



FOREWARD

PROFESSOR ALAN PATERSON

CHAIR, INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AID GROUP

Dear Colleagues,

I hope that somehow you are all escaping the clutches of COVID. Thanks to the industry of our authors, and of the newsletter editor (Peter van den Biggelaar) and the webmaster (Paul Ferrie) we have a further Newsletter for your interest. ILAG is regularly asked to work with other organisations in the legal aid field and two of the pieces this time relate to an important comparative EU project on legal aid for children and a connected conference. The researcher behind the report and conference Dr. Agne Limante asked that ILAG circulate details of the conference to our members and that we provide links to the research on our website, and we were delighted to do so. The third piece is from Roger Smith, former editor of the Newsletter, providing us with a fascinating snapshot of the experience of those coming to the UK Citizens' Advice Bureaux for help and advice during the pandemic. Finally, I have inserted an announcement concerning the 14th biennial conference of ILAG, being held remotely this year in New South Wales 22-24th June.

Happy reading and stay safe.

Ever best wish,

Alan



A SHORT NOTE ON THE CONFERENCE "LEGAL AID FOR CHILDREN IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS: CHILD-FRIENDLY LEGAL AID AT FOCUS"

DR. AGNE LIMANTE

CHIEF RESEARCHER, LAW INSTITUTE OF THE LITHUANIAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES



As some of you may have already heard, at the beginning of February 2021, an international conference called "Legal aid for children in criminal proceedings: child-friendly legal aid at focus" has taken place. The main objective of the event dedicated to implement an EU co-funded project "Legal aid for children in criminal proceedings: developing and sharing best practices" (LA CHILD) was to provide an overview of the access to legal aid in the EU and in

different national contexts as well as sharing recommendations and best practices regarding this crucial topic.

The conference was organised by the Law Institute of the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, DCI-Belgium and the Centre for Integrated Legal Services and Practices (CILSP, Albania). The online conference was a true success – 209 participants registered and 198 attended the event. Among the audience members were attendees from such contrasting national backgrounds as European countries, the USA, Kenya, Indonesia, India, Japan and many others, as well as from various national and international organisations, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

Presentations were delivered by several prominent experts, law professionals, practitioners specialising in the field of legal assistance for minors, members of the academic community and representatives of key international organizations and institutions (please see below for the link to the recordings).

- Dr. **Agne Limante**, the LA CHILD project leader, presented the project and its main milestones. She also informed about a new project publication – comparative report “Legal Aid for Children in Criminal Proceedings” which covers 14 European states and which is available on the project website.
- Mr. **Bärbel Heinkelmann** representing the European Commission delivered a presentation regarding the role of the lawyer when defending a child, as well as the perspectives of different legal instruments, particularly Directive (EU) 2016/800 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings and Directive (EU) 2016/1919 on legal aid.
- Ms. **Inês Carvalho Sá** of the European Criminal Bar Association (ECBA) touched on the main challenges faced by the lawyer when defending a child in criminal proceedings and showcased examples of procedural documents relevant to the process.
- In a presentation concerning the assurance of quality legal aid for children in contact with the criminal justice system, Ms. **Anna Giudice** of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) explored international standards on legal aid, challenges imposed on it and relevant principles, guidelines, and tools, provided by the UNODC.
- Representatives of the Free University of Brussels prof. **Elisabeth Alofs** and Dr. **Sofie De Bus** dedicated their presentation to examining the role of lawyers in Belgian youth court proceedings, and, more precisely, re-considering the special training necessary in youth law.
- Prof. **Ton Liefwaard** of the Leiden University introduced child-friendly justice in Europe and emphasized the goal to make sure that all children benefit from it. This goal includes, among other things, adopting a perception that juvenile justice is firstly a matter of children’s rights and based on child-friendly systems.
- Legal aid and young suspects' legal rights in England and Wales was discussed during the lecture of Dr. **Vicky Kemp**, a representative of Criminal Justice Research Centre and University of Nottingham School of Law. Ms. Kemp highlighted the importance of

understanding a child's perspective on being a young suspect and informing them of their legal rights – resources, methods and costs to do so were presented as well.

