

National report ILAG Harvard 2023

The Netherlands

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1. Country details

Name, Population, GDP, Poverty line/% of population deemed to be living in poverty, number of practising lawyers in the jurisdiction.

Name: The Netherlands

Population: 17,591,000 inhabitants (2022)¹

GDP: \$1.013 billion, \$57,800 per capita (2021)^{2 3}

Poverty line: The percentage of households living below the poverty line was 6,8 in 2022.⁴

Number of practising lawyers⁵ in the jurisdiction: 18.108 (01-01-2022)⁶

Number of practicing lawyers in legal aid: 6.125 (2022)

¹ Source: <https://cbs.nl>

² Source: <https://data.worldbank.org>

³ Data for 2022 is not yet available (april 2023)

⁴ Source: <https://cbs.nl>

⁵ In The Netherlands, the term "lawyers" can refer to both people studying law, people with a law degree as well as registered lawyers. In this report, we use the term to refer to the latter.

⁶ Source: <https://www.advocatenorde.nl/over-de-nova/publicaties>

2. Legal Aid Organisation / Authority

Name and Status of LAO (Independent, within Government, part of the Bar Association/Law Society, Public Defenders Office etc.). Number of board and staff members?

Delivery method (salaried, private profession, paralegals, through NGOs etc) Number of lawyers, advocates and paralegals (separately) participating in the legal aid programme? If mixed please give the division of labour and balance of the mix. What payment methods are used to recompense private lawyers or other providers in your system (e.g. contract, fixed fee, hourly rate, part pro bono, etc.)?

Residing under the competence of the Ministry of Justice & Security (J&S), an independent governing body called the Legal Aid Board ('Raad voor Rechtsbijstand', LAB) is entrusted with all matters concerning administration, supervision and expenditure as well as with the actual implementation of the Legal Aid System. This includes matching the availability of legal experts with the demand for legal aid, as well as the supervision and quality control of the actual services provided. Being financed by the Ministry of J&S, the LAB accounts to this ministry for its budgetary allocations. The legal aid system operates according to an open end provision.

The Dutch legal aid system is basically a threefold model. It encompasses three 'tiers' providing legal aid. The legal aid system, therefore, is a mixed model, consisting of a public preliminary provision, public first-tier and private second-tier help.

1. Public preliminary provision

Online self-help, information and support is offered on the *Rechtwijzer* website (Rechtwijzer translates into Roadmap to Justice; see www.rechtwijzer.nl) and on the website of the Legal Services Counter. Rechtwijzer is a preliminary provision and offers interactive 'decision trees' helping people to assess their situation. In addition Rechtwijzer provides easy-to-understand information and guidance on possible solutions for the most common legal problems. Rechtwijzer combines publicly run guided pathways for common legal problems with online products and services from private service providers. In 2020 Rechtwijzer was supplemented with Rechtwijzer EHBO ('First aid for solutions'). This decision tree is aimed at early identification of multiple problems. The Legal Services Counters (see below) also have a website that can be used as a preliminary provision.

2. Public first-tier

The Legal Services Counters act as what is commonly known as the 'front office' (primary help). Legal matters are being clarified to clients and information and advice is given. Clients may be referred to a private lawyer or mediator, who act as the secondary tier of legal aid. Clients may also apply for help from a subsidized lawyer or mediator directly. If necessary, clients can also be referred to other professionals or support agencies, such as legal advisors or Consumer and Rent Tribunals.

3. Private second-tier

Private lawyers and mediators provide legal aid in more complicated or time-consuming matters (secondary help) in the form of certificates. A lawyer (or mediator) submits an application to the LAB on behalf of his client. If legal aid is granted, a certificate is issued which allows the lawyer in question to deal with the case. Lawyers and mediators are paid by the LAB to provide their services to clients of limited means. Generally they are paid a fixed fee according to the type of case (with fixed surcharges if applicable), although exceptions can be made for more time consuming cases.

