



FOREWORD

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Dear Colleagues,

Those living in the Northern Hemisphere should be experiencing Winter just now. Instead, the weather varies from bitter cold to unseasonal warmth and back again all within a relatively short period. Such changeability in the climate mirrors the fortunes of access to justice programmes globally. Some are on the up, others are in decline. Our articles from Zambia and Uzbekistan in this Newsletter are in the former category and I commend them to the readership. The third piece is the Editor's trailer for the ILAG conference in June 2025 in Cologne. It promises to be an exciting one – with places at a premium, so Registration is likely to be open earlier than in the past.



Looking ahead to the next Newsletter (scheduled for March 2025) with climate change an ever-growing problem, predictably, this has begun to be reflected in litigation. The UK Supreme Court earlier this year ruled (by a narrow majority)¹ that planning authorities have to take account of the combustion emissions caused by new fossil fuel installations in their environmental impact assessments. We are hoping, therefore, to publish an article on climate change litigation from Nigeria in the March Newsletter.

My thanks again to our ever-industrious Newsletter editor (Peter van den Biggelaar) for generating the contributions to the Newsletter, our webmaster (Paul Ferrie) for his work on the Newsletter and Eileen Richie for sending it out.

Warmest best wishes for the holiday season.

Alan

¹ Finch [2024] UKSC 20

COLOGNE AND ILAG 2025

PETER VAN DEN BIGGELAAR

*VICE - CHAIR, INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AID GROUP AND FORMER
CEO OF DUTCH LEGAL AID BOARD*

After the beautiful and interesting ILAG conference in Harvard 2023, we are already preparing for 2025. In June, the ILAG conference in Cologne is on the program.

It is already the 15th conference since the start of the first in The Hague (Netherlands) in 1992. Wouter Meurs of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Professor Alan Paterson, of Strathclyde University then made the start of what later turned out to be a successful tour through the world.

Twelve countries have already been visited with a very varied range of papers and presentations each time, in which many and interesting topics have been discussed.

That does not mean that these topics have differed each time; some topics have remained and continue to return, but each time in a new and changing context and of course legal aid remains constantly in motion and the threats remain permanently present, but there too we see new solutions or changed insights every time.

It is precisely the combination of policymakers, researchers and academics that makes it interesting to see which approach can be successful, which steps can lead to further improvement and which path is better avoided.

The emphasis on the development of evidence-based policymaking also makes an important contribution when it comes to how improvements and changes can be achieved. It also provides insight into what could be a good approach, but which ultimately turns out not to be.

Development of legal aid remains a process of permanent monitoring and keeping an eye open on developments in society.

ILAG has been able to observe that more and more countries are using this approach and have also continued to improve, sometimes even being able to start from scratch.

Where possible and requested, ILAG also supports various projects of the Council of Europe, EU, UNODC and UNDP with contributions from its members, all with the aim of making legal aid accessible and available to citizens who desperately need support to be able to live as a full member of society.

Sometimes things move quickly, sometimes very slowly and sometimes even backwards with setbacks. Sometimes it also continues to resemble the movement of a pendulum in which insights gained on the basis of research lead to a nice step forward and then back again, but then hopefully less back than forward.



The call for papers and presentations for the ILAG conference in Cologne (25 - 27 June 2025) has already yielded a rich treasure trove of papers and topics. 48 applications have been submitted. Unfortunately, ILAG cannot accommodate all of them due to the limited number of sessions and sometimes also because of the combination of topics in a session.

To give you a sneak preview, the draft programme covers a range of topics from “Managing Resources for Access to Justice” to “Legal Aid and Mass Harm” and from “Thinking strategically about Access to Justice” to “Artificial Intelligence: Solution or Problem.”

We expect to be able to hold another very special conference in 2025.