- Fellow colleagues from Law Institute of the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences Dr. **Ruta Vaiciuniene** and Dr. **Simonas Nikartas** introduced the audience of the conference to legal aid for children in Lithuania and the national research results of the LA CHILD project. The comprehensive presentation of the national situation included legal examples, contents of conducted interviews, the challenges that were discovered as well as prospects for further improvements.
- A different national perspective was brought to light by **Eva Gangneux** of Defence for Children International Belgium (DCI-Belgium) – Ms. Gangneux discussed legal aid for children in Belgium and presented results of LA-CHILD project research from Belgium's point of view: key elements of legal aid for children in Belgium; designation, the role of a child's lawyer; required skills of legal aid providers were presented.
- The results of research conducted to implement the LA-CHILD project were also introduced by **Anjeza Puka**, who represents Center of Integrated Legal Services and Practices (CILSP) in Albania. Methodology of the conducted desk and field research was explained by the speaker, who then thoroughly described the research findings in Albania.
- Furthermore, **Khaled Quzmar** and **Ayed Abu Qteish** of Defense for Children International Palestine spoke of the Palestinian experience regarding legal aid for children. The speakers provided essential legal, political & geographic context and elaborated about two separate court systems: the Israeli Occupation Military Court System and the Palestinian Civil Court System. Goals and legal aid service characteristics of each system were also discussed.
- The following presentation by Dr. **Plarent Ruka** and Dr. **Arjana Fullani** (representative of Center for Integrated Legal Services and Practices (CILSP)) examined the challenges of the Albanian legal aid for children in conflict with the law and brought attention to the main legal fundamentals supporting the legal aid system.
- The subject of young suspects in Lithuanian criminal proceedings was analysed by **Raminta Gostautaite** representing the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Lithuania. Ms. Gostautaite discussed some of the gathered statistical data regarding juveniles, focused on these persons' rights in criminal proceedings and highlighted key aspects of the process.
- Lastly, **Marcos De Barros** of Terre des hommes Hungary (TDH Hungary) presented the project "CLEAR-Rights: Enhancing legal assistance and access to justice for children in conflict with the law in Europe", including the background context, activities and expected results of the project. The overall objective is "to improve equal access to a lawyer for children suspected or accused of a crime, through strengthening access to quality and specialised government-funded legal aid and pro bono legal assistance" – says Mr. De Barros.

According to the excellent feedback received through custom questionnaires, the attendees were very satisfied with the conference and expressed their willingness to attend more of such training events in the future.

If you would like to read more about the LA-CHILD project and/or view the recordings of conference presentations, please visit the LA-CHILD project site – www.lachild.eu.

“LEGAL AID FOR CHILDREN IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS: REPORT ON CURRENT EUROPEAN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS”

DR. AGNE LIMANTE

CHIEF RESEARCHER, LAW INSTITUTE OF THE LITHUANIAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES

Implementing an EU co-funded project “Legal aid for children in criminal proceedings: developing and sharing best practices” (LA CHILD), the international team has recently published a comparative report “Legal Aid for Children in Criminal Proceedings: Report on Current European National Frameworks”.

The report is available at:

<https://lachild.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/LA-Child-European-Report.pdf>

The Report presents an overview of regulations and practices in 14 European states with regard to legal aid for children in conflict with the law. It is based on the analysis of relevant international regulation, the EU and Council of Europe instruments, national desk-research, and semi-structured interviews with legal professionals.

The report discusses legal aid systems in European jurisdictions, the right to legal aid in criminal cases in Europe and specific regulations for the provision of legal aid to children in conflict with the law, requirements to legal aid providers in general and those providing legal aid to children, as well as assessment of legal aid quality. Moreover, specific focus is made on peculiarities of the right of children in conflict with the law to receive legal aid. In particular, the report analyses in what cases the laws of European states require the lawyer to be present, how the child assess information about legal aid; furthermore, the report also considers the child’s possibility to choose and change the lawyer and the means to protect the interests of the child.

By comparing different European systems, this report overviews the national regulation and identifies many challenges and inspiring practices. The report seeks to answer the question of



what is a child-friendly legal aid and how can it be achieved. Therefore, it is of particular interest to those who organise or administer legal aid for children, as well as researchers covering this field. You might also be interested in another report of the project team: “*Legal Aid for Children in Conflict with the Law in International and European Instruments*” which is available on the project website:

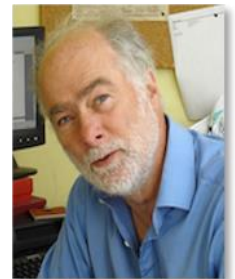
<https://lachild.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/INTERNA-AND-EU-INSTRUMENT-FINAL.pdf>

The EU co-funded project Legal aid for children in criminal proceedings: developing and sharing best practices (LA CHILD) is implemented by a consortium consisting of Law Institute of the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences (LIL, leading partner), Defence for Children International (DCI - Belgium) and Center of Integrated Legal Services and Practices (CILSP, Albania). The project started in February 2020 and will end in December 2021.

