



PILnet

Annual Report 2021-2022



*In just societies,
law works for all*

"As a legal profession, we are only as strong as our weakest links. But PILnet strengthens all links to create opportunities for social change by using a golden key: Law."

**— Gregory Vijayendran, President, Law Society of Singapore
Chair, 2019 PILnet Global Forum Host Committee**



Message from the Co-Executive Directors

PILnet was created in 1997 to promote the use of law as a tool to serve the interests of the whole of society rather than those of a powerful few. While our goal has not changed in the past 25 years, we have over time adjusted our strategic approach to achieving that goal to respond to the changing needs of civil society and the communities they serve. In 2022, PILnet reflected on its mission, vision, priorities, and approaches and we are happy to announce a new strategic plan for 2023-2026. PILnet's newly refined mission statement is:

PILnet partners with legal professionals and civil society organizations globally to protect civic space, address global challenges, and work to build just, equitable and sustainable societies.

PILnet knows that the power of law to help the more vulnerable members of society is boosted when civil society organizations (CSOs) and the legal sector work together to protect and enhance the strength of civic space allowing people to freely organize, communicate, and participate in society. For this reason, PILnet remains committed to our three program areas:

- Supporting civil society,
- Engaging legal professionals, and
- Nurturing and inspiring the next generation of legal professionals.

But with finite resources, we will prioritize three global challenges that we believe our method can have the most impact on:

- Protecting, increasing the resilience of, and expanding civic space,
- Enabling access to justice for refugees and people on the move, and
- Advancing environmental and climate justice.

In 2021 and 2022, we saw the continued backsliding of democracy across every continent, record levels of forced displacement, and the increase of human-made and natural disasters. We also saw the incredible determination of our global network of lawyers, CSO representatives, human-rights defenders, and academics. As the effects of COVID persisted, the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, Russia invaded Ukraine, and civil society was targeted by authoritarian regimes, PILnet is renewing its dedication to the idea that law is vital to building just, equitable, and sustainable societies.

**- Julia Mayerhofer & Andrej Nosko,
Co-Executive Directors**



Partners in Pro Bono

Supporting CSOs & Engaging Legal Professionals

CSOs play a crucial role in **promoting democratic governance, advocating for human rights, and addressing social issues**. PILnet supports them and their work by obtaining legal assistance, services and resources to strengthen their resilience and support their missions. Empowering CSOs enables more strategic use of resources and has greater impact than working directly with individuals.

The pro bono work offered by our legal partners is essential to meeting PILnet's mission. Recognizing their duty to **advance the rule of law and protect the rights of vulnerable communities**, lawyers use their expertise in a variety of fields of law, from civil rights to corporate law, to help CSOs achieve their missions and ensure their operational resilience.

PILnet, via its **Clearinghouse** process, **works with CSOs to identify their legal needs and match them with a lawyer to address that need**. This is through direct legal assistance for organizations with specific legal needs and creating resources addressing common needs of the sector. This also provides hundreds of law firms and solo practitioners in our global network opportunities to provide pro bono for specific projects and create long-term relationships with CSOs.

In 2021 and 2022, we supported hundreds of organizations to build legal advocacy campaigns, empower the communities they work with on legal topics, register new or relocated offices, and understand complex compliance regulations.



Participants at the 2022 Global Forum

Co-founded by PILnet in 2012, the European Pro Bono Alliance (EPBA) is a collaborative network of 22 clearinghouses and pro bono initiatives across 16 jurisdictions that strengthens, champions, and informs the European pro bono movement in support of the regional civic space. In 2022, in response to the Russian invasion, the Alliance quickly worked with Ukrainian Legal Aid Foundation, an active member of EPBA, to understand the needs of CSOs and individuals fleeing the country so they could develop country-specific guides on the rights and legal remedies available in each jurisdiction.

PIInet Clearinghouse

2021 Matches

136 CSOs

were helped with



181

legal matters



by **97** law firms and solo practitioners

12,081

hours of pro bono provided



Valued at

\$8,250,000



2022 Matches

142 CSOs

were helped with



169

legal matters



by **120** law firms and solo practitioners

10,490

hours of pro bono provided



Valued at

\$6,565,443



Top Matched Topics



Supporting CSOs

Success Stories

Legal terminology is difficult to understand when you are not a lawyer but often vitally important for CSOs navigating complex charity laws. So, in 2021, **ForNGO** created **YiLight**, an online wiki of legal terms, policies and regulations related to the public interest field to help build the legal infrastructure in the philanthropic sector. PILnet connected the organization to seven law firms and legal teams of international companies. ForNGO said the quality and responsiveness of those lawyers, “have set a high standard for our future content production outreach.” The website now also includes thematic packages of information for CSOs on topics such as starting a new charity and NGO finance, and continues to grow.



