Mission

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.
Introduction

Societies around the world and the field of public interest law have undergone tremendous changes since PILnet’s inception nearly three decades ago. Global challenges are immense and growing: democratic backsliding and the emboldening of authoritarian regimes; government repression of civil society organizations (CSOs); whole populations impacted by climate change; and more people being forcibly displaced than ever before. These are just a few of the urgent challenges that currently confront us.

For decades, PILnet has mobilized legal knowledge, resources, and expertise and has built an international network of legal professionals to partner with CSOs to use the power of law to meet these challenges. PILnet creates partnerships between these sectors to ensure civil society is resilient and robust to defend and advance human rights. This strategic plan sets out PILnet’s values and approaches, its priority issue areas, and its core strategies, all with the goals of maximizing PILnet’s impact and ensuring that both the organization and the field will continue to evolve and thrive well into the future.
Strategic Principles

PILnet’s strategic principles inform and underpin program design, work execution, and partner engagement across all program areas.

- **Prioritize Urgent Global Challenges:** We identify and prioritize global issues where civil society needs are urgent and where legal professionals have capacity and skills that can add significant value for concerned communities.

- **Build Impactful Relationships and Trust:** We place special emphasis on building impactful and trusting relationships within PILnet’s network, including among legal professionals, CSOs, students, and local communities.

- **Emphasize Inclusion and Empowerment:** We adopt an approach in all working relationships that (1) lifts up the voices of, empowers, and meets the needs of concerned communities as they articulate them and (2) ensures meaningful and more equitable partnerships between CSOs and legal professionals.

Where PILnet Works

Recognizing our global mandate and cross-border network, PILnet continues to serve civil society globally on a local, regional and international level, and especially where the needs for supporting just, equitable, and sustainable societies are greatest.

- We are expanding the availability of pro bono assistance in **Europe and Eurasia** to ensure the resilience of civil society and to support those most vulnerable to crises to navigate legal risks.

- Our work in **Asia** boosts pro bono culture by creating partnerships between civil society and the private legal sector and strengthening the capacity of the next generation of public interest lawyers.

- PILnet continues to explore the needs of CSOs and to develop collaborations with partners around the world, and especially in **Latin America** and **Africa**.
PIILnet actively creates and nurtures sustainable and equitable partnerships between civil society and the legal sector. In particular, PIILnet obtains from legal professionals tailored legal assistance for organizations through PIILnet’s established local, regional, and global clearinghouses and events that bring lawyers and CSOs together.

PIILnet facilitates pro bono legal assistance for CSOs that work with refugees, children and other marginalized groups and also supports the development of collaborative pro bono projects, including those that bring public and private sector legal professionals together to maximize expertise and resources.

When a new challenge or crisis situation arises that affects many CSOs, PIILnet convenes legal professionals to better understand, coordinate and respond. With their expertise, PIILnet creates legal resources to help civil society and their communities.

PIILnet focuses on inclusion and empowerment of civil society by listening to the needs and helping to identify legal solutions that inform PIILnet’s strategic priorities. To support equitable partnerships, PIILnet raises awareness within the legal community of what they can do to meet the needs of affected communities and provides tools and best practices to facilitate learning and exchange.

1. Supporting Civil Society:

Context: CSOs play a crucial role in safeguarding and advancing human rights, especially of those in particularly vulnerable or marginalized situations. CSOs also empower those who are often excluded from the crucial conversations to find solutions to their most pressing problems. Empowering and supporting CSOs is, therefore, a more strategic use of PIILnet’s resources so those organizations can more effectively work directly with individuals in need.

What PIILnet does: PIILnet supports CSOs and less formal community efforts by obtaining legal assistance, services, and resources to a) bolster their operational health and resilience and b) to advance their programs and missions. PIILnet believes that healthy and strong CSOs are crucial to finding solutions to some of the most pressing problems and safeguarding civic space. PIILnet also empowers CSOs to promote access-to-justice for marginalized communities such as minorities, refugees, victims of human trafficking, and children.
2. Engaging Legal Professionals

**Context:** Legal professionals possess important expertise, experience, and resources, which are often not available within or for civil society. Their engagement brings not only additional resources, but also creativity in tackling problems that communities around the world face and in developing solutions for which civil society can advocate.