To some extent, trade unions and consumer organizations also provide legal aid. The number of legal protection insurance policies continued to rise for a long time until 2014. Around half of the households in the Netherlands has a legal protection insurance policy.⁷

The legal aid system, therefore, is a mixed model, consisting of a public preliminary provision, public first-line and private second-line help.

Ad 1: in more detail: Rechtwijzer

The LAB remains committed to the development of innovative web-based applications for citizens, by offering the website Rechtwijzer (www.rechtwijzer.nl). Rechtwijzer is a preliminary provision that helps people find solutions for their legal problems in an interactive manner. In this way, citizens are empowered to navigate easy-to-use processes to solve their problems. In their own time, at their own pace, against low or no cost, and with assistance when needed. Rechtwijzer combines publicly run guided pathways for common legal problems with online products and services from private service providers meeting Rechtwijzer's rigorous quality standards. In 2022, Rechtwijzer registered more than 712,000 unique visitors.

⁷ Source: WODC, <https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/3008/Cahier-2020-18-volledige-tekst.pdf?sequence=9&isAllowed=y>

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For instance, Justice42 offers the online divorce platform www.uitelkaar.nl (freely translated: separation), with public legal aid available for low-income clients. In 2022, more than 70% of the cases, one or both (ex)partners receive public legal aid, showing that a considerable part of the target group of legal aid is open to using online services. Another private provider on Rechtwijzer is the Arbeidsmarkt Research Institute based at the University of Amsterdam. They offer MagOntslag (freely translated: is dismissal allowed?), a wide range of tools for assessing the legal merits of a dismissal case and information for work related problems. Using these tools, a letter can be drawn up for the employer, and a letter of objection or appeal can be drawn up for proceedings before the Court. More than 12,500 visitors of the Rechtwijzer website made use of these tools in 2022.

Rechtwijzer is continuously further developed and improved through feedback from users and service providers. The new application Rechtwijzer EHBO (freely translated: first aid) is a quick scan for multi-problems that maps out people's legal and psychosocial problems. It was developed in close cooperation with the renowned national social services organization Mind Korrelatie. More than 118,000 visitors of the Rechtwijzer website made use of the Rechtwijzer EHBO tool in 2022.

Last year, Rechtwijzer was been supplemented with (decision tree) support to draft a letter of objection or complaint against a government agency. Also, people can go to the Rechtwijzer website for information about support for debt issues. This applies to both the process of debt counseling as well as the process of the (legal) debt restructuring program.

Ad 2: In more detail: LSC

The LSC act as front offices and provide primary legal aid (information and advice). They are fully financed by the Ministry of Justice & Security on the basis of a closed budget.

The LSC has 30 offices and 24 service points⁸ across the country. These offices share a website and a call centre. Due to the even geographical spread, Dutch citizens find a Legal Services Counter within reasonable distance (around one hour travelling by public transport maximally). The offices have a uniform and recognisable appearance. The premises of the Counters have been designed to look inviting and accessible. In a way, they look more like a shop than an office. Inside is an open space with a waiting area and several desks. The call centre and rooms for private consultation are located at the back of the office. Brochures and flyers with information on legal matters are also available. In addition to the

⁸ Source: <https://www.juridischloket.nl>

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offices, a large call centre opened some years ago. It is staffed with approximately 50 people.

In general, each office is staffed with legal advisers. Since the services of the current Counters do not include extensive legal aid and representation in court, paralegals can also be employed. The Dutch education system developed a bachelor course to train students for these type of services.

The legal advisers switch between their work on the telephone, at the counter, and in the consultation rooms. The workload can be distributed between the different offices. They have access to custom designed computer software for support with finding legal information.