We are delighted to be able to support ForNGO not only with their legal work, but also in helping build a new generation of public interest lawyers! PILnet’s connection was crucial in building the relationship for us.” - Lawyer at Linklaters



UNITED SIKHS was in a race against time to file an opinion on two of Ireland’s acts that **combat discrimination and promote equality**. They needed legal help to prepare a submission on the impacts of these acts on the quality of life of Irish Sikhs and their religious freedom, but had to do so within a matter of days. “We knew it would be a great challenge for PILnet to obtain pro bono representation for us on short notice,” said Mejindarpal Kaur, International Legal Director of UNITED SIKHS. But within days, PILnet was able to connect them with lawyers at Fieldfisher and they filed the submission with the Irish Government before the deadline to ensure the voices of the Sikh community were heard.

Supporting CSOs

Success Stories

Mekong Club in Hong Kong engages the private sector in the **fight against modern slavery** and has sought legal support through PILnet several times. In 2021, PILnet obtained multijurisdictional legal research assistance for them to educate their corporate members on the dangers that so-called recruitment fees present for workers. These fees put workers at risk of exploitation, especially for those being recruited across borders. While many companies have made public commitments to eradicate recruitment fees in their supply chains, the reality is different. Research on varying regulations in selected jurisdictions in Asia and the Middle East allowed the Mekong Club to create a tool that explains the recruitment fee legal framework for key sourcing locations and migration corridors so that these private-sector actors can play their part in helping to end human trafficking.

“PILnet has genuinely helped us access some excellent legal assistance through its network of law firms. We could never have afforded or sourced this support on our own. We are a tiny team and simply do not have the resources.”
- The Mekong Club



Refugee Rights Pro Bono Project workshop

The **Refugee Rights Pro Bono Pilot Project** is an initiative to develop and trial a national-level pro bono coordination mechanism on refugee rights in Thailand. This project, hosted by the local CSO [Refugee Rights Litigation Project](#) (RRLP) with the assistance of PILnet and the Global Refugee Forum Pledge Core Group, built a vast **network of pro bono lawyers in Thailand** and trained them on international refugee law, the situation of refugees in Thailand, refugee protection in Thailand, and legal ethics. With this base of volunteers, PILnet and partners launched this project in 2022. The project is increasing the availability and quality of direct legal assistance for refugees and other forcibly displaced people and addressing some of the capacity constraints faced by legal assistance CSOs enabling them to take on more and more complex cases.

Supporting CSOs

Guides, Tools and other Resources

PILnet creates guides, tools, webinars, courses, and other resources to respond to regional and **global trends in legal threats and challenges that CSOs face**. This includes learning how to navigate the [money laundering risks](#) of their operations; how to legally use, process, and store the [personal data](#) of their beneficiaries; and how [arbitration](#) and other forms of dispute resolution may affect the public interest.

In the past two years, PILnet worked with its global network of CSOs and lawyers responding to the immediate and medium-term legal needs of people fleeing Afghanistan and Ukraine, the CSOs serving them, and the CSOs who stayed in their countries despite the challenges. We **developed and published more than 80** resources for individuals and organizations, which were researched and drafted by dozens of partner law firms and CSOs.



[Banking Guide](#) on specific aspects of opening and operating not-for-profit bank accounts - Available for 38 countries

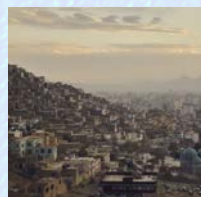


[Global Nonprofits Guide](#) on opening and operating a not-for-profit entity - Available for 65 countries



[Russia Sanctions: Compliance Guidance](#) to help CSOs understand the impact of the sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus - Available for 38 countries

[Country-Specific Guidance](#) for people displaced by the war in Ukraine, including guidance on travel documents, registration, access to social, medical, and housing services - Available for 29 countries



[Afghan Legal Aid and Pathways Project](#), a series of information sheets for Afghans in the country, those with family members in the country, and those wishing to relocate due to risk of harm - Available for 8 countries

Launched in 2021, the Climate Action Portal features a regularly updated and evolving range of case studies from around the world on how lawyers can dedicate their expertise, experience, and resources through pro bono work to help tackle the climate crisis. The guide currently presents more than 50 case studies on topics such as commercial legal advice, supporting climate activists, training community lawyers, assisting indigenous peoples, and immigration law. The Portal serves as an inspiration both to lawyers who want to advocate for environmental rights and to CSOs already working on climate change to learn how pro bono could help.

