



National Report Template ILAG Cologne 2025

It would be much appreciated if you could fill in what you can for your jurisdiction. We know it is a lot of information to ask, so do not worry if you can only provide some of the information. Please highlight any recent significant changes in your legal aid programme If time and energy permit.

1. Country details :

- ☐ **Name:** Rwanda
- ☐ **Population:** As of 2024, Rwanda's population is **13,798,561**¹.
- ☐ **GDP:** In the fiscal year 2023/24, GDP at current market prices was estimated at FRW **17,684 billion**, equivalent to **USD 12,305 billion**.
- ☐ **Poverty Line:** Approximately **38.2%** of the population is deemed to be living in poverty².
- ☐ **Number of Practicing Lawyers:** There are **1,506 practicing advocates** in Rwanda³.

2. Legal Aid Organisation / Authority:

- **Name of LAO:** Legal Aid Forum (LAF)
- **Status of LAO:** Independent Civil Society Organization
- **Number of Board and Staff Members:** 32

Delivery Method

LAF employs a **mixed delivery model** that combines the following approaches:

1. **Salaried Lawyers:** In-house legal experts.
2. **Private Contracted Lawyers:** Engaged periodically, based on specific project periods or needs.
3. **Paralegals through NGOs:** Supporting community-based legal aid.

¹ See National Statistics of Rwanda Website, available at <https://www.statistics.gov.rw/publication/size-resident-population> accessed 20/1/2025

² Available at <https://www.statistics.gov.rw/publication/statistical-yearbook-2019> accessed 20/5/2025

³ <https://www.rwandabar.org.rw/> accessed 20/5/2025

Personnel Details

- **Lawyers:** 9 salaried lawyers.
- **Advocates:** 9 private advocates.
- **Paralegals:**
 - **Active Paralegals in Districts:** 3,000 paralegals organized under the Paralegal Network.
 - **District Representatives:** 30 paralegal representatives elected from the network, who are supported with monthly incentives, bicycles, monthly internet access, and tablets for reporting purposes.

3. Paying providers of legal advice and services

Payment Methods:

- **Private Lawyers:** LAF compensates private lawyers through service provision agreements.
- **In-House Lawyers:** These are employed under formal employment contracts.
- **Paralegals:** LAF collaborates with community-based paralegal organizations under specific agreements tailored to their scope of work.

4. Budget and Spend:

In Rwanda, funding for legal aid services comes from a combination of government and non-governmental sources. However, the **Legal Aid Forum (LAF)** primarily relies on funding from charity organizations and development partners, with no direct financial contributions from the government or its institutions to LAF's budget.

Sources of Funding

LAF actively engages in fundraising initiatives with various development partners, including: **USAID; European Union; Belgian Embassy; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; Foreign Commonwealth Development Office; UNESCO; Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA); among others.**

Expenditure for the Last Two Years

The expenditures for legal services provided by the Legal Aid Forum over the last two years are as follows:

- **2023:** 1,741,651,511 RWF
- **2024:** 2,550,685,052 RWF

These funds were used to cover a range of services, including:

- **Initial Legal Advice and Orientation:** Services provided to individuals seeking legal guidance.
- **Civil, Criminal, and Administrative Cases:** Representation and support in legal matters involving civil rights, criminal proceedings, and administrative disputes.
- **Children and Asylum Cases:** Assistance for vulnerable groups, including children and asylum seekers.

Proportion of Funding

Since LAF's funding does not include government contributions, its budget is entirely supported by development partners and donor organizations.

Budget Nature

The legal aid budget for LAF is **demand-driven and capped**. This means that while the need for legal aid services might exceed available funding, LAF works within the constraints of its allocated budget, prioritizing cases based on urgency and impact. Continuous fundraising efforts are conducted to bridge gaps and expand service coverage.

5. Scope, Caseload and Eligibility:

LAF's legal aid services for the two years include:

- **Legal Representation:** 592 cases handled in courts and criminal justice authorities.
- **Free Legal Advice:** Provided to 12,293 individuals through various platforms, including the 1022 legal aid call center, referrals, and direct walk-ins.
 - Of these, **3,449 individuals** were assisted by community-based paralegals.
- **DNA Testing:** Facilitated for 39 vulnerable women and teenage mothers.