Space may be tight in Cologne so we will try to open registration earlier than usual in 2025.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ZAMBIA’S LEGAL AID SYSTEM – KEY DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PERIOD 2018-2024 / PART I

KAROL LIMONDIN

CHIEF ADVISER AT THE DANISH INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (DIHR), CURRENTLY POSTED IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA, PROVIDING EXPERTISE AND SUPPORT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENABLING ACCESS TO JUSTICE, CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION AND TRANSPARENCY (ENACT) PROGRAMME



- ✓ **Taking legal aid services closer to vulnerable groups**
- ✓ **Involving paralegals at all levels of the justice system in both formal and customary justice**
- ✓ **Based on cooperation between the state Legal Aid Board and non-state legal aid providers**
- ✓ **In collaboration with the Judiciary, prisons, police stations; and at community level, with Chiefs, traditional leaders and customary courts**
- ✓ **Empowering individuals to claim their rights and obtain remedies**
- ✓ **Supporting increased protection of human rights in Zambia**

In Zambia, the majority of the poor and vulnerable people has limited access to legal aid services. This means that the rights to legal assistance, legal representation and equality before the law as set out in the Constitution are not adequately fulfilled in practice:

- Overall, awareness levels on the law and the available legal remedies and protections amongst the population are low, with an additional lack of knowledge on where to seek assistance when confronted with a legal issue;
- In the criminal justice system, legal information and advice in police stations, police posts, prisons (called ‘correctional facilities’ in Zambia) and at court level were largely absent

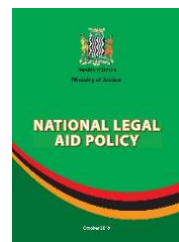
(until the introduction of legal aid desks at courts, prisons and police stations in 2017, see further details below). This left many suspects and inmates unable to claim their rights;

- At community level, women and other vulnerable people including children face significant violations of their rights in a wide range of justice matters, often related to family life and property ownership. This includes human rights violations in the context of the family, gender-based and domestic violence, as well as discriminatory practices imposed on women and various forms of child abuse and child labour. It also involves land and property related issues such as denial of property upon divorce, property grabbing at succession, and undue restrictions in accessing land. As legal education and information on the law and the available legal remedies and protections were not provided in a consistent manner to the population, most cases of women's and children's rights violations and gender-based violence are not reported to the formal justice system. In practice, the vast majority of disputes are settled locally according to customary law (*National Legal Aid Policy, Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2018*).

2018 – 2021: Adoption of a National Legal Aid Policy, a new Legal Aid Act and a standardised national three-level paralegal training scheme

Against this background, the Government of Zambia adopted on 1st October 2018 a **National Legal Aid Policy** with the objective to ensure efficient and effective delivery of legal aid services to the poor and vulnerable people in Zambia.

The development of the National Legal Aid Policy followed an inclusive approach based on extensive consultations involving institutions and stakeholders at provincial and national levels. The process was led by the Ministry of Justice and the Legal Aid Board in Zambia. The participants in the consultations included ministries and other state institutions, the Law Association of Zambia, universities and other higher educational institutions, and more than 25 civil society organisations involved in legal aid.



The National Legal Aid Policy establishes a **comprehensive and forward-looking legal aid system in Zambia**:

- It widens the scope of legal aid services, now including legal education / awareness raising, legal information, legal advice and mediation, in addition to legal assistance and representation in court;
- It recognises the role of civil society organisations in providing legal aid through paralegals and law degree holders providing legal aid (called 'legal assistants'), and the additional contribution from university law clinics and legal practitioners providing pro bono legal aid;
- It puts emphasis on the effective mobilisation and coordination of all legal aid service providers including state and non-state actors;
- It supports increased awareness on the law and legal aid services amongst the population in order to empower people to claim their rights and obtain remedies;
- It establishes a duty for state institutions to inform persons on their right to legal aid and the availability of legal aid services. It further requires institutions to assist

unrepresented detained persons in contacting the Legal Aid Board in order to apply for legal aid.

Overall, the National Legal Aid Policy recognises the **duty and responsibility of the State to provide for legal aid** and expands the mandate and functions of the Legal Aid Board to include the coordination, regulation and monitoring of the legal aid system.