Inspiring the Next Generation

We must nurture the next generation of public interest and pro bono lawyers to become changemakers to continue the important work of PILnet's current network. PILnet's programs increase the exposure and awareness to public interest lawyering and access-to-justice issues and help shape the way public interest lawyers think.

Public Interest Lawyering Course

To explore the concept of justice across Asian jurisdictions, PILnet, in cooperation with the Leitner Center at Fordham University, developed The Asia Regional Course on Public Interest Lawyering built around core concepts critical to shaping the way public interest lawyers think: Pro Bono Publico; Strategic Litigation; Legal Empowerment; and what we call New Directions in Public Interest Lawyering. The course, first piloted in 2020, creates a channel for new public interest-minded lawyers to gain an international perspective at the outset of their careers and to build a new network for like-minded professionals. In 2021 and 2022, a combined **105 participants from 12 different Asian countries** took part in the five-week online course of self-paced learning and live webinars/discussions, and all participants agreed that they better understood public interest lawyering because of this course.

Law for Change Student Competition

In Hong Kong, PILnet has organized five cycles of the Law for Change Student Competition since 2017, which provide opportunities for law students and new professionals to explore the role of law as a tool for social change. So far, it has produced 75 project proposals from more than 250 law students, and 35 finalist teams were given the chance to further develop their proposals with the mentorship provided by 95 solicitors, barristers and in-house counsels. Though the competition was paused for 2021 because of COVID, winners from previous years continued to implement their projects. For example, OUTLET, the winner of the inaugural competition, creates partnerships between law students, law firms, and CSOs to offer free legal talks for marginalized groups. To date, **1,500 people have participated** in these talks created by 20 law firms or barristers and 2,000 university students.



Convenings

PILnet organizes a variety of convenings locally, regionally, and globally to share knowledge, provide tools, and build stronger alliances with our network of lawyers and advocates.

More than **2,000** people participated in a workshop, roundtable, or other PILnet event in 2022.



The PILnet Global Forum



Sara Hossain, featured speaker at 2021 Virtual Global Forum



Awmaima Amrayaf, featured speaker at 2022 Global Forum

The 2021 Virtual Forum and 2022 Forum in Dublin were opportunities for participants to exchange best practices and develop new ideas on how law can support civil society. Both Forums, which were each attended by over **300 participants** from around the globe, created room for innovation and the formation of new partnerships. Furthermore, in Dublin, we were excited that participants could gather in person once again and celebrate PILnet's 25th anniversary and our 15th Forum.

At the 2022 PILnet Global Forum, individuals with a lived experience of forced displacement discussed how the global legal community can support refugees and others affected by crisis, leading to a better understanding of the importance of **refugee-centered partnerships**. PILnet and our partners also highlighted our Global Nonprofits Guide. This presentation was an opportunity for pro bono lawyers to learn how they could get involved in this project and demonstrated the types of projects they could partner with us on.

Convenings



2022 Slovakia Pro Bono Day



2022 France Pro Bono Day

European Pro Bono Week

In November 2021 and 2022, PILnet and its partners held the 3rd and 4th annual European Pro Bono Weeks. During both years, **11 European countries organized local events** throughout the week. The 2021 European Pro Bono Week focused on the state and future of pro bono and kicked off with the first ever joint European meeting bringing all of the participants together. The 2022 European Pro Bono Week was organized around the topic of pro bono in times of crises, where participants discussed current challenges in the region and successful pro bono collaborations.

Asia Roundtables

PILnet continues to organize a series of roundtables in Hong Kong and throughout Asia to build a pro bono community in the region. In Hong Kong, roundtable members gather quarterly to hear from local barristers active in public interest law and pro bono to learn about the work they are doing and to explore how they can provide support. The Asia Regional Roundtables, hosted in partnership with other organizations, are an opportunity for law firms, NGOs, corporations, law schools and others from across the region to meet one another and network.