**What PILnet does:** PILnet engages private sector and public interest legal professionals to meet the specific needs of CSOs and communities and, more broadly, to protect and advance the public interest.

**Key Initiatives:**
- PILnet strategically curates pro bono opportunities and engagements for legal professionals to meaningfully use their expertise and resources to support CSOs.
- PILnet convenes pro bono practitioners and public interest lawyers to discuss cutting-edge topics, provide a space for collaborative project development, and encourage knowledge and experience sharing. The PILnet Global Forum is the annual flagship event for this purpose. Local and regional pro bono convenings are held on specific topics and in new target jurisdictions, where there is space to further expand pro bono availability.
- In jurisdictions where pro bono culture is less advanced, CSOs' needs are high, and the strategic relevance is strong, PILnet encourages the growth of a pro bono culture in a way that empowers and engages local voices and actors. This is achieved by conducting legal needs assessments and consulting with local actors and partners to inform the design of our work, such as hosting convenings or trainings, or supporting the creation of new local or regional pro bono clearinghouses.
- We aspire to be a global leader on refugee rights pro bono, using our unique role to transform the way refugee rights pro bono is delivered so it reaches and empowers the communities and organizations that need it.
3. Training the Next Generation

**Context:** We believe that exposure to and hands-on experience with pro bono and public interest law is essential to nurture and inspire the next generation of pro bono and public interest lawyers and to build the talent pipeline for pro bono work. As such, PILnet provides opportunities for law students and new professionals to explore the role of law as a tool for social change.

**What PILnet does:** PILnet nurtures, inspires, and trains law students and new legal professionals to engage in public interest and pro bono lawyering in the short-term and throughout their careers.

Key initiatives:
- PILnet develops **learning opportunities** -- including online courses, training, and public interest projects -- for law students and early career legal professionals so they can learn about methods to protect and advance the public interest.
- PILnet also creates **structured programs** such as internships, fellowships, mentorships, and secondments with the organization and other CSOs that engage law students and early career legal professionals in an experiential manner.
- Recognizing the wide network of fellows, law students, and early career legal professionals who previously have participated in PILnet activities, PILnet ensures that they are **connected to the PILnet network** so that they can participate in future PILnet activities, share their experience, and multiply PILnet’s reach and impact.
Strategic Priorities

In the face of scarce resources, PILnet has identified specific urgent global challenges on which to focus its resources and capacity across the three program areas. These are challenges that are essential to address in order to build just, equitable and sustainable societies.

Increasing resilience of organized civil society, and protecting civic space.
Civic space is where people come together to freely exercise their human rights. It provides a platform for those who are often excluded from decisions affecting their most pressing problems to speak up and be heard. But this space is under attack in many places around the world by authoritative power that seeks to silence dissenting voices. PILnet works with its network of private sector lawyers to protect civic space by identifying common legal risks and innovative ways of using the law to manage them.

Advancing rights, justice and solutions for refugees and people on the move.
Forced displacement is at a record high and the law is often a key to unlocking rights, justice, and solutions for refugees and people on the move. PILnet connects actors, builds collaborations, and advances refugee rights pro bono in a way that is integrated into and supportive of a wider legal ecosystem that recognizes, nurtures and centers the legal needs, rights, and skills of forcibly displaced people and others on the move.

Advancing environmental and climate justice.
Climate change threatens fundamental human rights and poses serious challenges for vulnerable communities, as do specific efforts taken to mitigate it. PILnet is exploring opportunities for more impactful engagement of legal pro bono in support of CSOs who are building sustainable environments, tackling the global climate emergency, and supporting climate justice. PILnet has the ambition to be a global leader in a) pioneering the use of legal pro bono to support climate and environmental efforts of CSOs around the globe and b) creating opportunities for private sector and civil society to work together for a sustainable planet, where human and environmental rights are protected and fostered.