As outlined above, the LSCs act as front offices providing primary legal aid. They offer information concerning rules and regulations as well as legal procedures. They give advice and refer clients to private lawyers or mediators if their problems turn out to be more complicated or time-consuming. Services are free of charge. As of 2023, telephone calls also are free of charge (before the telephone line worked at 10 cents per minute). Although the LSCs are basically open to any Dutch citizen, the personal aid is specifically intended for persons of limited means who qualify for legal aid. Clients can turn to the Counters with all kinds of judicial problems that concern civil, administrative, criminal as well as immigration law.

The initial contact at the Counters is aimed at clarifying the nature of the problems. The legal advisors work with clients to find out:

- whether the problem is actually a legal problem and, if so,
- whether the problem is within the scope of the legal services provided by the Counters (not all legal problems – e.g. those between businesses – are dealt with by the Counters);
- what kind of help is most suitable for the client.

Staff of the LSC is not allowed to represent clients in any way.

Primary legal aid serves two major goals. First, it intends to create good access that is readily available and free of charge. Secondly, they have a preventive function: their early involvement helps to avoid escalation as well as minimise costs, both for the specific individual as well as for society at large.

There are several channels available through which potential clients can apply to the LSC for help: the website, telephone, counter or referral to a consultation hour (by appointment).

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Legal Services Counters: facts and figures

The total number of 'client-related activities' performed by LSC amounted to 423,450 in 2022. A client-related activity may take place through direct contact with the client or via other contact channels – 'the contact time' – or through other activities such as research needed in order to give proper advice in a certain case and consultation with the other party.

Below, figures show the nature of the client-related activities at the LSC. Most activities consist of contact by phone (57% of the client activities) (see table below).

Table 1: Nature of client activities of Legal Services Counters (2022)

	<i>Total number 2022</i>	<i>Percentages* 2022</i>
<u>Website</u>		
Visits	6,241,376	92%
Downloads sample letters	540,888	8%
Total website	6,782,264	
<u>Contact time</u>		
Telephone 0900	241,244	57%
Counter	57,870	14%
Consultation hour	15,523	4%
<u>Non-contact time</u>		
Researching	108,813	26%
Total contact & non-contact time	423,450	

**The percentages have been rounded off. That's why the total not exactly equals 100.*

A client may have contacted the LSC on more than one occasion in 2022. That's why the number of clients is lower than the number of client activities.

The LSC provide several kinds of services. The majority involves providing information and answering questions (87%). Clients are also referred to the consultation hours (6%), to lawyers (7%), to mediators (<1%) or to other network partners (2%).

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The majority of inquiries concern employment (23%), family law issues (13%), contract/consumer law issues (16%), housing (14%), and administrative law, including social security (9%).

Ad 3. In more detail: Private lawyers and mediators

Legal aid in the Netherlands works with private lawyers who provide legal services and representation to clients in the following fields of law: criminal, family, labour/ employment, housing, social security, consumer, administrative, debt restructuring, Psychiatric Hospitals Act, asylum and immigration. Private lawyers obtain legal aid cases in two ways: either they are referred to in the first tier, or a client directly contacts a LAB-registered lawyer.

In order to be able to accept legal aid cases, private lawyers need to be registered with the LAB and to comply with a set of quality standards. For some fields of law – criminal, mental health, asylum and immigration law, youth, family law, victims of crime, housing, social benefits, and labour/employment – additional terms apply. The lawyer must have adequate expertise as well as sufficient experience in the particular field of law.

Number of board and staff members

The LAB has one board member and more than 300 employees/staff members.

Number of lawyers, advocates and paralegals (separately) participating in the legal aid programme

There are 6,125 lawyers participating in the legal aid programme and 768 mediators. Paralegals working for registered lawyers are allowed, under conditions set by the LAB and the Bar Association, to offer some services for cases of the lawyer but do not participate separately in the legal aid programme.

