

2025



UNODC WORK ON EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL (2023-2025)

Building inclusive, effective and accountable criminal justice systems that leave no one behind.



United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime

ACCESS TO
JUSTICE



BACKGROUND

The objectives of ensuring access to justice and realizing a safe and secure society are central to the **Secretary-General's new Vision for the Rule of Law** and to the commitments expressed in the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals** 5, 10, 17 and particularly SDG 16, Target 16.3, which focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

As highlighted in **The Global Progress Report on SDG 16** there remains a significant gap in people's ability to seek or access justice, particularly due to underreporting in cases of physical and sexual violence. Discrimination remains widespread, affecting one in six people globally, with racial discrimination being the most common and individuals with disabilities experiencing discrimination nearly twice as often as others.

MANDATE

General Assembly resolution 78/227 on "Equal access to justice for all", adopted in December 2023, requested

"the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to continue developing technical tools and training material based on United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice and to provide technical and material assistance to Member States, upon request, to ensure access to justice for all".

In accordance with the resolution, and in line with its Strategy 2021-2025, UNODC has scaled up its work to develop technical tools and provide technical assistance to Member States in the use and application of UN standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice within the framework of its global, regional and country technical assistance programmes by:

- Strengthening **access to legal aid** for individuals who are detained, arrested, imprisoned, suspected, accused, or charged with a criminal offense, as well as for victims and witnesses of crime;
- Supporting **human rights-based and gender-sensitive** police, courts and prosecutions, and other criminal justice institutions,
- Increasing the **efficiency, accountability, and integrity** of criminal justice institutions; protecting, assisting, and supporting victims of crime;
- Expanding the use of **restorative justice practices**;
- Addressing **discrimination** in the criminal justice systems and responding to **hate crime** through criminal justice approaches; and
- Ensuring the **responsible use of technology** to increase access to justice.

RECENTLY DEVELOPED TECHNICAL TOOLS

During this period, UNODC has developed a range of technical tools and translated several existing ones, many in partnership with other United Nations agencies, including:

- **The Practical Toolkit for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests**, developed jointly with the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 50/21. (available in all six official UN languages)
- The **United Nations Manual on Investigative Interviewing for Criminal Investigations**, developed with the Department of Peace Operations and OHCHR (available in English, French, Portuguese, and Ukrainian);
- **UNODC eLearning Modules on Conducting Investigative Interviews**, including three core modules (Introduction, Step-by-Step – Parts I & II) and three mini-modules (on human memory, communication, and investigation management and decision-making), **available in** Arabic, English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian;
- The UNODC/OHCHR **Resource Book on the Use of Force and Firearms in Law Enforcement** (Spanish version);
- The UNODC/Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI) **Police Resource Toolkit**, available in English, French, and Spanish;
- **Forthcoming 2025**: Legal aid assessment tool and eLearning Module on Quality Legal Aid



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

At both the global and regional levels, UNODC has reinforced its role as a **resource and knowledge hub on equal access to justice** through a series of strategic initiatives and partnerships, including by:

- Facilitating **knowledge exchange** between intergovernmental processes, policy makers, and criminal justice practitioners;
- Collaborating with the World Bank on access to legal aid for women, contributing to the **Global Forum on Law, Justice and Development**, and preparing for the **2025 Law, Justice and Development Week**;
- Engaging with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, including speaking roles at the Global Roundtables on Access to Justice held in Slovenia (2023) and Canada (2024);
- Co-organizing the 2025 **"Year of Victims' Rights"** campaign with Victim Support Europe, a network representing over 80 organizations across 36 countries;
- Participating in global policy discussions on human rights and digital justice,
- Partnering with the **INTERPOL Innovation Centre** to support the development of technical guidance on emerging technologies in policing.