Global Refugee Forum Pledge

As the number of people displaced around the world continues to grow at an alarming rate, PILnet works to build equitable collaborations between those affected, refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and CSOs who support them, and the legal sector to advance refugee rights pro bono. As such, we and a Core Group of CSOs and legal professionals coordinate the Global Refugee Forum Legal Community Pledge (Pledge), launched at the first UN Global Refugee Forum. The Pledge is a **collective of 113 signatories** who have committed to increase access to justice for those displaced. We convene these signatories to share resources and good practices as we build bespoke and equitable partnerships and collaborations. In fulfillment of their commitments, private sector signatories to the Pledge and other legal professionals provided well over 580,000 hours of pro bono assistance between 2020 and 2022 to refugees and the organizations that work with them.

One part of this work includes relaying PILnet's expertise in working with CSOs to understand how legal assistance could help their beneficiaries and their organizations. In addition to matching matters through our clearinghouse, we worked directly with nine CSOs and RLOs to **develop and pitch 12 projects to 30 legal actors** during our 2022 Asia Pro Bono Legal Community Roundtable. Projects that were matched provided direct assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, comparative and country-specific research on a range of forced displacement issues, and legal support to strengthen the organizational capacity of several CSOs and RLOs. In a rousing success, all were matched with a suitable pro bono provider or a collaboration of firms.

As a result of this work, CSOs reported that the Pledge provided valuable opportunities for connecting with others doing similar work, learning from others' experiences, and developing a sense of common purpose and solidarity. Moreover, lawyers reported greater visibility of RLOs and greater awareness of the importance of **meaningful participation** in the legal sector.

In 2021,
Signatories provided
146,434
pro bono hours,

13% more
the **127,000** pro bono
hours pledged.

14 requests to
Clearinghouse,
with **13** matched,
93% matching rate.



In 2022,
Signatories provided
275,130
pro bono hours,

DOUBLE
the **135,180** pro bono
hours pledged.

45 requests to
Clearinghouse,
with **39** matched,
87% matching rate.



Global Refugee Forum Pledge

Success Stories from the Pledge

Following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August of 2021, PILnet and its partners organized an urgent consultation with more than **300 local activists and legal stakeholders** to discuss the legal needs of Afghans and Afghan CSOs and foster information sharing around resources. We then helped coordinate actors to develop pro bono projects that helped national and international organizations train private sector lawyers from dozens of law firms to work on issues such as representation during immigration proceedings, humanitarian visas, family reunification applications, and other legal pathways. PILnet also worked with RLOs to draft and publish a series of legal information sheets for Afghans seeking legal assistance in or relocation to a number of countries.

PILnet, in coordination with UNHCR, worked with a range of legal actors, including lawyers who had been displaced from Ukraine, **European Lawyers for Lesbos (ELIL)**, and Pledge member law firms, to scope a collaborative pro bono project that was piloted as part of the UNHCR - UNICEF coordinated Blue Dot Hubs in Poland. The project provides in-person, high-quality legal information and assistance to refugees arriving from Ukraine in order to help them obtain temporary protection, answer their legal queries, and navigate the legal procedures in Poland. They also provide specialized support for individuals with more complicated legal situations. In its first year, this project helped hundreds of people with one-on-one consultations.



Children's Rights

PILnet works to protect the rights of children in conflict with the law across Europe by building the capacity of European lawyers, **creating a community of lawyers and advocates to exchange best practices, and encouraging partnerships between these lawyers and child-focused CSOs.**

In 2021 and 2022, with the support of the EU, in partnership with Terre des Hommes and four other partners in the CLEAR Rights project, and with participation from children involved with the law, PILnet held trainings, created training guides, and organized a study tour for legal practitioners to strengthen their capacity on this issue in the project's target countries, Hungary, Belgium, France, The Netherlands, and Romania. PILnet reviewed the gaps in the legal aid systems for children and created core principles and a step-by-step guide for lawyers working with children in conflict with the law. We also drafted recommendations on how to improve the accreditation criteria that a lawyer should comply with to provide legal assistance to children.

The year ended with the launch of a specialized clearinghouse at events held in Hungary and Belgium on the advancement of child justice. The **Pro Bono Children Europe clearinghouse**, operated by the European Pro Bono Alliance, facilitates access to free quality legal assistance for CSOs working with children and their clients, including those working across borders, providing help with EU-wide legal research, operational legal needs, representation, legal drafting, legal translation, and more.