Payment of lawyers and mediators

As soon as a case is closed, the lawyer invoices the LAB for the services provided. A lawyer does not charge for hours but works for a fixed fee which differs according to different types of cases, with fixed surcharges for some categories. These fees are based on extensive analyses of legal aid cases from the past and are supposed to correspond with the average time spent on a specific kind of case by a lawyer. In 2017, an extensive re-evaluation of the average time spent per case was conducted⁹ and as a result of this fees for most cases were re-evaluated and increased in 2022. In family cases, new fixed surcharges were introduced, for example in divorce cases involving minors/children.

⁹ Source:

https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/2322/2793_Summary_tcm28-284816.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

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A few examples of the fixed fees are presented below. In cases that concern labour (dismissal), for example, lawyers receive a compensation that corresponds to 11 hours.

Table 2: Examples of types of cases and the corresponding fixed number of paid working hours

<i>Type of case</i>	<i>Fixed number of paid working hours</i>
Labour: dismissal	11
Divorce	15 (19 with surcharge)
Felony	7-14
Minor criminal offence	6

In 1994, the hourly rate for legal aid was €26. In 2000 and 2002, fees were increased substantially. Since then, the Ministry determines the hourly rate every year following an annual price index. In 2023, the hourly rate is €120.20. This means for example that for a labour - dismissal case a lawyer receives 11 x €120.20. Part of this fixed fee is paid by the client through the individual contribution; lawyers are responsible for collecting this contribution themselves. The LAB pays the remainder.

3. Budget and Spend

Please give the budget for Publicly Funded Legal Services/Legal Aid in your jurisdiction for the last two years. If possible show the actual expenditure broken down by civil, criminal, administrative, children, asylum? Expenditure on initial advice services. Please indicate the proportion of the legal aid budget that is funded by (a) central/Federal Government (b) Local or state government. Contribution paid by the client. Is your legal aid budget demand led (uncapped) or capped or a mixture? (Please elaborate).

Financed by the Ministry of J&S, the LAB is accountable to this ministry for its budgetary allocations. The legal aid system operates according to an open end provision.

Table 3

Year	Total Dutch population*	Total expenditure on legal aid in Euro (x 1,000)	Expenditure per capita in Euro
1994	15,300	184,000	12
1998	15,650	195,000	12
2002	16,105	315,000	20
2006	16,334	398,000	24
2010	16,575	472,000	28
2014	16,829	432,000	26
2018	17,181	395,000	23
2020	17,408	441,000	25
2022	17,591	540,000	31

* in thousands

Expenditures can (roughly) be broken down to the following domains (2022):

- Civil: € 174,000,000
- Administrative (including immigration): € 105,000,000
- Criminal (including duty solicitors): € 207,000,000
- Primary help/Legal services counters: € 27,400
- Remaining expenditures: € 27,000,000

Own contribution clients

Legal aid is primarily financed by the state (the Legal Aid Fund) and only for a very small part through an income-related contribution of individual clients. The own contribution is intended as an incentive. It is envisaged to let clients carefully consider the pros and cons of taking a matter to a lawyer, hence discouraging frivolous or minor cases to be brought to the legal system. Lawyers are responsible for collecting this own contribution.

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There are 5 contribution categories, dependent on the clients income. In approximately 88% of the certificates granted, the person seeking justice falls under the lowest individual contribution category.

4.Scope, Caseload and Eligibility

What restrictions on scope are there for civil and criminal administrative, children, asylum? legal aid and for initial advice in your jurisdiction? Total number of applications and grants for the last two years. Please break down by civil, criminal administrative, children, asylum? and initial advice as well as by year. Proportion of the population eligible for civil legal aid and/or initial Advice. Eligibility limits for criminal legal aid. Are means tested contributions part of your (a) civil (b) criminal (c) initial advice eligibility requirements? In your jurisdiction, are legal aided litigants who lose their case liable to pay the other side's legal expenses/costs?

Scope second line/certificate users

The LAB can assess the scope of the Legal Aid System and gain a better insight into the socio-economic characteristics of those who apply for legal aid. Estimates are that approximately 36% of the population, on the basis of their financial means, is eligible for legal aid.

