Table of contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 4
About OGP and Justice ............................................................................................................ 5
Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 8
  What is justice and the justice system? .................................................................................. 8
  What is open justice? ........................................................................................................... 9
  Other dimensions of justice .................................................................................................. 9
  Why open justice? ................................................................................................................ 9
  What do open justice reforms look like? ............................................................................. 9
Open Justice in OGP .................................................................................................................. 11
Objectives and contents .......................................................................................................... 12
Courts ..................................................................................................................................... 15
  Open Court Data ................................................................................................................ 16
  Judicial Officers—Appointment and Accountability .......................................................... 22
  Court Modernization ......................................................................................................... 30
Police ..................................................................................................................................... 35
  Open Police Data ................................................................................................................ 36
  Oversight and Monitoring of Police ................................................................................... 42
Prosecutors .............................................................................................................................. 49
  Prosecutors ......................................................................................................................... 50
Legal Aid .................................................................................................................................. 57
  Legal Aid ............................................................................................................................... 58
Corrections Systems ................................................................................................................ 65
  Pretrial Detention ................................................................................................................ 66
  Prisons—Transparency and Accountability ..................................................................... 72
Acknowledgements

Sanjay Pradhan,  
Chief Executive Officer

Author
Jessica Hickle, Research Associate

Contributors
Sandy Arce, Program Officer  
Renzo Falla, Senior Research Officer  
Joseph Foti, Chief Research Officer  
Maha Jweied, OGP Justice Consultant  
Mia Katan, Research Associate  
Amalia Pleake-Tamm, Consultant  
Peter Tuths, Research Associate

Copy Editor
Lora Bolton

Graphic Design
Nicol Regan

Special thanks
Adna Karamehic-Oates, OGP  
Joseph Powell, OGP  
Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies

Additional Thanks

Reviewers
Rachel Aicher  
David Anderson  
Aparna Basnyat  
Harry Cheng  
Lara Deramaix  
Gipsy Escobar  
Helen Fair  
Cherise Fanno Burdeen  
Anna Giudice  
Danielle Hirsch  
Anika Holterhof  
Liz Komar  
Venkatesh Nayak  
Rachel Neild  
Rebecca Neusteter  
Sven Pfeiffer  
Olivia Rope  
Rebecca Shoefler  
Roberta Solis Ribeiro Martins

Experts Consulted:
Pablo Cruz  
Michelle Deitsch  
Amy Gryskiewicz  
Pablo Hilaire  
Gaurav Jain  
Aristotle Jones  
Jennifer Lewis  
Sarah Long  
Mikaela Robinowtz  
Kate Robertson  
Supriya Sankaran  
Andrew Solomon  
Bethany Young

About OGP and Justice

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) provides an opportunity for government and civil society reformers to make government more transparent, participatory, inclusive, and accountable. Working together, government and civil society co-create two-year action plans with concrete commitments across a broad range of issues. All commitments are then monitored by OGP’s Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). Recently, thanks to increased global activity around justice, many governments and civil society leaders are expressing growing interest in better linking justice with open government.

This paper is the second of three in a series on justice released as a part of the Open Government Partnership Global Report. In 2019, OGP released the series’ first installment, Access to Justice, which focused on how open government can help people identify and address their legal needs. In the coming months, the OGP will issue the third installment on justice as a means to enforce open government. The series aims to show how open government can make accountable, credible improvements to justice systems. The aim of this report is to inspire countries to adopt policies and activities suggested here and adapt them for their own national and local context. Working closely with international and domestic partners, the OGP Support Unit will use this research to help OGP members continue to develop and implement strong justice commitments.

The Access to Justice paper can be found here. The Global Report can be found here. More information about the Open Government Partnership and how it works can be found here.

Please contact research@opengovpartnership.org with any additional comments or inquiries.
Legal Aid

Overview

Legal aid is a critical component to ensuring access to justice. Indeed, it is a human right in criminal cases and a component of the fundamental right to a fair trial as recognized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Whether in criminal or civil matters, access to legal aid for individuals with limited means or who are in situations of vulnerability is critical to achieving fair and just outcomes. The provision of legal aid services reinforces the accountability of the justice system and safeguards the rights of individuals.