CLEAR Rights 2022 children's rights advocacy event

Copyright: Tdh Zsuzsa Darab

Because of this project, lawyers reported a better understanding of quality legal aid assistance for children in conflict with the law and a number of stakeholders reported collaborations between CSOs and professional organizations to implement similar initiatives such as training for lawyers, the promotion and use of tools produced by the project, and to organize joint events on these themes.

This project empowered children with lived experience to make their voices heard by creating child advisory boards who assisted in the design and development of project activities and outputs, including actively participating in the training of lawyers. Across Romania, Hungary and France, 68 children served on these advisory boards, with the support of trained adults, and participants reported having a better understanding of what the 'ideal' lawyer is.

2021 & 2022 Financial Briefs

In 2021 and 2022, PILnet was grateful to have received generous assistance from its many supporters. With these funds, PILnet delivered valuable legal support to civil society organizations around the world.

PILnet is a global nonprofit organization and is legally registered in the United States, Hong Kong, and Hungary.

2021 Financial Position

Total support & revenue	\$ 1,911,507
Total expenses	\$ 2,210,846
Net change in assets	\$ (299,339)
Net assets (beginning)	\$ 2,088,559
Net Assets (Ending)	\$ 1,789,220

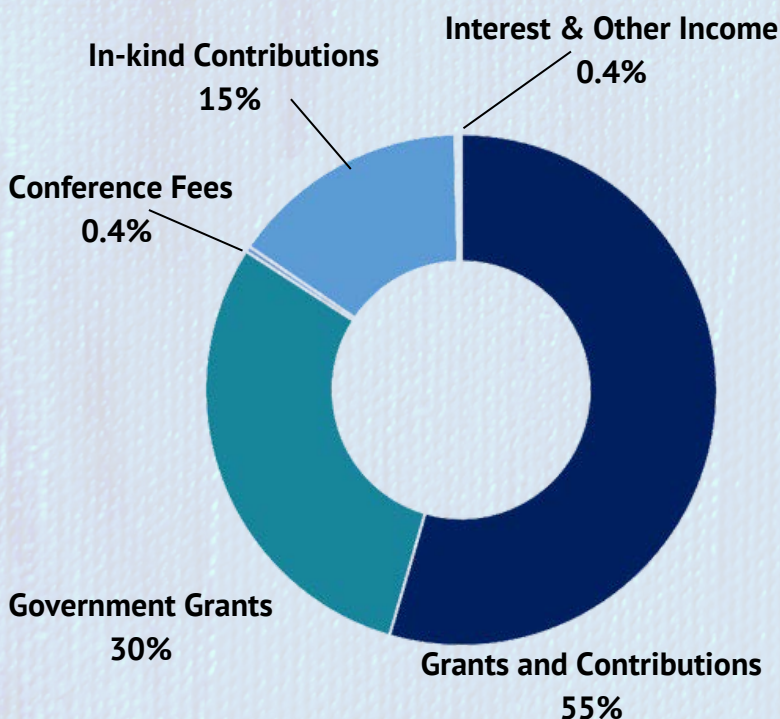
In 2021, lawyers
provided more than

12,081

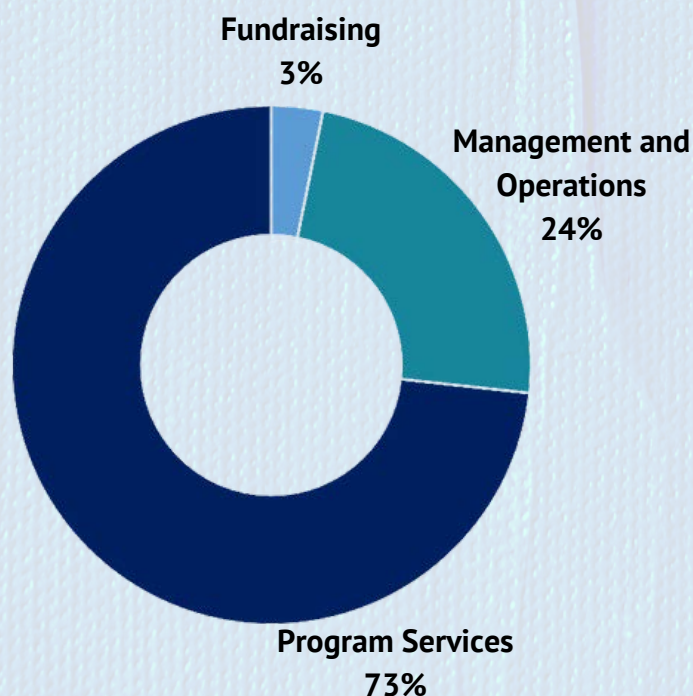
pro bono hours
worth

US 8.2M

2021 Support and Revenue



2021 Operating Expenses



2022 Financial Position

Total support & revenue	\$	3,205,417
Total expenses	\$	2,231,626
Net change in assets	\$	973,791
Net assets (beginning)	\$	1,789,220
Net assets (ending)	\$	2,763,011