On the basis of the data it receives from the Central Statistics Office, the LAB can identify their background characteristics. Holders of a legal aid certificate are predominantly male and between 20 and 55 years of age; certificate holders of over 65 are fairly infrequent. Employed and retired workers are found to be fairly underrepresented, whereas recipients of social benefits and other non-working persons are overrepresented. Certificate holders are also found to more often be divorced and less often married. Certificate holders living in single-parent families are overrepresented. Furthermore, certificate holders are more likely to be members of ethnic minority groups and often live in larger cities (>250,000 population) and less often in smaller municipalities (<50,000 population).

Process of certificate application

The LAB assesses applications for a certificate on the basis of the client's income, the client's assets, and the (financial) significance of their legal problem. The LAB verifies the client's personal data with those in the municipal population register and checks the applicant's income and assets with the tax authorities. It is able to do so with the aid of a 'burgerservicenummer' (citizen service number) (BSN); this is a unique identification number, which every Dutch citizen receives when registering in the municipal population register. The API with the tax authorities allows the LAB to rapidly obtain information concerning the applicant's income and assets.

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Eligibility

Assessment of the applicant's income and assets is based on the financial situation two years prior to the application date, 'reference year' (t-2). The reason is that these data were validated and complete. For example, if someone applies for a certificate in 2022, their income in 2020 is taken into account. Their income for that year should not be higher than €29,400 (single household) or €41,600 (shared household/single person with children). The applicant's assets may not exceed €30,846.

Change of the reference year can be requested, if the applicant's income and/or assets have substantially decreased since the reference year. If an applicant wants to apply for a lower own contribution, their income should have decreased by at least 15% compared to the reference year.

When a client receives more than €15,874 (single household) or €31,747 (shared household) because of the result of a procedure, his certificate will be withdrawn retroactively. They are expected to pay their own lawyer.

People who do not have Dutch nationality also receive legal aid when they have a problem that concerns the Dutch legal system.

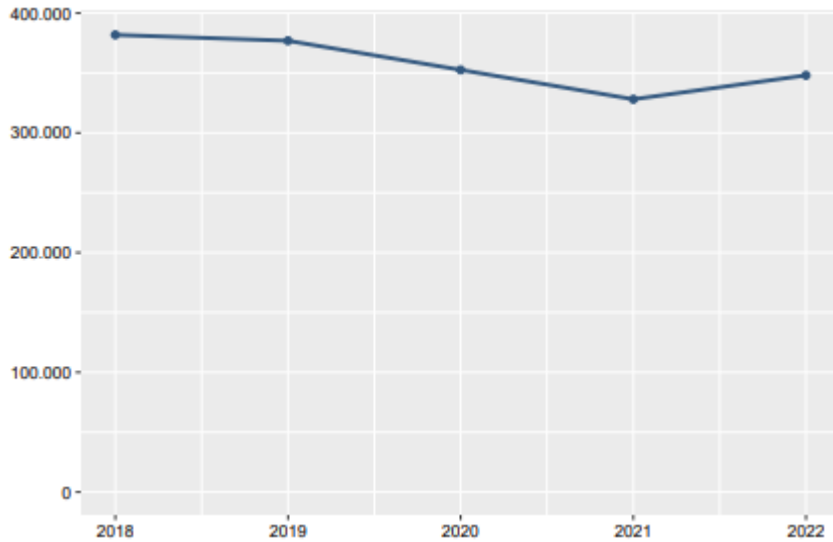
Sometimes, clients are exempted from individual contributions, for example for all cases in which people have been deprived of their freedom against their will. And, for example, people who participate in the debt restructuring scheme, are also exempted from paying an individual contribution as well as victims of violent crimes and sexual offenses.