If you would like to read more about the LA-CHILD project, access its materials or view the recordings of the conference, please visit the LA-CHILD project site – **www.lachild.eu**.

CHARTING THE PANDEMIC

ROGER SMITH



Citizens Advice of England and Wales has given the most comprehensive picture of people’s need for legal assistance during the pandemic anywhere in the world in its ‘[Life Through Lockdown](#)’ report. It contains an invaluable snapshot of the time – ‘More than half of the people who came to us for help between September and December last year said their issue was brought about, or affected by, the pandemic’, ‘1 in 5 said they were not confident in using the internet’. And the issues that it foresees as key areas for the future? All of them relate to increased poverty: personal debt, housing and homelessness and inadequate incomes.

Citizens Advice (CA) is really a unique service even in countries like Australia and Canada which have followed its model to some extent. In modern parlance, it is multi-channel legal information, assistance and referral service run with a spine of 7000 paid advisers and 21,000 volunteers. Its website – the most comprehensive basic legal information resource in the world – got 52m page views in 2019. It has a network of local offices, but they have been shut for most of the 2020 pandemic year. It compensated with half a million phone consultations and 98,000 over web chat. CA gave advice to 2m people – most of them remotely via phone (up 77 per cent on the previous year), web chat (83 per cent up) and email (41 per cent up).

CA has learnt how to use data. It can produce graphs which show increased website use precisely related to government announcements on the pandemic: The report reproduces one ‘which shows the traffic to our online advice about the furlough scheme from 10 to 12 May 2020. There were two major spikes – the first immediately after the Prime Minister’s announcement about the easing of restrictions in England, when searches included ‘work during covid’, ‘furlough’, ‘can I move house?’, ‘hairdressers’, ‘holiday’, ‘landlord’, and ‘visiting my child’. Two days later there was an even bigger spike as the Chancellor announced changes to the furlough scheme.’

The trends over the year are revealing. ‘After an initial spike in visits at the beginning of the first lockdown, overall views dipped and settled although still at a higher level than during the same period the previous year. As the first lockdown eased, and people returned to something more similar to their normal lives, the number of people coming to our website increased again. It’s likely that during lockdown people prioritised the most urgent problems: with schools closed and children at home, parents did not have the space or time they needed to get help from us. This is similar to the patterns we see in school holidays in previous years. We can see that trend returning during the first months of 2021 as schools were closed once again.’ One trend common to all years (and possibly a good sign) was a big dip over Christmas: ‘Even during a pandemic people still take a much-needed break from their problems).’

Make what you will of the detail that the CA can provide: this is CA’s assessment of changing consultations: ‘Normally, we see a different pattern in our most-viewed pages at the weekend compared to weekdays. On weekdays before the pandemic, people were usually focussed on immediate problems around income, debt and housing. At the weekend, they thought longer term, and searched for advice around family, divorce and wills. During the spring lockdown, this stopped happening – with people at home all the time there was little difference between weekdays and weekends. People were concerned about dealing with their immediate coronavirus-related concerns every day of the week. As restrictions eased last summer, we saw the patterns gradually go back to normal. With people spending more and more time at home, we also saw an increase in the popularity of our page explaining how to complain about your neighbour – but only at the weekend.’

CA can trace website use by category of problem. Redundancy issues rose to a peak in the summer but fell dramatically towards the end of the year. The furlough scheme was as major interest: ‘The furlough scheme was the central plank of the government’s response to the pandemic, with a cumulative 11.2 million jobs supported since the start of the scheme. This was something that had never been done before, and people needed information to help them understand it. Unsurprisingly in this context, our online advice about the furlough scheme has been the most popular content throughout the entire pandemic.’ And CA can link google searches around ‘furlough’ to clicks through to its own website. Debt queries had a steep fall off in the early months of the pandemic but have then risen consistently. And the CA has a hard-hitting conclusion about the inadequacies of the benefit scheme (despite temporary enhancement): ‘The financial challenges people are facing are laid bare by the number of people coming to for help accessing charitable support or seeking a referral to a food bank. While the increase in food bank referrals is partly due to a new partnership between Citizens Advice and the [Trussell Trust](#), it is clear that the welfare net isn’t going far enough – either because it does not cover people’s costs, or because they are unable to access it.’

