



**FREE LEGAL ADVICE AND STRATEGIC
LITIGATION SUPPORT FOR NGOS**

Pro Bono Connect is a project of the Dutch Committee of Jurists for Human Rights (NJCM).

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December: Taking stock & recommitting to our goals in 2024

Access to justice, empowering civil society, inspiring lawyers to the public interest.

Thank you to our partner firms, NGOs and lawyers who contributed to the success of European Pro Bono Week as speakers, hosts, and participants!

- At the NGO round table, we were inspired by the resilience and commitment of our NGOs in the face of legal, administrative and financial challenges. The final conclusion was clear: pro bono lawyers remain a valuable partner for civil society enacting change!

- In a conversation on strategic litigation, we explored the best moment to engage pro bono lawyers (earlier in the process than you might think) and the value of NGOs who specialize in strategic litigation, as legal strategists and expert community liaisons.

- Finally, our partner firms celebrated the past year's successes and re-committed to providing the same support in the coming year at the Round Table for law firms. See below for a snapshot & inspiring speakers.

The takeaways from these events & our ongoing NGO survey form the basis for our 2024 plans. We continue to serve as a bridge to pro bono legal support.

UPCOMING EVENTS 2024 - Save the Dates!

More to come

28 February - Workshop: Financial Inclusion & International transfers

10-14 June - European Pro Bono Week (events in NL)

12 June - Round Table Partner Firms

21 November - NL Pro Bono Day & Round Table Partner Firms

Pro Bono Week: connecting, learning, inspiring!

During European Pro Bono Week, we reflected on the potential impact of pro bono work. In a lively discussion with NGOs, we explored the challenges they face and how pro bono lawyers can support them - both with organizational and strategic, direct-impact issues. NGOs shared their experiences with pro bono and we walked the way energized for the work ahead!

We were joined by Thalia Malmberg of Human Securities Collective, based in the Hague and working globally on issues of development, security and citizen involvement. We discussed the challenge of accessing and navigating financial services, and the challenges of de-risking caused by measures to counter financing of terrorism & money laundering. The last years have shown the essential role of civil society in humanitarian response to natural and man-made disasters. NGOs, both new and well-established, face inordinate delays in cash transfers, onerous due-diligence requirements, inability to open bank accounts and arbitrary closure of bank accounts. HSC co-chairs the Dutch Roundtable on Financial Access for NPOs with the Ministry of Finance and the Dutch Banking Association (NVB), publishing guidance and helping stakeholders understand each others' perspectives.

Check out the [HSC website on financial inclusion of non-profits.](#)

Save the date: Wednesday, 28 February 2024, Join our workshop on financial inclusion & international transfers hosted by Pro Bono Connect and our partners, together with Human Security Collective!

Lawyers inspiring Lawyers

We closed the week with a round table of Pro Bono Connect partner firms. One of our foundational goals is inspiring lawyers to work in the public interest. Two passionate lawyers supporting the rights of vulnerable communities shared their experiences, a reminder that lawyers can be found on both sides of pro bono work.

Yevheniia coordinates the Ukrainian Legal Helpdesk of the [Opora Foundation](#), providing free legal advice to Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands. Her experience coordinating a legal helpdesk in the Ukraine and recent move to the Netherlands inspire her work, and keep her in tune with the needs of the community she serves. Questions range from rights under the Temporary Protection Directive, to rental and

employment rights under Dutch law. In 2024, PBC hopes to continue supporting their work, in new ways and closer collaboration.

[Shibolo](#) is the Executive Director of The Robust Initiative For Promoting Human Rights (TRIUMPH UGANDA). He shared the story of his work for the rights of the LGBTI+ community in Uganda, and the pressure faced by lawyers and civil society organizations working for the community under the so-called "anti-homosexuality" laws. Organizations face onerous and arbitrary administrative burdens, and lawyers are at risk of arrest and detention. This leads to extra legal fees, both for individual lawyers and civil society organizations.

If you'd like to know more or want to support these initiatives, let us know and we can connect you!

Legal workshops: special opportunities for lawyers, NGOs and communities

In 2023, multiple partner firms have contributed to legal workshops as hosts and speakers. In this newsletter, we share a quote from our partner, [HVG Law](#).

"A highlight of our pro bono contribution was a workshop in collaboration with the Ukrainian legal support network of Opora Foundation. HVG Law provided advice to displaced Ukrainian people in the Netherlands, covering topics like work on ZZP-basis."

HVG Law has been a trusted partner to PBC in 2023, taking on a large number of pro bono requests for diverse NGOs in a variety of legal areas. Because of their relationship with EY, they have increased our capacity to support NGOs working in the fields of **supporting the next generation or environmental sustainability with pro bono tax law support.**

If your organization or initiative is looking for guidance in this area, please reach out to us!

Are you the new members of our Advisory Committee - a sounding board and advisor to the PBC team?

The Advisory Committee acts as a sounding board for the Pro Bono Connect team. Its members meet twice a year to advise on diverse strategic and complex matters; focusing on the matching mandate (mediation criteria for requests, navigating conflict of interest and capacity limitations), and addressing long-term strategy (fundraising, outreach, projects). Advice may also be requested ad hoc in pressing matters.

The Advisory Committee consists of established experts from the project's main stakeholders: law firms (3), NGOs (3), independent experts (2), and the board of NJCM (1). Members hold the position for 3 years.

As the current term comes to an end, we are looking for new members starting in 2024. We have several ambitious plans in the coming year to further support a strong civil society as well as examining the strategic position of our project. We are looking for candidates to contribute their strategic insights and commitment to human rights and pro bono's social impact.

Email your interest or questions to v.pisorn@probonoconnect.nl.

Achievements of Pro Bono Connect and our partners: Thank you!

- PBC received 140 requests for pro bono legal support.
- The top three areas of law requested were notarial, employment and privacy.
- Of the approximately 30 requests that fell outside the scope of our mandate, a majority were requests for legal support from individuals, e.g. refugees and people with housing issues. We try to point each of them in the direction of relevant assistance, e.g. Dutch Refugee Council or Juridisch Loket.
- More than 30 NGOs participated in legal workshops and our NGO round table.

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