In civil cases, clients who lose their case can be ordered to pay the other side's legal expenses/costs. In criminal cases, convicts (when irrevocably convicted) are obliged to retroactively pay back their legal aid if they turn out not to be eligible.

Certificates: facts and figures

In 2022, 371,740 legal aid certificates were issued. The figure below shows the number of regular legal aid certificates issued since 2018:

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In addition to the regular legal aid certificates – 348,021 in 2022 – 10,623 'minor aid' certificates were issued (i.e. for max. three-hour legal aid). In addition, as of 1 July 2021 this also includes certificates that the LAB temporarily provides to lawyers for a special Advisory certificate self-efficacy (Atz). Further, 13,096 mediation certificates were issued.

For every certificate issued, the LAB registers the pertaining field of law (see table below). This table shows that approximately half of the certificates concern criminal (33%) and family-related cases (20%).

Table 4: Types of cases represented in legal aid certificates (2022)

	<i>Number 2022*</i>	<i>Percentage 2022*</i>
Criminal	114,000	33
Family	69,500	20
Asylum	35,500	10
Psychiatric Hospitals (Compulsory Admissions) Act	33,500	10
Contract/consumer	20,000	6
Housing**	19,000	5
Immigration	12,500	4
Social benefits	11,000	3
Labour/employment	9,500	3
Social (security) insurance	8,000	2
Administrative	6,000	2
Pre-deportation detention	6,000	2
Other civil cases	3,000	1
Debt restructuring	1,500	<1
<i>Total regular legal aid certificates</i>	<i>349,000</i>	
Mediation certificates	13,000	
Minor aid certificates	10,500	
<i>Total</i>	<i>373,000</i>	

*All figures have been rounded off (to the nearest 500). That's why the total not exactly equals the sum of the separate figures.

**This also includes additions with regard to the childcare benefits scandal.

5. Quality Assurance

System used – Complaints to LAO, Complaints to the Bar Association/ Law Society, Client Satisfaction questionnaires/interviews, Continuing Legal Education, Mentoring, Peer Review, Supervisor audit, Observation or video/audio tape etc? What requirements are there (if any) for lawyers and others who wish to provide legal aid, other than membership of the Bar /professional association e.g. registration, experience, special exams, interviews, upper or lower limits on number of cases undertaken annually etc.?

The number of certificates that can be granted to a lawyer or mediator is maximally 250 per year. Each certificate is weighed according to the fixed number of paid working hours for each certificate. A maximum number is maintained for reasons of quality. If the number of certificates exceeds 250, lawyers or mediators would not have enough time to spend on each case. In the same way a maximum of 2000 paid working hours is set that can be paid to a lawyer each year. When a lawyer invoices more than 2000 hours in a year, he or she receives a lower maximum of certificates the next year.

In the Netherlands, deans of the local bar associations cooperate with institutions to improve communication in the system and to solve issues in an informal manner. The deans further collect complaints about lawyers. Information about the possibility to complain is published on their website.

The LAB conducts regular satisfaction surveys. The most recent survey took place in 2018. It showed that clients are satisfied with their lawyer in general. To judge whether lawyers performed well, the LAB asked other legal professionals (judges, prosecutors) to judge the work of lawyers. This showed that other legal professionals evaluate lawyers' work mostly positive, although it varies. The Knowledge Center of the LAB currently works on designing and implementing a more structural feedback loop, of which the experiences of citizens (also with their lawyer) are a key component.

In the Netherlands, peer review thus far is (only) established in the area of asylum law. In this field of law, clients are highly vulnerable and have little possibilities to complain if they were dissatisfied with the quality of the legal aid service. All lawyers agreed to implement a peer review system via a democratic vote. They also elect the peers who conduct the peer review. Peers review the files of the lawyers regularly, attend court sessions, and monitor new asylum lawyers.

In 2020, the Bar Association made it compulsory for all lawyers to dedicate a certain amount of time each year to intervision or peer review.