CA has a warning for the courts: ‘Sometimes our data changes rapidly, and points towards future problems. For example, searches for advice about County Court judgments (CCJs) have doubled in recent weeks, with the vast majority of people landing on our page about CCJs and credit ratings. This suggests that increasing numbers of people are having CCJs issued against them for the non-payment of debts as protections for borrowers affected by the pandemic are unwound.’

The CA data shows the personal cost of the pandemic in three key regards. First, ‘last spring, as many people spent more time at home, greater numbers of people sought one-to-one advice about divorce – as well as questions about children, primarily around contact with parents and

other relatives. This has continued throughout the pandemic, albeit at a slightly lower rate following the initial spike.’ Secondly, ‘In a stark reminder of the human cost of this pandemic, we have seen a big rise in prominence of our pages on wills and deaths. A sharp increase during the first wave of the pandemic was followed by an even greater increase during the winter lockdown, mirroring the higher death toll of the second wave.’ Third, the pandemic has changed the demographic of the poor: ‘When the pandemic hit, we saw a marked change in the type of people seeking our support with applications. In the weeks immediately before and after the first lockdown being announced we saw an 11% increase in the proportion of women seeking our help, a 19% increase in the proportion of under 35s, and a 3.7% fall in the proportion of people with disabilities.’

CA highlights poverty as the issue for the future: ‘The development of a vaccine means that for many people life will return to normal during the course of this year. Yet for millions of people their problems might be only just beginning, as they continue to struggle with the knock-on effects of the pandemic just as the support measures put in place by the government start to be withdrawn.’

The value and precision of this report stands as somewhat of a sunlit island against surrounding darkness. We need its insights supplemented by other providers of basic information and assistance. We need to see how its insights feed through into eventual fulfilment. Unfortunately, the courts and legal aid authorities really cannot provide anything comparable. For the former, CA is highlighting an issue on county court judgements. Well, what will the courts have to say about that? No, much if they do not considerably raise their game on data collection.

It is not just data, we need. CA can produce this type of report because it is one organisation with, effectively, a large set of franchised outlets operating to common standards. Overall, in the field of legal provision, England and Wales has opted for – or, more accurately, ended up with – a disparate range of different providers at every stage of the legal process with no presiding or unifying authority.

And, finally, we do not only need data and statistics. More than these, we need a strategic body or bodies that will deliver justice (and access to it) with the single-minded determination that the NHS is delivering the Covid vaccine. That should be the real lesson of the pandemic. Ultimately, once you have messed about with unfocused test, track and trace, you beat the pandemic with a laser focus on its eradication through a clear strategy and coherent delivery. (Yup. You might be able to tell I had the second Pfizer dose this afternoon). That is what life after the lockdown should be like.

We can live in hope.

THE SIERRA LEONE LEGAL AID BOARD AT A GLANCE

FATMATA CLAIRE CARLTON-HANCILES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LEGAL AID BOARD SIERRA LEONE

Introduction



The Legal Aid Board is a non-profit scheme which started operations in May 2012 following the passage of the Legal Aid Act 2012. The object for which the scheme is established is to provide, administer, coordinate and monitor the provision of legal aid in civil and criminal matters. In addition to the provision of legal aid to indigent persons regardless of their nationality, it is also the regulatory body for legal aid provision in the country. These involve accrediting legal aid providers, monitoring and evaluating the quality of legal aid provision.

Visibility

The Board is one of the most visible agencies of government in the country by virtue of the fact that it has offices in twenty-three (23) cities and towns across the country. These include all the 16 district headquarter towns including Karene and Falaba Districts which were created in 2016.

The Board established its first office in the Western Urban District which is home to the capital Freetown at inception in 2015. More offices were established in seven out of eight district headquarter towns in 2017 and 2018 respectively. Seven (7) more offices especially in remote parts of the Country including Karene and Falaba Districts were created in 2016. Additionally, the Office expanded its operations in five chiefdom headquarter towns in 2019.

Staffing

The Board has 17 Legal Aid Counsels on its staff who are deployed around the country. It has nine lawyers in the capital Freetown, two each in the Western Area Rural and Bo Districts and one each in Port Loko, Bombali, Kono and Kenema.