- **Awareness and Education:** An estimated **8,410,420 individuals** were educated on laws, including family, land, and procedural laws, through radio, TV, paralegal programs, and the ICT platforms.

✓ **Proportion of the Population Eligible for Legal Aid and Initial Advice:**

Legal aid primarily targets vulnerable and indigent populations, including:

- ☐ **Poor and Vulnerable Individuals:** People certified as indigent by local authorities or other competent entities.
- ☐ **Survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of GBV.
- ☐ **Children in Need:** Minors involved in legal proceedings (e.g., custody, juvenile delinquency, or child abuse cases). And Orphans and vulnerable children.
- ☐ **Refugees and Asylum Seekers:** Individuals seeking refugee status or already recognized as refugees who face legal challenges.
- ☐ **Persons with Disabilities:** Those requiring legal aid due to physical, mental, or intellectual disabilities.
- ☐ **Elderly People:** Indigent older persons requiring legal protection or assistance.
- ☐ **Victims of Human Rights Violations:** Individuals whose fundamental rights have been infringed upon, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups such as journalists facing persecution, harassment, or legal challenges related to their work
- ☐ **Wrongfully Accused or Detained Persons:** Indigent people facing criminal charges who require legal defense.
- ☐ **Persons in Land and Property Disputes:** Poor individuals involved in land disputes or threatened with eviction.
- ☐ **Indigent Women:** Especially those involved in family law matters like divorce, child custody, or inheritance disputes.

✓ Eligibility Limits for Criminal Legal Aid

Eligibility Limits for Criminal Legal Aid

1. Right to Defense in Criminal Cases

- According to Article 126 of the Rwandan Criminal Procedure Code, all accused individuals have the right to defense and legal counsel.
- For minors, Article 148 mandates that a specialized chamber adjudicates cases involving minors, ensuring representation by legal counsel, with input from parents, guardians, and other stakeholders.

2. Prioritization of Indigent Individuals in Serious Cases

- Legal aid prioritizes indigent individuals, particularly those accused of serious offenses (capital crimes).
- Legal representation is mandatory in the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court.
- Article 42 of the Judiciary Law ensures representation for parties unable to afford legal fees, with free legal assistance available upon application to the President of the Supreme Court.

3. Legal Aid for Transferred Cases

- The Law N° 47/2013 addresses cases transferred to Rwanda from the ICTR and other jurisdictions, primarily concerning genocide and international crimes.
- Accused individuals are entitled to counsel of their choice or free legal representation if they cannot afford it.

4. Protection of Children's Rights

- Article 26 of the Law on the Rights and Protection of the Child Against Violence mandates legal assistance for children without guardians when tried in court.

5. Role of the Rwanda Bar Association (RBA)

- The RBA is tasked with supporting the government in providing free legal services to indigent individuals, as stipulated in Article 4 of the RBA Law.

- Article 60 further obliges the Ministry of Justice to allocate budgetary funds for legal and judicial aid to the indigent.

6. Legal Aid for Persons with Disabilities

- Article 8 of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities guarantees legal representation for disabled individuals in court.
- The State is responsible for ensuring legal aid for disabled persons unable to afford representation, with various organs facilitating access to necessary services.
- ✓ **No Means-Tested Contributions in Legal Aid:** In Rwanda, financial contributions are not required for accessing **Civil Legal Aid**, **Criminal Legal Aid**, or **Initial Legal Advice**. This approach is rooted in two core principles of legal aid:

1. Access to Justice Principle

- This principle ensures the legal aid system is accessible, effective, sustainable, and reliable, enabling individuals to exercise their right to justice without financial barriers.

2. Non-Discrimination Principle

- Legal aid is available to all individuals, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, political opinion, or social status. Special protection and assistance are extended to vulnerable groups, including women, children, and orphans.

Eligibility for Legal Aid in Rwanda

Eligibility is determined using three key methods:

1. Automatic Qualification

- The Government of Rwanda, through the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), automatically qualifies individuals classified as poor for legal aid.
- To improve this process, the issuance of a certificate of indigence is being streamlined in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, making it a reliable document for means testing in legal aid provision.