In 2021, a **new Legal Aid Act** was enacted, operationalising the objectives and policy measures set in the National Legal Aid Policy. The two documents have laid down a solid **foundation for the legal aid system in Zambia**. Both contain **radical innovations** in the Zambian context, in particular with the formal recognition of paralegals, legal assistants, civil society organisations and university law clinics, based on a broadened definition of legal aid, and with strengthened partnership between state and non-state legal aid providers.

The Legal Aid Board in Zambia is a statutory body established under the Legal Aid Act No. 1 of 2021 to provide for the granting of legal aid in both civil and criminal matters to persons whose means are inadequate to enable them to pay for legal services. The Legal Aid Board is also responsible for providing regulation of paralegals, legal assistants, civil society organisations, university law

In addition, a **standardised national three-level training curriculum for paralegals** was developed by a multi-stakeholder committee mandated by the Ministry of Justice and led by the Legal Aid Board. It involved stakeholders from the paralegal and vocational training sector. Before 2018, paralegals were trained by various learning and vocational institutions and organisations. The content and duration of the trainings varied, as well as the qualification of the trained persons. This caused a lack of confidence in the competency of paralegals to provide legal services.

In 2018, the newly designed national three-level training curriculum for paralegals was officially approved by the Technical Education, Vocation and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA). The new curriculum has a dedicated focus on paralegal skills development. Together with the adoption of the National Legal Aid Policy, clear training standards, qualifications and mandates are now established for paralegals. This led to increased competence and professionalism of paralegals, and enhanced quality of paralegal services provided. It further contributed to the recognition of the paralegal profession in Zambia.

Since the beginning of the new training scheme, 422 paralegals were trained in total as of 2024 (50% of whom are women). They are made up of 325 paralegals trained at level 3, 59 paralegals at level 2 and 38 paralegals at level 1. An additional 50 paralegals are presently being trained at level 1 of the TEVETA-approved paralegal training scheme. Paralegal training manuals have been developed and updated at all three levels of the training scheme, and paralegals can now get trained through distance learning. Trainings are being held by 11 different training providers, including universities, training institutes and civil society organisations.

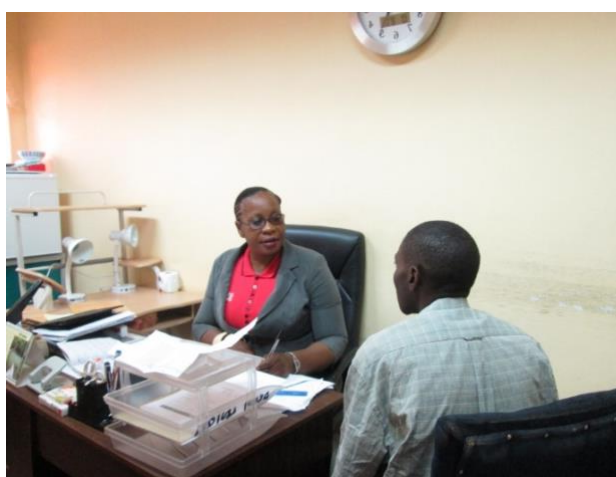
There are 3 levels in the training programme that qualify for different tasks:



Source: GIZ, 2020.

2018 – 2024: The Legal Aid Board and civil society legal aid providers joining efforts to create and strengthen a more accessible legal aid system, based on a network of 116 legal aid desks, with services provided at various levels of the justice system

35 legal aid desks based in courts, prisons and at police stations



Paralegal receiving a client at the pilot Legal Services Unit, in the initial year of operation, at the Lusaka Subordinate Court.

Building on the success of the pilot Legal Services Unit at the Lusaka Subordinate Court (initiated in 2013), the Legal Aid Board has partnered with various civil society organisations to gradually come up with a **network of 35 legal aid desks** in 5 select provinces in Zambia i.e. Central, Copperbelt, Luapula, Lusaka and Southern provinces. These desks are set up to provide legal aid services to suspects, accused persons and other litigants in civil and criminal matters. They are strategically **placed inside police stations, prisons and courts**, with daily outreach to suspects in police custody and inmates. The desks are based on a unique cooperation between the Legal Aid Board, civil society organisations providing legal aid,

and the Judiciary of Zambia, the Zambia Correctional Service and the Zambia Police Service.