Also, the scheme has a total of 59 Paralegals. There are at least two Paralegals in each of its 23 offices. This is far below the minimum requirement provided in the Legal Aid Act 2012. Section 14 (2) of the Act provides that: ‘...the Board shall appoint at least one Paralegal to each chiefdom.’ With 190 chiefdoms in the country, the Board will need to recruit an additional 131 paralegals to meet this requirement.

Legal Representation

The Legal Aid Board runs the largest scheme in the country. 413,169 people including foreign nationals have benefitted from the scheme from its inception in May 2015 to December 2020. 24,768 benefitted from the scheme in 2015/16; 83,053 in 2017; 106,655 in 2018; 112,841 in 2019 and 85,852 in 2020.

The Board has always made steady gains in the total number of beneficiaries since 2015. The notable exception is in 2020 when the total number of beneficiaries for that year was down 26,989 on 2019. This is due largely to the restrictions introduced by the Government and traditional leaders to contain the COVID – 19 virus.

More importantly, the Legal Aid Board continues to carry the criminal calendar in the general courts. It represented 36 of the 52 accused persons whose matters were heard in the January 2021 Criminal Call-Over in Freetown. It represented all the 78 accused persons in February and March 2021 Special Criminal Sessions held in seven districts with a resident judge.

Moreover, it represented all the accused persons in the High Court in Port Loko, Moyamba, Kabala and Kailahun. These are district headquarter towns which did not have a resident judge before 2021.

Key Population

The Board provided legal assistance to members of the key population. These are groups which are most prone to HIV/AIDs infection. These comprise Female Sex Workers, Men Having Sex with Men and People who inject Drugs. 303 members of the key population comprising 198 Female Sex Workers (FSW), 96 People who Inject Drugs (PWIDs) and 9 Men having Sex with Men (MSM) benefitted from the scheme in 2020.

The Board collaborated with the following partner organizations - Dignity Association, Society for Women and Aids in Africa, Sierra Leone Youth Development and Child Link, Women in Crises – Sierra Leone and Kakua Hospice among others, which provided medical and psychosocial support to these groups. The Board's Paralegals visit drop-in centers run by partner organizations on a daily basis to determine their justice needs.

For instance, the scheme provides legal assistance to Female Sex Workers who face harassment and intimidation in the hands of the police as they go about their business. They are usually arrested for loitering or frequenting while their male clients walk away free.

Women and Children

Women and children benefit the most from Alternative Dispute Resolution/Mediation services in respect of Child Maintenance, Spousal Maintenance, Debts, Inheritance and Property matters. Out of a total of 37,286 persons who benefitted from Mediation services in 2020, 27,944 were women and children, accounting for 75% of beneficiaries.

Through these services the Board has ensured women inherit properties of their deceased husbands even in remote communities where customary rules and practices are entrenched. The Board has also ensured women own property.

The opening of Child Maintenance Accounts at the Rokel Commercial Bank and securing of Court Orders for breach of monthly payment of Child Maintenance money have brought about a huge relief to mothers whose children have been abandoned and neglected by their fathers. The Board has opened 543 Child Maintenance Accounts since July 2019 when the first account was opened to December 2020. Also, the Bank opened an outlet in the Head Office of the Board in Freetown to make the opening of these accounts simpler and easier.

This brought about a huge improvement in the rights of children relating to education, food, accommodation and general upkeep. For instance, the Board offices work overtime in the weeks leading to the reopening of schools to mediate child maintenance matters so that children do not have to drop out of school because they cannot afford school charges or school fees where applicable, fare to school, lunch and books.

Mediation

The Legal Aid Board mediates civil matters or matters of non-criminal nature such as Child Maintenance, Spousal Maintenance, Inheritance, Property Matters, Labour Matters, Family and Marital Disputes. The Board also mediates community level disputes and minor criminal matters such as abusive language, threatening remarks, common assault or fighting etc. This is aimed at reducing the pressure on an already overstretched police force and general court. Furthermore, it also promotes peaceful coexistence as opposed to the adversarial nature of the criminal justice system.

The Board mediated 184,406 matters from date of inception in May 2015 to December 2020. 7,794 matters were mediated in 2015/16, 41,592 in 2017, 48,452 in 2018, 49,282 in 2019 and 37,286 in 2020.