2. Means and Merit Testing

- **Means Test:** Legal aid eligibility considers the applicant's financial situation to determine if they genuinely require support.
- **Merit Test:** The likelihood of a successful outcome in legal proceedings is also evaluated to ensure efficient allocation of resources.
- For legal persons, the financial standing of the entity and the individuals with an interest in it are assessed to determine eligibility.
- ✓ **Liability for Legal Expenses in Case of Loss:** Legal-aided litigants who lose their cases are typically required to pay the other side's legal costs. This ensures accountability within the justice system but may pose challenges for vulnerable groups, highlighting the need for continued measures to safeguard equitable access to justice.

Key Challenges and Recommendations

- **Resource Constraints:** Insufficient funding to meet the growing demand for legal aid services.
- **Geographical Disparities:** Rural areas remain underserved, with limited access to legal aid services compared to urban regions.
- **Capacity Limitations:** Inadequate numbers of trained paralegals and legal professionals to handle the increasing caseload. And Insufficient staff at Access to Justice Bureaus (MAJ) to assist all eligible beneficiaries, particularly in civil matters.
- **Awareness Gaps:** Some citizens remain unaware of their legal rights and the availability of legal aid services, leading to underutilization of resources.
- **Delays in Pro Bono Services:** The process of requesting and receiving pro bono services is often lengthy and inefficient, delaying access to justice.
- **Shortage of Legal Aid Providers:** The number of legal aid service providers is insufficient relative to the high demand for services.
- **Limited Support for Minors:** Lawyers to assist children are not always available, and the number of legal counsels dedicated to minors is inadequate.

Recommendations

1. **Enact a Comprehensive Legal Aid Law:** Draft and implement a legal aid law that not only encourages the use of legal aid services but also strengthens monitoring and accountability mechanisms for its execution.
2. **Increase Staffing at Maison d'Accès à la Justice (MAJ):** Expand the number of staff at the Ministry of Justice's Access to Justice Bureau (MAJ) to better serve the growing demand for legal aid services across the country.
3. **Raise Awareness of Legal Aid Services:** Launch national campaigns to raise awareness about the availability of legal aid services, ensuring that all eligible beneficiaries are informed and able to access the support they need.
4. **Expand Funding for Legal Aid:** Establish a dedicated Legal Aid Fund to ensure sufficient resources are allocated for the provision of legal services, thus broadening coverage and enhancing service delivery.
5. **Decentralize Legal Aid Services:** Expand legal aid services by introducing mobile legal clinics and strengthening the MAJ offices in rural and underserved areas, ensuring equitable access to justice across the country.
6. **Enhance Capacity and Training:** Increase training opportunities for paralegals and lawyers, focusing on child-friendly and human rights-focused legal aid approaches to improve the quality of legal support provided.
7. **Promote Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR):** Strengthen the role of the ADR Center to provide efficient alternatives to court proceedings, helping to reduce case backlogs and accelerate dispute resolution.
8. **Scale Up Legal Literacy Campaigns:** Implement targeted legal literacy initiatives, especially in remote and underserved communities, to empower citizens with knowledge of their rights and the available legal aid services.

6. Quality Assurance:

Systems Used for Quality Assurance

1. **Complaints Mechanisms:**
 - **Toll-Free Line:** The 1022 legal aid call center serves as a direct platform for legal aid seekers to lodge complaints and access services promptly.

- **Direct Complaints:** Beneficiaries can raise grievances directly with legal empowerment staff or the Executive Director of the Legal Aid Forum (LAF).
2. **Complaints to the Bar Association:**
 - Clients can file complaints regarding misconduct or inadequate service delivery by lawyers, in accordance with the rules of the Rwanda Bar Association.
 3. **Rwanda Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS):**
 - LAF utilizes the IECMS platform, where every case is electronically linked and tracked.
 - This system ensures efficient case management and enhances the quality of court submissions prepared by LAF advocates, promoting accountability and transparency.
 4. **Legal Aid Performance Standards:** The **Legal Aid Performance Standards** are part of an advocacy initiative to establish clear guidelines that ensure the quality and consistency of legal aid services provided across the country. Developed by the **Legal Aid Forum (LAF)**, these standards serve as a **quality control mechanism** to monitor, evaluate, and enhance the delivery of legal aid, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Key objectives of the standards include:

- Providing **guidance** to legal aid providers to ensure **high-quality and consistent** services in both **criminal and civil matters**.
- Supporting the **monitoring and evaluation** of legal aid services to measure their effectiveness.
- Upholding **professionalism** and accountability in legal aid service delivery.