REGIONAL AND COUNTRY-LEVEL ACTION

Fostering Regional Networks and Good Practices

- Convened a Global Conference of legal aid experts in **Vienna, Austria** (November 2024) to exchange knowledge on legal aid delivery, the role of academia, and the needs of groups in situations of vulnerability ;
- Supported regional cooperation on early access to legal aid in **South Asia**, including the establishment of the South Asia Legal Aid Network following meetings in Nepal (2023–2024) ;
- Partnered with the **Government of Namibia** to host a regional workshop with 15 Southern African countries and international experts, focusing on legal aid services for groups with specific rights and needs and recommending continued exchange and network development.

Strengthening Human Rights-Based Policing

- Delivered regional workshops on investigative interviewing for criminal justice officials from:
 - South-East Asia and the Pacific (**Bangkok**, 2023) with over 80 participants;
 - South-Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Moldova (**Vienna**, 2023);
 - The Caribbean (2023–2024), in partnership with regional and global institutions.
- In **Brazil**, delivered national capacity-building for law enforcement to standardize human rights-compliant interviewing practices—recognized as a model for evidence-based policymaking.
- In **Pakistan**, set up facilitation desks for victims of gender-based violence and conducted a needs assessment to improve justice access for transgender individuals.
- In **Nigeria** and **Saint Lucia**, advanced police oversight and accountability mechanisms, including expansion of complaint units and development of regional projects on police integrity in collaboration with national and regional bodies.

Delivering Country-Level Justice Reform

- In **Uganda**, implemented a five-year programme to strengthen justice institutions and legal aid:
 - Reached 33,732 inmates with legal representation; supported release of 9,902 persons; Developed e-justice frameworks, legal information materials, and training resources; Held the first National Court Open Day engaging over 1,000 participants.
- In **Nigeria**, supported legal aid networks to adopt transparent practices, improve coordination, and review operations.
- In **Sri Lanka**, delivered training on responding to rights violations, connecting women legal aid providers with civil society groups to form informal support networks.
- In **Egypt**, trained judges and justice officials on access to justice for persons with disabilities, resulting in improved legal aid services and court accessibility.
- In **Burkina Faso** and **Mauritania**, provided technical support to enhance legal aid provision.

Improving Judicial Processes

- At the request of the **Supreme Court of Angola**, delivered a workshop on case management and access to justice, drawing on South-South cooperation with experts from **Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa**.

Addressing Discrimination and Hate Crime

- Supported **Mexico's** "Justice without Discrimination" campaign in 2023.
- Contributed to the development of prosecutorial guidance on hate crime and hate speech with the **Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights** (2024).
- In **Colombia**, partnered with municipal authorities to strengthen justice services through the Justice Houses initiative in Bogotá.

Advancing Restorative Justice

- In **Indonesia**, supported the integration of restorative justice principles into national policy, including the new penal code and long-term development planning.
- In **Nigeria**, provided technical support for the review of the federal restorative justice policy, related legal instruments, and training manuals; delivered training for facilitators and raised awareness across the criminal justice system and media.



WAY FORWARD

To continue supporting Member States in fulfilling their commitments, future efforts will focus on further consolidating and enhancing the knowledge base, technical tools, and strategic partnerships essential to advancing equal access to justice for all

Building on the progressed achieved, the **Access to Justice team** will place particular emphasis on expanding global and regional technical guidance, while promoting cross-regional dialogue and professional exchange and peer learning.

Key areas of work will include:

Advancing understanding on building efficient, effective, accountable, fair, humane, and inclusive criminal justice systems, including through engagement in policymaking forums such as the 2026 United Nations Crime Congress.

Promoting the professionalization of criminal justice actors through the development and promotion of capacity-building resources (such as guidance documents or eLearning tools) in key areas such as police and criminal justice reform, access to legal aid, restorative justice, and victim support.

Providing targeted support to Member States to identify systemic gaps, develop strategies, and implement comprehensive reforms to strengthen access to justice, with an emphasis on inclusive participation, institutional development, and community engagement.

Generating focused knowledge products on under-researched dimensions of access to justice.



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