The provision and scope of legal aid services differ across countries. In some countries, legal aid is a public service provided by government-funded lawyers or private lawyers who are contracted with or appointed by a public authority to provide their services. In other instances, legal aid is provided by civil society organizations – sometimes funded by the government and sometimes by nongovernmental sources. Law school clinics, community paralegals, and community leaders might also provide services, as might private sector lawyers offering legal help pro bono. While all of these actors play important roles and can provide crucial services in their communities, this section will focus on legal aid providers in the context of the formal legal system.

The transparent and accountable administration of legal aid can help strengthen these services and ensure that they are accessible to all who need them. For example, transparency around the criteria that legal aid providers’ use to determine who is eligible for their services (also called a means test) allows individual beneficiaries, civil society groups, and the government to monitor and ensure equity in the provision of these services and see whether sufficient resources have been allocated to them.

Likewise, as with other justice system stakeholders, legal aid providers should be independent and subject to rigorous standards of professional conduct. If they fail to meet such standards, disciplinary complaints should be promptly investigated and adjudicated in accordance with professional codes of ethics before an impartial body and subject to judicial review (see Principles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems, which also appear later in this chapter). Grievances or complaints related to a legal aid provider’s conduct and any disciplinary proceedings that might ensue should be handled in a fair and transparent process.

Recommendations and Sample Reforms

The following list includes measures countries can take to improve access to and the quality of legal aid.

• Establish or strengthen the legal aid authority. Create an independent legal aid authority that can establish, fund, staff, regulate, and evaluate the legal aid scheme. Consider a multistakeholder approach, bringing in legal professionals, civil society, and representatives from underserved communities. The authority should establish a body that can impartially investigate complaints against legal aid providers and put in place a suitable mechanism for evaluating and improving the quality of services.

• Establish training for legal aid providers. Fund and launch training programs for legal aid lawyers, paralegals, and pro bono volunteers to improve their legal skills and knowledge to better understand the needs of low-income and underserved individuals. Providers should be trained on their professional obligations and relevant codes of conduct.

• Establish minimum practice standards for legal aid providers. Establish and publicly disclose minimum requirements for training and practical experience that legal aid service providers must meet. Establish clear disciplinary procedures for violations of these codes. All procedures should be developed in consultation with legal aid providers and made public in advance of their use.

• Establish a fair means test for services. When a country uses a means test to determine eligibility for legal aid, the criteria should be widely publicized and consistently followed. Persons who are denied services should have the right to appeal the decision. According to the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems, people in urgent circumstances, such as police stations and detention centers, or in courts should be provided legal help even when their eligibility is being determined. Importantly, children should always be exempt from a means test.

• Expand provision of quality legal aid. Expand access to quality civil and criminal legal aid to hold the state accountable to respect citizens’ rights by giving citizens’ access to legal help and information. This may include identifying communities or areas with disproportionate legal needs or that traditionally lack access to legal aid, expanding the provision of legal aid for problems that might not have adequate funding, and developing partnerships with civil society organizations offering legal assistance. Empower legal aid organizations to address the consequences of coming into conflict with the law, such as job loss and homelessness. Increase

Namati works with inspiring groups in many countries, including Sierra Leone, to deploy frontline legal advocates. Photo by: Aubrey Wade/Namati.
• Funding to existing legal aid services, and establish new offices and services to reach isolated or underserved communities.

• Publicly report on legal aid access. Countries that track how many people go unrepresented each year at all levels, along with how many people qualify for legal aid and what percentage actually receive these services, will be able to better target legal aid expansion and show progress.

• Conduct client satisfaction surveys. The satisfaction of beneficiaries should be a factor in assessing the overall quality of legal aid schemes.

• Deepen cooperation to address legal needs. Launch working groups composed of government and civil society members to identify legal reforms needed to improve justice delivery systems through legal assistance and the courts. Strengthen and institutionalize partnerships, for example between the judicial system, legal aid providers, CSOs, academia, social services, the health-care system, and law enforcement, when appropriate, to better serve underserved communities.

• Make funding and budgets transparent. Budgets should be made publicly available down to the individual program level. Expand and diversify financing for legal assistance at national and subnational levels, including public sector partnerships.

LESSONS FROM REFORMERS

United States’ efforts to develop national-level indicators on Sustainable Development Goal 16.3

In June 2016, the United States committed to developing national-level indicators on Sustainable Development Goal 16.3 (the call to ensure equal access to justice) through a working group connected to the White House Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable (which was a separate OGP access to justice commitment) to discuss data collection on access to justice and legal aid, including its impact on federal programs that advance efforts to promote access to health and housing, education and employment, family stability, and public safety. The working group was tasked with assisting the US government in identifying and developing national-level indicators to track achieving Goal 16, SDG to promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice for all. The activities of the working group are summarized in this factsheet.