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They receive points in return, as part of the permanent education. All mediators registered with the Legal Aid Board are registered with the Mediation Federation Netherlands and have to conduct a peer review successfully once in every 3 years.

6. Public Legal Education

Initiatives in last two years to increase public awareness of the availability of Publicly Funded Legal Services/legal aid in your jurisdiction and how to access it. (Include any particular approach for those in remote areas or those with special legal needs e.g. the elderly or victims of domestic violence). IT packages introduced to enhance access for the public. Has there been a country wide Needs Assessment study in your jurisdiction in recent years, looking at the distribution of justiciable problems and how the public respond to them? Date of last needs assessment? Executed by?

Online self-help, information and support is offered via the *Rechtwijzer* website (*Rechtwijzer* translates into Roadmap to Justice; see www.rechtwijzer.nl) and on the website of the Legal Services Counter (www.juridischloket.nl). These online provisions are designed to be accessible for most Dutch citizens (96,5% of the Dutch adult population has home access to the internet or can go to public libraries for free internet access and support if needed).

The public awareness of the availability of legal aid generally seems good. Still, the latest Paths to Justice study (Ter Voert & Hoekstra, WODC 2020¹⁰) found that 11% of the respondents fail to find legal help (either primary or secondary help).

The 'childcare benefits scandal' (in which tax authorities falsely accused thousands of families of fraud¹¹) and the gas extraction scandal (gas extraction has caused a number of earth quakes, damaging many houses of inhabitants in Groningen) led to an all-encompassing re-imagination of the relationship between citizens and government. Reforms in public service delivery are under way, aiming to provide a people-centered approach.

It is expected that these developments will impact the public legal aid provision. Firstly, free legal aid is available for the victims of both scandals. Secondly, the current legal aid reform, although unrelated to the scandals, adopted a similar approach by emphasizing the importance of early information, advice and holistic support close to the homes of citizens, in collaboration with communal and social services. More than 30 pilots and experiments took place in the last years, experimenting with various ways of early and holistic legal aid delivery. The results of the pilots are expected in 2024.

¹⁰ Source: <https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/3008/Cahier-2020-18-volledige-tekst.pdf?sequence=9&isAllowed=y>

¹¹ The 'childcare benefits scandal' was the reason why the cabinet resigned on 15th of January 2021, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_childcare_benefits_scandal.

7. Alternative Sources of Legal Aid services

What are the other principal sources of legal help for disadvantaged citizens in your jurisdiction, and how many clients do they assist annually (e.g. legal expenses insurance, trade unions, consumers organisation claims companies, community law clinics, university law clinics, local charities, NGOs etc.).

Outside the system of legal aid, there are other possibilities to seek legal assistance. To some extent, trade unions and consumer organizations provide legal aid. Around half of the households in the Netherlands has a legal protection insurance policy¹².

In addition to legal protection insurance policies the legal aid insurers offer pre-paid legal aid against fixed prices.

People can further seek help at social-legal counselors (social raadsliden) and law clinics (rechts- and wetswinkels, usually linked to universities where law students help people with legal problems). Unfortunately there is no data of the number of clients for these organisations.

Finally, a number of lawyers offer half an hour free information and advice.

¹² Source: WODC, <https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/3008/Cahier-2020-18-volledige-tekst.pdf?sequence=9&isAllowed=y>

8. Holistic legal services

Is your jurisdiction exploring link ups between legal services providers and non lawyer professionals e.g. health/justice partnerships, social work/justice collaboration, or other forms of "one stop shop"?

One of the goals of the current legal aid reform is to establish strong collaborations between legal aid services and social and communal services. Many of the pilots in the legal aid reform included cooperation between the legal and the social and communal service providers. The Legal Service Counters have a coordinating role in establishing local and regional collaborations. In addition, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities and Social Work Netherlands received funding from the Ministry of J&S for setting up and strengthening 'robust first tier legal aid' in all 342 municipalities.