By implementing these standards, legal aid providers can enhance access to justice and ensure that beneficiaries receive **efficient, reliable, and equitable** legal assistance.

5. **Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (CLE):**
 - Lawyers are required to undergo CLE annually to renew their licenses, ensuring they stay up-to-date with legal developments and maintain professional excellence.
6. **Mentoring and Peer Review:**

- Junior lawyers receive mentorship from senior lawyers to improve their skills and service delivery.
- Peer reviews ensure that legal aid cases are handled with the highest professional and ethical standards.

Requirements for Legal Aid Lawyers and Providers

1. In-House Lawyers from LAO:

In-house lawyers play a vital role in advancing access to justice by providing the following services:

- **Legal Aid Advice:** Offering consultations to individuals seeking legal guidance.
- **Mediation:** Facilitating alternative dispute resolution to resolve conflicts amicably and reduce court burdens.
- **Legal Education:** Conducting community outreach to raise awareness of legal rights and laws.
- **Other Services:** Providing assistance with drafting legal documents, referrals, and addressing legal challenges outside the courtroom.

2. Membership with the Bar Association:

- Registration with the Rwanda Bar Association is mandatory for lawyers who wish to represent clients in court under legal aid.

3. Additional Requirements:

- **Interviews:** Candidates undergo interviews to assess their suitability for legal aid service provision.
- **Internships:** Prospective legal aid lawyers are required to complete internships to gain practical experience in handling legal aid cases.
- **Written Exams:** Candidates must pass written exams to demonstrate their legal expertise and competence.

4. Annual Caseload Limits:

- While no fixed upper or lower limits exist for caseloads, manageable workloads are encouraged to ensure quality service delivery and maintain professional standards.

Objectives of Quality Assurance Measures

The implementation of these measures aims to:

- **Deliver Consistent High-Quality Services:** Ensure legal aid beneficiaries receive professional and reliable services.
- **Promote Accountability and Transparency:** Enhance the trustworthiness and integrity of legal aid providers.
- **Leverage Technology:** Utilize tools like IECMS to improve case management and overall service delivery efficiency.
- **Empower Vulnerable Groups:** Address grievances effectively and ensure the justice system remains inclusive and responsive to the needs of vulnerable individuals.

7. Public Legal Education:

In the past two years, a series of initiatives have been implemented to increase public awareness of publicly funded legal services and how to access them, with particular focus on vulnerable populations and those in remote areas. An estimated **8,410,420 individuals** have been educated on various laws, including the new family law, land law, gender-based violence (GBV) laws, and procedural laws. These initiatives have included:

1. **Paralegal Education and Outreach:** LAF has empowered over 3,000 community-based paralegals through comprehensive training on key laws and legal aid services. Paralegals, stationed in communities, prisons, and refugee camps, are crucial in educating citizens about their rights and available legal services. With support tools like paralegal manuals, tablets, bicycles, and communication allowances, they are able to effectively assist marginalized groups, including those in remote areas.
2. **Mobile Legal Aid Clinics (MLAC):** To improve accessibility, LAF has deployed mobile legal aid clinics, which bring legal services directly to communities. This initiative, particularly valuable for remote and rural areas, allows paralegals, legal officers, and attorneys to provide on-site legal consultations, addressing issues like domestic violence and land disputes. It significantly reduces the transportation burden and costs associated with accessing legal services.
3. **Legal Aid Week:** Since 2009, LAF has hosted an annual Legal Aid Week in collaboration with other justice sector institutions. During this week, lawyers, paralegals, and legal officers travel to regions across the country, providing intensive legal education and services to vulnerable groups such as the elderly, minors,

pregnant and nursing mothers, people with disabilities, and survivors of domestic violence. This initiative reaches individuals who may otherwise struggle to access legal assistance.