Other OGP Commitments


Colombia: Launch a web portal and mobile application called LegalApp to facilitate public access to information on justice services (2016–2017).

North Macedonia: Establish four access-to-justice centers to provide free legal aid to marginalized communities (2018–2020).


South Africa: Integrate and strengthen Community Advice Offices as a grassroots and permanent part of the wider justice system (2016–2019).

LESSONS FROM REFORMERS

Indonesia’s effort to increase the availability and quality of legal aid

The Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (“ILAF”) has been providing legal aid in Jakarta since the 1970s. Their services increased dramatically in the 1980s with assisting clients who were not only poor but also marginalized and oppressed. The ILAF’s services include litigation, education and empowerment of community members, research, and policy advocacy. In recent years, ILAF has received support from the Open Society Foundations to enhance its provision of legal aid. In 2018, Indonesia committed to creating regulations that guarantee funding for legal aid organizations, allowing them to expand their reach to more remote and impoverished communities while simultaneously strengthening the awareness and legal capacity of individuals who are poor and marginalized.
The 14 principles include the following:

• Principle 12. – Independence and protection of legal aid providers: States should ensure that legal aid providers are able to carry out their work effectively, freely and independently. In particular, States should ensure that legal aid providers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; are able to travel, to consult and meet with their clients freely and in full confidentiality both within their own country and abroad, and to freely access prosecution and other relevant files; and do not suffer, and are not threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

• Principle 13. – Competence and accountability of legal aid providers: States should put in place mechanisms to ensure that all legal aid providers possess education, training, skills and experience that are commensurate with the nature of their work, including the gravity of the offences dealt with, and the rights and needs of women, children and groups with special needs. Disciplinary complaints against legal aid providers should be promptly investigated and adjudicated in accordance with professional codes of ethics before an impartial body and subject to judicial review.

The 18 guidelines provide more practical guidance and detail on the principles, such as how to determine eligibility for legal aid and how countries can establish, fund, staff, and regulate legal aid schemes, including the following:

• Guideline 1. Provision of legal aid: Recommends that States make their eligibility means tests widely publicized and offer an opportunity to appeal ineligibility. In addition, the guideline encourages that persons whose means exceed the limits but who otherwise cannot afford assistance be given assistance. Persons who require legal help urgently – such as at police stations, detention centers, or courts should be provided preliminary legal aid while their eligibility is being determined. Children are always exempted from the means test.

• Guideline 11. Nationwide legal aid system: Recommends that states establish a legal aid body or authority to provide, administer, coordinate, and monitor legal aid services. That institution should be independent and have the necessary powers to establish and oversee legal aid services, including the handling of complaints. The development of a long-term strategy on legal aid in collaboration with justice sector stakeholders and civil society organizations is recommended.

• Guideline 15. Regulation and oversight of legal aid providers: Recommends that states, in cooperation with professional associations, set criteria for accreditation of legal aid providers; ensure that providers are subject to professional codes of conduct with appropriate sanctions when infractions occur; establish rules prohibiting legal providers from requesting payment from beneficiaries of legal aid, except when authorized to do so; ensure disciplinary complaints against providers are reviewed by impartial bodies; and establish oversight of providers to prevent corruption.

For further guidance and details on tools and approaches, see the UNODC/UNDP handbook on Early Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Processes and the UNODC Handbook on Ensuring Quality of Legal Aid Services in Criminal Justice Processes.†

Endnotes


† Ibid. Principle 13; Guidelines 11, 15, and 16.

† Ibid. Guideline 1.

† Ibid. Guideline 17.

† Ibid. Guideline 15.