The legal aid desks are run by a team of professional staff who are experienced, qualified and fully committed to the desks and their clients. This includes:

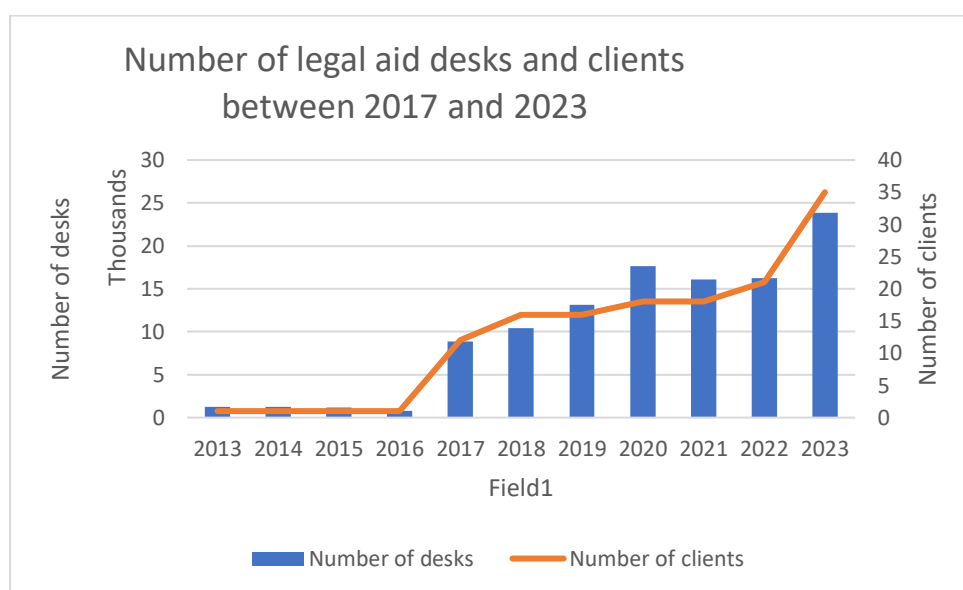
- 79 paralegals and legal assistants from various civil society legal aid providers, namely Caritas Mansa, Caritas Monze, Legal Resources Foundation, National Legal Aid Clinic for Women, Prisoners' Future Foundation, Prisons Care & Counselling Association, Undikumbukire Project Zambia; and
- 19 legal aid assistants (who are law graduates attached to the Legal Aid Board, with limited rights of audience in court as per the provisions of the Legal Aid Act).

They all operate according to the quality standards set by the Legal Aid Board and under the direct supervision of a Legal Aid Board practitioner, who ensures that professional standards are fully complied with in order to be able to best serve desks' clients.

The legal aid desks at court and in prisons and police stations address cases of ongoing stay in remand or in police custody, ongoing trials and delayed judgments. Similarly, desks liaise with the Department of Immigration on cases of illegal immigrants facing ongoing detention. The desks assist child offenders in detention and support the increased use of diversion measures.

In **2023**, these 35 legal aid desks provided **legal aid services to 23'886 people**, **25%** of whom are **women and children**. Out of this number, 4'226 inmates or persons in police custody (18%) were successfully released on police bond or bail following the desks' assistance. In addition, 346 children were sent for diversion. Further, only 37 per cent of the people who were assisted and represented in court through one of the court-based legal aid desks (Legal Services Units) were sentenced to imprisonment (others were acquitted, discharged, withdrawn or diverted away from the criminal justice system, or received a non-custodial sentence).

Overall, this is a **total of 110'700 clients** who received legal aid from the desks based in courts, prisons and at police stations, ranging from 1'238 clients in 2013 (at the pilot Legal Services Unit at the Lusaka Subordinate court) to 23'886 clients in 2023 (at the 35 desks). In 2024, it is anticipated that more than 26'000 people receive legal aid through the community desks.