4. **University Legal Aid Clinics:** LAF has established four university legal aid clinics where law students, under the supervision of professors, provide free legal services to vulnerable individuals. This approach not only offers practical legal training to students but also ensures that marginalized people receive legal advice, court submission drafting, and referrals, particularly in underserved communities.
5. **ICT for Legal Empowerment – 1022:** To address barriers like distance and transportation costs, LAF introduced the ICT-based service 1022 in 2018. This platform uses mobile phones to provide legal information and advice via interactive voice recordings (IVR) and Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD). It allows citizens, particularly those in remote areas, to access legal content on their rights and legal procedures, empowering them to self-educate and take action on legal matters.
6. **Legal Education through Media:** LAF has engaged with major media outlets to raise awareness of publicly funded legal services. Through TV and radio programs, LAF educates the public about their rights, the availability of legal aid, and how to access these services. This outreach is particularly impactful in rural areas, where media remains a key source of information.
7. **Know Your Rights Posters:** To further empower communities, LAF has distributed informative "Know Your Rights" posters in public spaces like police stations, courts, and prisons. These posters highlight essential legal rights, such as pre-trial rights and freedom of expression, and serve as an easy-to-read resource for the public.

Needs Assessment:

In terms of assessing the public's need for legal aid, two key studies have been conducted:

- **2022 Legal Aid Provider Mapping Exercise:** The Ministry of Justice conducted a national mapping exercise to assess the capabilities of legal aid providers across the country. The study aimed to identify the existing providers, evaluate their geographic coverage, and establish a database of services and contact details for further collaboration and improved service delivery.
- **2020 National Legal Aid Policy Assessment:** The Legal Aid Forum conducted an assessment of the implementation of the National Legal Aid Policy. The assessment

reviewed the progress made in the policy's rollout, identified gaps, and provided recommendations for full implementation, focusing on improving access to justice for underserved populations.

8. Alternative Sources of Legal Aid services:

In Rwanda, legal aid services for disadvantaged citizens are provided by a variety of sources, both state and non-state actors. These sources include:

1. **State Actors:** The Ministry of Justice, through MAJ (Ministry of Justice's legal aid program) and Abunzi (local mediation committees), are integral players in providing legal aid services.
2. **Non-State Actors (NSA):**
 - **NGOs:** There are 30 NGOs that offer legal aid services, supporting vulnerable individuals across the country.
 - **Universities:** 4 universities host legal aid clinics where law students, under supervision, provide free legal assistance to the community.
 - **Private Practitioners:** 40 private legal practitioners assist clients, often focusing on pro bono cases for marginalized groups.
3. **Umbrella Organization:** The **Legal Aid Forum (LAF)** is the umbrella network that brings together all these NGOs, ensuring coordination, support, and the delivery of effective legal aid across the country.

These providers serve various groups, including the poor, women, children, refugees, and persons with disabilities. The exact number of clients served annually varies, but LAF alone plays a significant role in reaching thousands of individuals.

9. Holistic legal services:

Rwanda is actively developing innovative partnerships between legal service providers and non-lawyer professionals to establish integrated, "one-stop shop" models for vulnerable populations. These initiatives aim to provide comprehensive support by combining legal, health, and social services in a seamless and efficient manner.

1. **Isange One-Stop Center (IOSC):** A leading example of Rwanda's holistic approach to addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and child abuse, the IOSC offers a range of integrated services, including legal aid, medical care, counseling, investigation, and prosecution—all under one roof. This model ensures that survivors receive the full spectrum of support necessary for their recovery and access to justice. Additionally, at the district level, **One-Stop Centers (OSCs)** provide land-related services in a centralized location, improving efficiency and service delivery.
2. **LAF's GBV and Legal Aid Integration:** The Legal Aid Forum (LAF), with financial support from USAID, is working to integrate legal services with health and GBV support. A key initiative involves establishing comprehensive service structures where GBV survivors can access both legal and health services in the same location. This integrated approach strengthens coordination among service providers and ensures a more effective response to GBV.
3. **Community-Based Paralegals:** Community paralegals including prison paralegals and refugee community paralegals play a critical role in expanding access to justice, particularly in underserved rural areas. In communities where legal knowledge is limited, paralegals help individuals navigate the legal system by providing legal education, advice, referrals, accompaniment, and mediation. All paralegals working within LAF member organizations operate as volunteers, demonstrating their commitment to justice and community support.

Through these initiatives, Rwanda is making significant progress in delivering holistic, accessible, and coordinated legal services, particularly for GBV survivors and vulnerable communities.

10. UN SDG Standard 16.3

SDG 16.3 aims to promote the rule of law at national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all. A key indicator of progress is the percentage of referred cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and children that are investigated and result in sentencing.