Another example of connections between legal and non-legal workers is driven by the Dutch Judiciary. In many cities community courts and neighbourhood judges are set up and running in collaboration with local organisations, and with publicly funded legal aid lawyers in two community courts.

9. UN SDG Standard 16.3

Please identify any steps being taken to articulate and elaborate Sustainable Development Goal 16.3 in your jurisdiction.

The developments in the Dutch system continue to encourage a more sustainable solution to the problems people have. This translates to initiatives to organise different types of support in a more holistic manner, closer to the people who need them. The support include registered lawyers, jurists, and even support in the social domain.

Since 2018, the legal aid system in the Netherlands has again been under construction, with a *renewed and learning* system in 2025 as spot on the horizon. The people-centred approach, which puts people and the problems as they experience them more to the centre than the legal interpretations of them, is still very much in focus. This translates to more people-centred policies and practices at organizations like the LAB, expressly seeking the margin of appreciation in specific hardship cases.

10. Other

Most innovative project 2021-2022

Most disappointing trend 2021-2022

Biggest challenge for 2023

Something about Covid-19 effects?

The LAB is preparing the implementation of a new ICT infrastructure. As this creates the opportunity to modernise the services for citizens, the LAB is redesigning its citizen-facing processes and interfaces. As part of this, the LAB explores how citizens can stay in control and owner of their data, how the legal aid process can be more transparent, how different access points for different segments of citizens can be created, and how there can be made a better match between people, their problems and their preferences on the one hand, and specific legal aid and lawyers on the other. This program started end of 2022 and is expected to show the first live results in 2026.

For the special legal aid arrangement for victims of the childcare benefits scandal in which the Dutch Tax Authority falsely accused thousands of families of fraud, per May 2021 the LAB already introduced a special process through which citizens are matched with a lawyer. On the basis of characteristics of the case, of the citizens and their situation, and their preferences, citizens can choose from three lawyers that meet their criteria. 77% responded that they were positive about matching, due to the fact this safeguards quality, versus 9% that rather searches a lawyer themselves. Per 14 April 2023, 256 lawyers participate and 8.246 matches were established.

After the revelation of the large-scale childcare benefits scandal, the assumption of self-efficacy in the public legal aid domain is under further scrutinization. A special, temporary arrangement called the Ratz (Regeling Adviestoevoeging Zelfredzaamheid; Arrangement for Advice Certificate Self-efficacy) was created. Under this arrangement, citizens receive legal advice, whereas under the Wrb they would not have been granted legal aid because they are assumed to be able to take action themselves, or with other kinds of support. Goals of the Ratz are to develop a better understanding of the challenges that citizens face in situations where the system assumes a sufficient level of self-efficacy. This is a closer cooperation between first tier and second tier legal aid with the goal to prevent people to become lost in between the two tiers, and to further investigate the omissions between them.

A concerning trend in The Netherlands is the gradual but steady decline of number of lawyers who are available for providing legal aid. There is a negative growth due to an outflux that is higher than the influx. Given the special characteristics when it comes to entry costs and time, more

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immediate action is currently being prepared. A study found that monetary compensation, organisational robustness, innovation, and standing are critical variables for increasing the availability of legal aid lawyers.

To stimulate the influx in new lawyers into the legal aid system, since 2021, the LAB offers a subsidy for the cost of the compulsory Professional Education for trainee lawyers. Each year, the education of approximately 175 trainee lawyers are subsidized in this way. In addition, since 2021 the Legal Aid Board offers a subsidy for the cost of the compulsory Professional Education for lawyers active in the system of Legal Aid.

In 2022, the LAB together with representatives from the Bar Association and the Mediators Federation took the initiative to develop guidelines for legal support of people who have become unable to work due to invalidity (social security law).

As of March 2023, in court-annexed mediations, litigants who are not eligible for legal aid receive a subsidy to cover the first 2.5 hours of mediation.