity status, governance, directors’ duties, etc) and research support for such organisations (eg, report preparation, and case law analysis).
- Establishing climate justice clinics in collaboration with relevant stakeholders (eg, universities).
- Providing secondees to non-profit organisations who are working to address climate change.
- Convening or supporting legal education and training initiatives for law students and qualified lawyers (eg, in collaboration with law schools, law associations and law firms).
- Supporting non-profits and developing country delegations in international negotiations and proceedings (eg, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or proceedings before international courts).
- Providing legal advice for persons impacted by climate-related extreme weather events and disasters, experiencing climate-related displacement, or otherwise adversely impacted by environmental degradation.
- Supporting whistleblowers and climate and environmental defenders who face risks of harm due to the nature of their work.

Resources:

- Climate Action Portal (Australian Pro Bono Centre and PILnet)³⁸
- Pro Bono Guide to the Climate Crisis (Australian Pro Bono Centre)³⁹
- Lawyers Responding to Climate Change (Legal Response International)⁴⁰
- Net Zero Lawyers Alliance Pro Bono Initiative (Net Zero Lawyers Alliance)⁴¹
- The Chancery Lane Project⁴²

³⁸ Australian Pro Bono Centre and PILnet, Climate Action Portal, www.pilnet.org/our-work/case-studies/, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

³⁹ See n 36.

⁴⁰ Legal Response International, Lawyers Responding to Climate Change, <https://legalresponse.org/>, last accessed on 28 July 2025.

⁴¹ Net Zero Lawyers Alliance, Pro Bono Initiative, www.netzerolawyers.com/pro-bono-and-the-net-zero-lawyers-alliance, last accessed 29 July 2025.

⁴² The Chancery Lane Project, Reduce emissions using the power of legal documents and processes, <https://chancerylaneproject.org/>, last accessed on 29 July 2025.



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