Resources and Partners

Resources

- The International Legal Foundation’s 2016 Report Measuring Justice provides recommendations for defining and evaluating criminal legal aid programs.
- World Justice Project’s 2019 Global Insights on Access to Justice report and interactive portal
- United Nations’ Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2016 Global Study on Legal Aid

Organizations

- Namati
- National Legal Aid and Defender Association (United States)
- Open Society Justice Initiative
- Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies
- Penal Reform International
- The International Legal Foundation
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- World Justice Project
- Namati
- National Legal Aid and Defender Association (United States)
- Open Society Justice Initiative
- Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies
- Penal Reform International
- The International Legal Foundation
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- World Justice Project
Pretrial Detention

Overview

According to global standards, pretrial detention – the practice of detaining individuals before the start or conclusion of a criminal trial – can be used as a tool of last resort to ensure public safety or when a criminal defendant is deemed a flight risk. However, international law makes it clear that pretrial detention should only be used once all other options have been exhausted and enshrines the right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

Still, roughly 3 million people worldwide are held in pretrial detention at any given time, often in conditions and subject to treatment that is far worse than that experienced by sentenced prisoners. Transparency and accountability around jail (both remand and pretrial) populations is key to ensuring that pretrial detention is used proportionally, effectively, and fairly. Publishing information about detained individuals – such as criminal charges (or that none exist, when that is the case), the status of cases, disaggregated demographic data, the average lengths of pretrial detention, the reasons individuals are held pretrial, and whether they are ultimately convicted – can help government reformers and watchdog organizations identify inconsistencies in the application of pretrial detention. Transparency around the trends in detention and conditions of detention are also important to ensure the public health and safety of individuals being held.

In addition, detainees, civil society, and members of the public should have access to mechanisms through which they can hold courts and jails accountable if they detect irregularities in public information. These mechanisms include accessible complaint mechanisms for detainees, multistakeholder advisory panels that can identify and monitor information for disclosure, and independent bodies (such as human rights commissions or ombudsman offices) that can monitor and inspect detention facilities.

Recommendations and Sample Reforms

The following are actions governments can take to improve transparency of their use of pretrial detention:

• Create multistakeholder advisory panels. Convene prison institutions, civil society organizations, and members of the public to identify priority information for collection and disclosure. Importantly, these institutions should include directly affected individuals (former pretrial detainees and their family members) as members.

• Disclose information about pretrial prison populations. Provide regularly updated information on the number of and reasons for arrests; the number of people charged and the nature of their charges; the number of people in pretrial detention (both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the overall prison population); the duration of pretrial detention, disaggregated by offense; and the number of pretrial detainees receiving legal advice and representation. In addition, disclose the ratio of charged individuals held pretrial as compared to the number released.

• Disclose information about the status of detainees’ cases. Provide a public record of the charges for which individuals are detained – broken down by type of offense such as petty and nonviolent offenses, violent offenses, and drug-related crime – and the justification for their detention pretrial (e.g., flight risk, risk of tampering with evidence). Allow exceptions for juvenile detainees and individuals who have received expungements. All information that may lead to the identification of individuals should be withheld from documentation.

• Disclose demographic information about pretrial detainees. This includes information about prisoners’ gender, age, race, ethnicity, disabilities, and any mental and physical health-care needs. Information such as prisoners’ family, economic, and employment status; education level; and criminal record can also help determine whether they can be safely supervised in the community, rather than detained. This information should be anonymized appropriately to protect personal information.

• Standardize the release of prisoner information across jurisdictions. Centralize data, and align definitions across jurisdictions and levels of government to provide a full picture of the country’s prison population, trends, and analysis of system-wide gaps and needs.

• Require judicial officials/magistrates to publicly justify detaining individuals pretrial. Judicial officials should publish a timely and public justification specifying the characteristics of the individual that merit detention. The state has the burden of showing why a less restrictive means will not protect the community and ensure appearance at trial.
The following are actions governments can take to improve public oversight of the use of pretrial detention:

- **Monitor use of pretrial detention.** Publish clear limits on the duration of pretrial detention and allow oversight institutions, including detention-monitoring bodies, such as national preventive mechanisms, and watchdogs to identify cases of discrimination in the use of pretrial detention and to evaluate prison conditions. Pretrial detainees should not be incarcerated with convicted prisoners, in overcrowded facilities, or under conditions that do not comply with international standards. Men, women, and children should be separated.

- **Set up independent oversight.** Ensure that an independent body – such as a human rights commission, an ombudsman, a national preventive mechanism, or a dedicated prison inspection office – can inspect facilities on demand and unannounced, access prison information and data, and interview detainees privately. This body should publish its findings and recommendations, which are to serve as the basis for constructive dialogue.

- **Establish complaint mechanisms.** Clear mechanisms for lodging complaints should be accessible to all detainees, their families, and legal representatives.

- **Conduct regular reviews of pretrial detainees.** Court authorities should evaluate alleged offenders regularly throughout the course of their case to determine whether continued detention is necessary. The detained and their counsel have the right to be at these reviews.