Community Advisory Bureau

These are satellite offices of the Legal Aid Board. They are run by volunteers who are drawn from the community or Ward where the Bureau is located. This initiative is aimed at ensuring that Communities and Wards take ownership of their justice needs and challenges and by extension reducing pressure on the Board and Police. The Bureaus provide primary legal aid services such as referrals, mediation of community level disputes, provision of basic information on civil and criminal matters and organizing outreach events to educate their members on the laws and how the justice system works.

The Board started establishing Bureaus in February 2017. 35 Bureaus have been established so far. Three (3) Bureaus were established in 2017, 13 in 2018 and 19 in 2019. No Bureau was established in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Board hopes to set up one Bureau in each of the remaining 411 Wards in the country as and when funds are available.

Legal Education

Legal education is aimed at educating people on and raising awareness on the laws, legal processes, how the justice system works and human rights. This is done through community outreach, school outreach and radio phone-in programmes.

It goes without saying that those who are educated on these issues are less prone to abuses and extortion when accessing the justice system. More important, they are able to assert their rights.

160,440 benefitted from legal education through community, school outreach and/or radio phone-ins from date of inception in May 2015 to December 2020. 11,710 benefitted from legal education in 2015/16, 26,746 in 2017, 40,953 in 2018, 45,004 in 2019 and 36,027 in 2020.

Also, this has been a key driving force in taking legal aid services to the doorstep. As a result, the LAB offices have become the first port of call for those accessing or facing challenges with the justice system.

This has brought about a reduction in abuses people are subjected to when accessing justice.

This has reduced the cost of accessing justice in the sense that they do not have to incur fare to receive information on criminal and civil cases or have their matters referred to the appropriate justice sector.

Local Court

The provision of advice and legal assistance also targets Local and Traditional Court Administrators and inhabitants of chiefdoms who access these courts. Paralegals provide these services to these three categories of people since lawyers are not allowed to make representation in these courts.

The Paralegals provide advice and information on the matters Local and Traditional Courts can hear and determine such as civil matters governed by customary law and minor criminal offences. They ensure, they do not hear and determine serious criminal matters relating to sexual offences, murder, robbery etc. These matters are referred to the police.

Referral

The Board is the first port of call for many to request information on where to seek justice. There have been instances in which serious criminal offences have been taken to the Local and Traditional Courts even though they are meant for the police.

In monitoring the justice system, the Board ensures that justice institutions hear and determine matters within their jurisdiction. There have been instances in which the Board has referred matters from the Local and Traditional Courts to the police where they truly belong.

Also, minor criminal matters like abusive language, threatening remarks and other community level disputes and customary matters are referred to Local Court or Traditional Court for mediation to ensure settlement of the matter and peaceful coexistence.

This Legal Aid Board has brought about a reduction in exploitation, extortion and other forms of abuses people are subjected to following seeking justice in the wrong justice sector.

Monitoring

The Board monitors the delivery of justice at both formal and informal level. The former, comprise the Police Station, Correctional Centers, Local Court and Magistrate and High Courts. The latter comprise Traditional Courts presided over by Local Court administrators, Paramount Chiefs, Tribal Head and Sub Chiefs.

This service is aimed at ensuring that justice institutions conduct their affairs in a manner consistent with their mandate and human rights standard. For instance, the Board ensures the police do not over-detain suspects, deny bail where bail is due, and suspects are not put under duress while they are being investigated.

The Traditional Courts do not have judicial power even though they illegally exercise such powers from time to time. These 'courts' have many excesses. These include prohibitive fines,

bias against women, handling matters outside their remit, illegal arrest and detention. The Board has been successful in curbing these excesses through monitoring.

In the case of the Local Court, Paralegals ensure that Court Chairmen dispense justice in a manner consistence with the Local Court Act 2011. This entails putting a stop to some of the abuses in the way Court Chairmen dispense justice such as prohibitive fines, illegal arrest and detention and presiding over serious criminal matters which fall outside their remit.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The Board had to revise its strategy in January 2020 to mitigate the dramatic increase in Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) cases around the country as a result of pre-COVID-19 pandemic.

This involves the use of community radio phone-ins to educated people on the Gender Laws - Domestic Violence Act 2007, Devolution of Estate Act 2007, Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2009 and Sexual Offences Act 2012 (As Amended in 2029) - so as to know the offences and the penalties under these laws.