Further, the legal aid desks' staff (or their supervising practitioner from the Legal Aid Board) participate in the **Communication, Cooperation and Coordination Initiative (CCCI) Chapters** that have been formed at Subordinate Court level in Zambia. CCCI is a platform of actors in the administration of justice. It includes criminal justice institutions, civil society organisations and other stakeholders working in the justice system. It aims at addressing challenges within the system through better communication, coordination and cooperation among justice stakeholders. Due to the visible impact of CCCI Chapter's on the efficiency of the justice chain, the Judiciary of Zambia in 2019 initiated the establishment of CCCI Chapters in all districts of Zambia.



Source: GIZ, 2020.

The CCCI Chapters usually meet once a month to provide a platform for discussions on administrative, procedural or legal challenges arising in the justice system. During these meetings, the CCCI members identify specific issues or bottlenecks and find joint solutions for challenges. Also, the CCCI members undertake various activities together, including awareness raising and visitations to police stations and prisons. With their in-depth knowledge of the issues faced by litigants and communities on the ground, the legal aid desks' staff contribute to the CCCI Chapters discussions and actions and play a crucial role in improving the access and delivery of justice in Zambia.

Here is an example of a case handled in 2023 by one of the legal aid desk:

Case study: *At the age of 16, Smart K. was convicted of a theft he denies committing. For 19 months he was kept in police custody and later in one of Zambia's congested prisons. Smart is one of 23'886 Zambians who in 2023 received help from one of the legal aid desks at court, prison and police station levels.*

According to Smart, at the age of 16, he purchased some household goods, which turned out to be stolen goods. After the police found the stolen items at his home, they charged him with theft. At first Smart was detained in a police cell at a police station in his hometown. While in custody waiting to take plea, there was brawl in the police cell and a detainee was badly beaten. The Police

decided to charge everyone in the cell with assault including Smart, however he denied being involved. He was jointly charged with 3 adults. Three months after buying the stolen goods and now facing two charges, the Subordinate Court of the town discharged Smart for the offence of theft. However, the assault case went to trial. Smart was found guilty of the offence and ordered to be detained at a reformatory school.

According to the Juveniles Act, a legal framework that protected the rights and welfare of children and youth of Zambia, which has since been replaced by another legal framework, a reformatory order had to be confirmed by the High Court before it took effect. While Smart awaited a response from the High Court, he was transferred to a prison in Zambia's capital, Lusaka, one of the most overcrowded in the country.

"It was a nightmare. I didn't know when I would get out. I felt really bad and considered committing suicide," says Smart.

Legal aid paves the way for freedom

It is not until he met Kabota C., a senior legal officer and Jephter C., a legal assistant working for the organisation Undikumbukire Project Zambia (UP Zambia) at one of the legal aid desks located in prisons, that Smart began to harbour a small hope of returning to his hometown.

When the UP Zambia team delved into Smart's case, they found out that Smart was not on the High Court's cause list of children whose order needed to be confirmed by a High Court judge. It turned out that the court documents could not be located either at the local Subordinate Court or at the High Court.

Several times, Kabota C. together with his colleagues at UP Zambia requested the court and social services in his home town to have Smart's sentence being confirmed by a High Court judge. In UP Zambia's letters to the Judiciary, they emphasise that the right to a fair trial is a human right, which includes the confirmation order to be issued in a reasonable period of time.

After a year and three months, UP Zambia finally succeeded in having Smart brought before a High Court judge, who ended up sentencing him to an 18-month suspended sentence for the assault charge.

"If he hadn't received legal assistance, Smart would likely still be in detention. There are many children in Zambia who, like Smart, end up detained in prisons for several years." says Jephter C.

Smart is grateful for meeting the legal aid desk. "I didn't know my rights and didn't know that I had the right to get help," says Smart.

When he was arrested and convicted of theft, he was in 9th grade and never completed junior secondary school. It disappoints him, but since his release, Smart has been mostly focused on how he can expand his soap business and help his family financially.