### Lessons From Reformers

**Afghanistan releases pretrial detainees to reduce COVID-19 risks.**

In many countries, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic posed particular risks to detention and prison populations due to prison conditions and overcrowding that could accelerate the spread of the virus and inhibit adequate responses in the case of outbreaks. Following [recommendations from the International Legal Foundation (ILF)](https://www.legalfoundation.co.uk/), Afghanistan took swift action to reduce these risks by reducing the number of people in detention centers and prisons. In March 2020, President Ghani decreed that up to 10,000 prisoners – including women, children, older prisoners, and prisoners with disabilities who do not pose a risk to national security – would be released from prisons and jails within 10 days. A subsequent decree issued in April and August called for the release of an additional 12,000 prisoners. Importantly, the President’s Office also directed the attorney general to issue guidance on the release of pretrial detainees (with exceptions for individuals accused of certain violent crimes) and the Attorney General’s Office consulted with legal aid providers to improve accountability. The attorney general’s guidance emphasizes that prosecutors should avoid detaining suspects and accused individuals pretrial where the law provides for their release. Shortly thereafter, the Supreme Court issued a circular advising Afghanistan’s courts to ensure the implementation of the attorney general’s guidance – thereby creating oversight and ensuring additional accountability – and use their discretion in granting bail and release on parole.

**Mexico created a register of detainees and missing persons.**

To increase accountability in the prison system and better ensure that officials adhere to the presumption of innocence in detaining individuals, Mexico used its 2013 action plan to create an electronic registration system for all detainees. The publicly accessible system – called the [Detainee Consultation System](https://www.legalfoundation.co.uk/) – allows Mexican citizens to view statistical data on the date individuals were arrested, the reason they are being detained, and the locations where they are being held. The use of the Detainee Consultation System allowed Mexico to improve efficient access to information about detainees. In 2015, when the system was first implemented, information concerning arrests was not available within 48 hours for nearly 90 percent of all cases. By January 2016, a year after the system was fully implemented, the Office of the Presidency of the Republic reported a 12.5 percent decrease – meaning that information for more cases is now made available within 48 hours of an individual’s arrest.

**Other OGP Commitments**

**Paraguay:** Publish up-to-date data and information on prisons to help address, among other problems, the high number of pretrial detainees on the Penitentiary Management Information System ([2018–2020](#)).
United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners

The 2015 United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the Nelson Mandela Rules, provide minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners, including pretrial detainees. Transparency reforms could focus on key areas identified in the rules, such as the following:

- Characteristics (and trends) of the prison population
- Reasons for detainees’ arrest and detention
- Living conditions, including accommodation and health-care services
- Occupancy rates
- Conditions of confinement

The rules also include minimum standards for ensuring accountability in detention facilities:

- Detainees should be able to file anonymous complaints, such as to the prison director, an inspector, the central prison administration, or a judicial body.

- Complaints should be addressed in a timely fashion and without retaliation, intimidation, or other negative consequences for the prisoner.

- There should be both internal and external systems for prison inspection. External inspection teams should be made up of independent inspectors – including health-care professionals – and may include international or regional bodies, ideally with balanced gender representation.

- Inspectors should be able to access all information on the number of pretrial detainees and their treatment, including their records and conditions of detention. They should be able to make unannounced visits to prisons of their choosing and interview any prisoners privately and confidentially. Written reports with recommendations should follow inspections and ideally be publicly available.

**United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**

UN Sustainable Development Goal 16’s Indicator 16.1.2 concerns “unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population.” Countries should consider the methods they use to collect data and report on pretrial detention to ensure that the data they provide to the United Nations is recorded. This will involve enhancing the interface between national statistical agencies and the sometimes decentralized institutions responsible for pretrial detention.

See also:

- United Nations Bangkok Rules on Women Offenders (“The Bangkok Rules”) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2010

**Endnotes**

- The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Attorney General’s Office, “Primer’s Summary for Supporting the Suspects, Accused, and the Convicted during Investigation, Prosecution, and Suspension of Order for Averting the Outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus),” accessed October 15, 2020, [https://aq/a060066d4b15c4c8-e0b5-d4-b35679abfe5c4464-c045b75a.png](https://aq/a060066d4b15c4c8-e0b5-d4-b35679abfe5c4464-c045b75a.png)
- United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, General Assembly Resolution 70/175, December 17, 2015, [https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/175](https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/175)