CONCEPT NOTE

2026 U.S. Refugee Rights Pro Bono Pitching Roundtable

Building on momentum to expand free legal support for displaced and stateless communities

October 20, 2026 | 10:00–11:30 AM Pacific Time / 1:00–2:30 PM Eastern Time | Virtual

Background

Across the United States, refugee-led organizations (RLOs), diaspora groups, and other community-based nonprofits are central to protecting the rights and dignity of displaced communities. Yet they operate in an increasingly challenging environment, navigating growing legal and regulatory complexity alongside shrinking resources. While pro bono work on immigration and asylum is well developed in the U.S., many of these organizations still struggle to access it.

At the 2019 and 2023 Global Refugee Forums (GRF), more than 110 legal and refugee rights organizations came together to **expand access to legal assistance for displaced people and the organisations that are led by and work with them.** Together, members of a multi-stakeholder *Global Refugee Forum Legal Community Pledge* ("the Pledge"), have committed to provide over 1 million hours of free legal assistance towards this shared goal. To leverage these hours and direct them towards needs-driven pro bono partnerships, PILnet has partnered with UNHCR to develop an innovative legal matching mechanism; our Refugee Rights Pro Bono Pitching Roundtables. Having delivered results across Asia (2020, 2022) and the UK and Europe (2024), the model arrived in the United States in 2025 with equally compelling results. The First U.S. Refugee Rights Pro Bono Pitching Roundtable (October 2025), co-organized by PILnet, Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, HIAS, and Thomson Reuters Foundation, saw more than 20 projects pitched, with around 80% successfully matched with law firms. Half of participating organizations were led by refugees, stateless people or diaspora groups, and 90 percent were engaging with an international pro bono network for the first time.

Building on this foundation, and as refugee-serving organizations navigate a fast-shifting legal landscape with shrinking resources, PILnet is partnering with Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, A&O Sherman, UNHCR, and Refugee Congress to co-organize the **2026 U.S. Refugee Rights Pro Bono Pitching Roundtable**,**Tuesday, October 20, 2026, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time / 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. Eastern Time**.

The U.S. Refugee Rights Pro Bono Pitching Roundtable

The Roundtable will serve as a platform for partnership building between the U.S. pro bono community and nonprofits, advancing implementation of the Pledge in the U.S. **A catalog of projects and a pitching agenda will be shared with registered participants in advance of the Roundtable.**

At the Roundtable, nonprofits will pitch concrete pro bono projects directly to lawyers, followed by facilitated interactive discussions with legal professionals present. Only pitching NGOs are invited to attend. PILnet and co-organizers will provide follow-up support to help match firms with projects and to establish sustainable partnerships. While Pledge signatory status will be taken into account during matching, it will not be determinative. **The Roundtable is open to all U.S. legal professionals providing pro bono services, including in-house counsel.**

Preparing for the Roundtable

On September 10, 2026, PILnet and the co-organizers hosted the **U.S. Refugee Rights Pro Bono Workshop** for RLOs and nonprofits serving asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless people. The workshop aimed to:

- Raise awareness of the pro bono legal support available in the U.S. and internationally, and how to access it.
- Share real-life examples of successful pro bono partnerships, drawing on case studies and lessons from the first U.S. Roundtable.
- Offer practical guidance on navigating common challenges when working with law firms.
- Equip nonprofits to develop strong, actionable pro bono project proposals and pitch them at the Roundtable and beyond.

Following the workshop, interested organizations submitted project ideas through PILnet's Legal Assistance Intake Form. Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, A&O Sherman, and PILnet are now working with these organizations to refine their proposals, with particular support for those engaging with pro bono processes for the first time.

Key Timeline

1. **Legal Needs Submitted** (September 21, 2026): Nonprofits/RLOs submit interest in pitching via the legal request intake form.
2. **Project Pitches Developed** (September 23 – October 5, 2026): PILnet, Orrick and A&O Shearman work with nonprofits/RLO develop project pitches.
3. **Catalog Finalized** (October 12–14, 2026): PILnet finalizes and catalogs projects.
4. **Catalog Distributed** (October 15, 2026): Catalog sent to law firms.
5. **Pitching Roundtable** (October 20, 2026): Projects pitched and discussed with law firms.

Register

Legal professionals can **register here**

The 2026 Roundtable is made possible through the generous support of Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP and A&O Shearman.

Organizations seeking legal support are encouraged to submit a Legal Assistance Intake Form, and law firms or in-house teams wishing to contribute are invited to contact grfpledge@pilnet.org.