"The 19 months I was in detention didn't just create a lot of problems for me. It affected my whole family, both mentally and financially," says Smart. After 19 months of detention, Smart was released and reunited with his family on August 29, 2023.



Smart K. at his home place, 2024

In the next ILAG Newsletter, Part II of this Article on “The transformation of Zambia’s legal aid system – Key developments over the period 2018-2024” will cover the work and services provided by legal desks based in communities, and developments taking place between Local Courts, customary courts and community-based paralegals.

This work is supported by the “Enabling Access to Justice, Civil Society Participation and Transparency” (EnACT) Programme in Zambia, implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) with technical assistance from the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR). EnACT is commissioned by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and is co-funded by the European Union.

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LEGAL AID IN UZBEKISTAN: NEW REFORMS

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In recent years in light of the ongoing judicial and legal reforms being implemented in Uzbekistan, special importance is being given to the issues of ensuring access to legal aid. Creation of organizational and legal framework and mechanisms necessary for the establishment of an effective system for the provision of qualified legal aid has become one of the most pressing issues in this area not only in criminal cases, but also in certain categories of civil and administrative cases.

The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the fundamental document guaranteeing everyone's right to legal aid. Under Article 29 of the Constitution, the right to qualified legal assistance is guaranteed, which in certain cases is provided at the expenses of the state. The constitutional principle of the presumption of innocence enshrined in Article 28 of the Constitution provides for the right of everyone to a defense and constitutes the core of modern criminal proceedings. The very formula of the principle contains such an important element as providing a suspect with a real opportunity for his/her defense, including through the involvement of a lawyer. Uzbekistan's legislation on criminal procedure also includes the principle of presumption of innocence as one of the fundamental principles of criminal procedure. Thus, Article 24 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that a person conducting an initial inquiry, an investigator, a prosecutor or the court must take measures to ensure that the suspect, accused person or defendant has the actual opportunity to use all the means and ways provided for by law in order to defend himself/herself against the charges brought.

Moreover, Article 51 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that the participation of a defense lawyer in certain categories of cases is mandatory. In cases where the participation of a lawyer is compulsory and when a lawyer cannot be retained by the person being prosecuted, the lawyer must be provided at the expense of the state. Article 50 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides that the person conducting the initial inquiry or pretrial investigation, the prosecutor or the court, which is considering the case may exempt the suspect, accused person or defendant, in whole or in part, from paying for legal assistance. In such cases, the costs of paying for the lawyer's services are borne by the state in accordance with the procedure established by the Cabinet of Ministers. Thus, Decree No. 137 of the Cabinet of Ministers «On the Measures to Improve the Mechanism of Payment for Legal Aid» dated 20 June 2008 defines the grounds and procedure for charging the costs of legal aid provided by a lawyer to a suspect, accused person or defendant at the expense of the state.

The absence of an independent specially authorised body responsible for organising, controlling, and coordinating the system of providing state-guaranteed legal aid as well as the lack of proper quality control of such aid for decades has resulted in the becoming of the legal aid provided at the expense of the state as something formal, which would not allow the real protection of the rights and interests of the person. The procedure for selecting lawyers to participate in cases on the basis appointment was also non-transparent and biased, which depended on the human

factor. In addition, the lawyers providing legal aid upon completion of legal services, to receive funds from the state had to confirm a certificate of legal aid to their procedural opponent (investigator, prosecutor) or to a judge, which negatively affected the independence of the lawyer. These factors not only negatively affected the quality of legal aid, led to inefficient use of allocated budget funds, abuse and corruption, and to the emergence of 'pocket lawyers', but they also violated the rights and interests of the defendant by limiting an access to real legal aid. This in its turn had a negative impact on the judicial and legal system as a whole and hence, undermined the trust of citizens in justice.