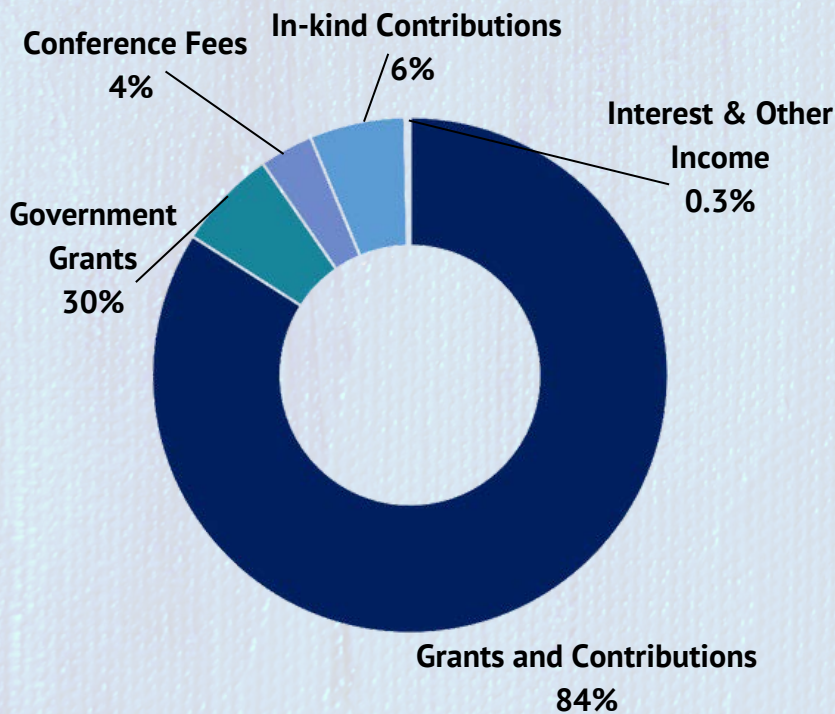
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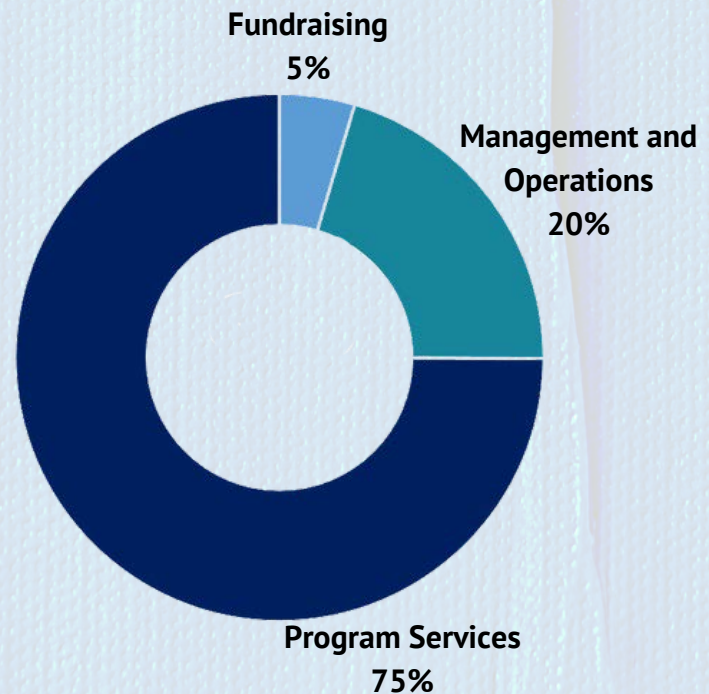
pro bono hours
worth

US 6.6M

2022 Support and Revenue



2022 Operating Expenses



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"Lawyers, we often focus on the law and sometimes lose sight of the end goal, which is justice."

- David Boyd, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment speaking at the Global Pro Bono Climate Portal Forum

PILnet.org



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