The Board produces sensitization materials, jingles, documentaries on SGBV in collaborate with over 300 partners to enhance community sensitization, monitoring and reporting of cases and the provision of psychosocial support to victims

The Board signed an MOU with the Sierra Leone Police to mitigate the incidence of Sexual and Gender Based Violence. This includes the distribution of mobile numbers of senior police officers to partners and members of the community to enhance timely reporting and response to SGBV.

The Board also signed an MOU with the Sierra Leone Association of Women in Journalism (SLAWIJ) to raise awareness on SGBV through the use of radio programmes, which were broadcast on major radio station across the country.

LEGAL AID NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

PAUL FERRIE

ONLINE ADMINSTRATOR, ILAG AND ASSOCIATE SOLICTOR, FULTON'S (SCOTLAND)



The news items shown below are largely compiled from articles on the internet, found on the basis of a simple search for terms such as 'legal aid', 'access to justice' and 'pro bono'. Therefore, readers must, just as buyers, beware of authenticity. The links worked at the time of writing, but some will obviously fail after a period of time.

Australia

['Tsunami' Of Women Seeking Legal Help And Services Can't Keep Up](#) – The Sydney Morning Herald

[Vic Legal Aid Fights Visa Secrecy Bill](#) – The West Australian

Canada

[Legal Aid Ontario Launches Program To Improve Legal Aid Services For Immigration Detainees](#)

– Law Times

[Income Assistance Rates To Rise In Nova Scotia, Premier Says](#) – CBC News

['We're In Trouble': Advocates Urge Ottawa To Help Close The Access-To-Justice Gap](#) – CBC News

China

[Legal Experts Launch China's First Non-Profit Foundation Dedicated To Offering Legal Aid To LGBTQ Community](#) – Global Times

England & Wales

[Barristers Call On Ministers To Make Legal Aid Available In All Domestic Abuse Cases](#) – The Justice Gap

[Calls For End To Remote Legal Advice For Vulnerable Suspects In Police Stations](#) – The Justice Gap

[Landmark Report Paints Bleak Picture Of Criminal Legal Aid](#) – The Law Society Gazette

[Legal Aid Can't Wait For A New Government, Says Lammy](#) – The Law Society Gazette

[Legal Services Board Under Fire For "Neglecting Impact Of Covid"](#) – Legal Futures

[Lack Of Legal Aid For Immigration Detainees In Prisons 'Unlawful', High Court Rules](#) – The Justice Gap

[MOJ: 2021 Is Set To Be A "Big Year" For Legal Aid](#) – Legal Futures

[UK Aid Cuts To Refugee Legal Support Threaten 'Utter Destitution' For Syrians](#) – Arab News

India

[Do More Pro Bono Work: Next CJI To Senior Lawyers](#) – Times Of India

[How Covid Pandemic Hit The Justice System](#) – Hindustan Times

[Poor Quality Of Legal Education Worrying, Says Justice Ramana](#) – Hindustan Times

[Rural Experience: Fewer Legal Aid Clinics, Police Personnel](#) – Hindustan Times

Korea

[Pro-Bono Lawyers Unveil Legal Aid Statistics For Child Support Payment Lawsuits](#) – Korea Bizwire

Republic of Ireland

[FLAC Welcomes Plans For Civil Legal Aid Review By September](#) – Irish Legal News

[Justice Minister Looks To Cap Hefty Legal Fees](#) – Irish Examiner

[Minister To Consider Public Defender System To Replace Legal Aid Scheme](#) – Irish Legal News

Scotland

[Cautious Welcome For Five Per Cent Increase In Legal Aid Fees](#) – Scottish Legal News

[Law Society Of Scotland Calls For Big Justice Reform In Next Parliament](#) – The National

[New debt navigator project at Govan Law Centre](#) – Scottish Legal News

Singapore

[Legal Aid Services Get Boost With Tie-Up Between SG Cares Office And Law Society Pro Bono Services](#) – The Straits Times

United States of America

[Iowa Legal Aid Says More People Seeking Help As Eviction Deadline Looms](#) - KCRG

[“It’s A Black Hole”: Legal Aid Justice Center Discusses Virginia Employment Commission Lawsuit](#) – NBC29

[Pandemic Causes Rise In Need For Civil Legal Aid](#) – Boston Globe

[Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice: Civil Legal Aid Must Be Essential](#) – Port Arthur News

[Tyson Boosts Workers' Legal Aid](#) - Northwest Arkansas Newspapers

For more information about the work of the *International Legal Aid Group*, please visit our website which can be found at <http://www.internationallegalaidgroup.org>.