The attention of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev was drawn to the above-mentioned shortcomings of the system of providing legal aid, as the result of which the President initiated reforms in this area. Since 2017, a number of Presidential Decrees have been issued, which are aimed at bringing the norms of national legislation governing the provision of state-guaranteed legal aid in line with international standards and norms and which aim to improve the system of providing legal aid in addition to expanding access to legal aid to low-income citizens and to other citizens, who are in need of social protection in criminal, administrative, and civil cases.

The initiative of the President of the country formed the basis for the adoption of the new Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Provision of Legal Aid at the Expense of the State" in 2023.

The Law provides that the Ministry of Justice is a specially authorized state body, which is responsible for providing legal aid at state's expense. It is entrusted with the following functions:

- implementing a unified state policy in the area of the provision of legal aid;
- managing the system for the provision of legal aid;
- drafting and submitting to the Cabinet of Ministers draft state programmes on the provision of legal aid;
- maintaining a register of lawyers providing legal aid;
- ensuring the conclusion of contracts on the provision of legal aid with advocates, who have expressed a wish to be included in the Register of lawyers (advocates) providing legal aid and monitoring their execution;
- organising a systematic monitoring of compliance with the requirements of the legislation on the provision of legal aid;
- taking measures to cover the costs associated with the provision of legal aid;
- forming budget requests for the next period on the issue of financing of the legal aid system at the expense of the State;
- analysing legislation and law enforcement practice in the area of legal aid and developing proposals to improve its effectiveness, and
- coordinating the system of interaction between state bodies and lawyers (advocates) in the area of legal aid.

The new Law defines the mechanisms and principles of providing legal aid, the list of persons who are guaranteed legal aid, and the conditions under which it is provided. A novelty of the Law is the expansion of access to legal aid to low-income citizens and to other citizens, who are in need of social protection in criminal, administrative, and civil cases. The Law provides for the use of an automated system for the automatic identification of a lawyer from the Register of lawyers, which will prevent the repeated appointments of the same lawyers and the interference of third parties into the selection process.

Undoubtedly, the adoption of the Law “On the Provision of Legal Aid at the Expense of the State” strengthens the constitutional guarantees to legal protection, eliminates existing shortcomings of the system, and fills the gaps in the normative-legal regulation of the matter. The Law also provides a solid legal basis for the establishment of a sustainable and reliable system of legal aid in addition to ensuring equal access to justice and legal aid.

LEGAL AID NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

PAUL FERRIE

*ONLINE ADMINISTRATOR, ILAG AND LEGAL DIRECTOR,
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The news items shown below are largely compiled from online articles, found based on 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.



Australia

Legal Aid Crisis in the Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is facing a significant legal aid crisis, with Chief Justice Lucy McCallum describing the situation as "unsolvable." Over a third of legal aid lawyers are set to retire in the next decade, exacerbating the shortage of legal professionals available to assist those in need.

Source: Scottish Legal.

https://www.scottishlegal.com/articles/legal-aid-crisis-looks-unsolvable?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Canada

Government of Canada Renews Funding for Immigration and Refugee Legal Aid Services in Manitoba

The Government of Canada has announced \$1.038 million in funding over three years (2024–2027) to Legal Aid Manitoba. This funding aims to enhance immigration and refugee legal aid services, including preparing Basis of Claims for refugee claimants, providing legal representation at hearings before the Immigration and Refugee Board, and offering legal assistance for detainees at Immigration Holding Centres. This initiative supports the federal commitment to a fair, efficient, and accessible justice system.

Source: Department of Justice Canada

https://www.canada.ca/en/department-justice/news/2024/10/the-government-of-canada-renews-funding-for-immigration-and-refugee-legal-aid-services-in-manitoba.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Legal Aid Alberta and Provincial Government Sign New Five-Year Governance Agreement

Legal Aid Alberta and the provincial government have entered into a new five-year governance agreement, ensuring approximately \$110 million in funding for the upcoming year. This agreement aims to enhance the delivery of legal aid services across Alberta, addressing the growing demand and ensuring access to justice for all residents.

Source: Canadian Lawyer

<https://www.canadianlawyermag.com/news/general/legal-aid-alberta-provincial-government-sign-new-five-year-governance-agreement/388358#:~:text=Legal%20Aid%20Alberta%2C%20provincial%20government%20sign%20new%20five%2Dyear%20governance%20agreement,-The%20new%20deal&text=Two%20months%20after%20Legal%20Aid.signed%20a%20five%2Dyear%20deal>

England & Wales

Criminal Legal Aid: £24m Welcome First Step to Tackle Crisis

The UK government has announced additional funding for criminal legal aid, but critics argue more is needed to address systemic challenges in the justice system.

Source: The Law Society of the UK.

<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/legal-aid/criminal-legal-aid-24m-welcome-first-step-to-tackle-crisis>

Criminal Legal Aid Funding Increase: A Step Forward for Vital Public Service

Legal professionals are cautiously optimistic about increased funding for criminal legal aid in England and Wales, but challenges remain.

Source: The Law Society of the UK.

<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/news/stories/criminal-legal-aid-funding-increase-a-step-forward-for-vital-public-service>

Scotland

Scotland Faces Challenges with Legal Aid and Access to Justice

Scotland has been criticized for failing to meet the Aarhus Convention's requirements on access to justice. Issues include high litigation costs, limited legal aid availability, and barriers to pursuing environmental cases. Campaigners are urging reforms to address these obstacles.

Source: *The Canary*

<https://www.thecanary.co/global/2024/10/15/scotland-faces-challenges-with-legal-aid-and-access-to-justice>

SLAB Report Confirms Legal Aid Crisis in Scotland

Data from the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) reveals a crisis in Scotland's legal aid system, including fewer solicitors taking on legal aid cases, funding shortfalls, and increasing court demands. The report highlights the urgent need for investment and structural reforms.

Source: *Law Society of Scotland*

<https://www.lawscot.org.uk/news/slab-report-confirms-legal-aid-crisis>

Why Scotland Needs Legal Aid Reform

Ongoing issues with legal aid in Scotland include a shortage of legal aid solicitors, restrictive eligibility rules, and funding challenges. This report calls for immediate reforms to improve

access to justice, especially for vulnerable populations in rural and low-income areas.

Source: *JustRight Scotland*

<https://www.justrightscotland.org.uk/news/why-scotland-needs-legal-aid-reform>

South Africa

UNODC Supports Southern African Countries in Strengthening Legal Aid Systems

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has launched initiatives to improve access to legal aid in Southern Africa, focusing on vulnerable populations.

Source: *UNODC*.

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2024/09/unodc-supports-southern-african-countries-in-strengthening-legal-aid-systems.html>

United States of America

Conference on Access to Justice in California: Challenges and Policy Innovations

A conference in California highlighted ongoing challenges in access to justice and potential policy innovations to improve legal aid services.

Source: *Stanford Law School*.

<https://law.stanford.edu/publications/conference-on-access-to-justice-in-california-challenges-and-policy-innovations>

New Rules for Legal Paraprofessionals to Take Effect in December 2024

Texas is introducing new rules to expand the role of legal paraprofessionals in addressing the justice gap.

Source: *Texas Bar Practice Blog*.

<https://blog.texasbarpractice.com/2024/09/27/new-rules-for-legal-paraprofessionals-to-take-effect-in-december>

State Agencies Collaborate to Better Serve Californians' Legal Aid Needs

California state agencies are working together to improve legal aid delivery and address unmet legal needs.

Source: *State Bar of California*.

<https://www.calbar.ca.gov/About-Us/News/News-Releases/state-agencies-gather-to-collaborate-to-better-serve-californians-legal-aid-needs>

Texas Access to Justice Foundation Honors Supreme Court Chief Justice Nathan Hecht

Texas celebrates Chief Justice Nathan Hecht's contributions to improving access to justice and advancing legal aid efforts in the state.

Source: *Texas Bar Blog*.

<https://blog.texasbar.com/2024/10/11/texas-access-to-justice-foundation-honors-supreme-court-of-texas-chief-justice-nathan-l-hecht>

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>.