Rwanda's Commitment to SDG 16.3

Rwanda has made significant strides in advancing SDG 16.3 through comprehensive legal and institutional reforms, strategic policies, and innovative justice sector initiatives. These efforts enhance judicial efficiency, promote accountability, and ensure justice is accessible to all.

Key Justice Sector Reforms Enhancing Access to Justice

Rwanda has introduced several critical reforms to strengthen the rule of law and improve legal access:

1. **Establishment of an Appeals Court** – Strengthens judicial review, ensuring fairness, consistency, and equitable redress mechanisms.
2. **Integrated Electronic Case Management System (IECMS)** – A **digital platform** for electronic case filing and management that improves judicial efficiency, transparency, and accessibility.

Legal Aid Forum's (LAF) Role in Advancing SDG 16.3

LAF plays a **pivotal role** in ensuring access to justice through **community-based legal aid initiatives**:

- **Community-Based Paralegals**: Training and supporting **paralegals** to help communities understand and exercise their legal rights.
- **Mobile Legal Aid Clinics**: Bringing **legal services closer to underserved populations**, ensuring justice is accessible regardless of location.
- **Online Legal Aid Platform (Dial 1022)**: Expanding **digital access** to legal services, reducing financial and geographical barriers ([See impact](#)).
- **Abunzi (Mediation Committees)**: Strengthening **community-based dispute resolution mechanisms** to promote social cohesion and ease the burden on formal courts.

Conclusion

Through these reforms and initiatives, **Rwanda continues to lead in implementing SDG 16.3**, ensuring justice is **efficient, transparent, and inclusive for all**.

11. Other

I. Most Innovative Projects 2023–2024

1. Expansion of ICT-Based Legal Aid Services

One of the most impactful innovations in 2023–2024 has been the integration of technology into legal aid services, enhancing accessibility and efficiency.

1022 legal aid call center: citizens can access real-time legal advice and information remotely via tools such as interactive voice response (IVR) systems, USSD-based legal education, and call center lawyers. This technological advancement has significantly reduced barriers to justice, especially for rural and vulnerable populations, making legal aid more inclusive and ensuring widespread access to essential legal support.

2. Plea Bargaining as an Innovative Legal Reform

Plea bargaining, a cornerstone of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), has emerged as a transformative reform in Rwanda's justice system. Designed to resolve criminal cases efficiently, reduce court backlogs, and promote restorative justice, this reform has had significant impacts:

- **Policy Advocacy:** LAF worked closely with the Government of Rwanda to integrate plea bargaining into the legal framework, ensuring its alignment with ADR principles of reconciliation, fairness, and efficiency.
- **Capacity Building:** LAF trained legal practitioners, including prosecutors, judges, lawyers, and paralegals, on plea bargaining procedures and its role in restorative justice.
- **Public Awareness:** Through campaigns via TV, radio, and community outreach, LAF educated citizens on the benefits of plea bargaining, including reduced costs and faster case resolutions.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** LAF continuously monitors its implementation to ensure equity, refining the process to address emerging challenges.

Key Impacts of Plea Bargaining

1. **Efficient Case Resolution:** Backlogs in courts have been reduced, enabling the judiciary to focus on more complex cases.
2. **Cost Savings:** Both the government and defendants benefit from minimized trial costs.
3. **Restorative Justice:** Encourages accountability and reconciliation by promoting voluntary admission of guilt and resolution agreements.
4. **Increased Access to Justice:** Vulnerable groups now have faster, more affordable pathways to justice.

Future Directions

- **Expanded Use:** Exploring plea bargaining in civil, administrative, and juvenile cases.
- **Legal Safeguards:** Ensuring agreements are voluntary and supported by legal representation.
- **Digital Integration:** Leveraging e-justice platforms for streamlined accessibility and efficiency.

2. Most Disappointing Trend 2023–2024

The most disappointing trend has been the **persistent underfunding of legal aid services**, particularly by the government. Despite ongoing advocacy efforts, government contributions remain minimal, leaving NGOs and international donors to shoulder the bulk of legal aid financing. This dependency creates a precarious situation where critical services are vulnerable to funding cuts or shifts in donor priorities.

Another concerning trend has been **rising demand for legal aid services**, particularly for vulnerable groups such as victims of gender-based violence (GBV), and children, without a proportional increase in resources or capacity. This has resulted in long waiting times, limited coverage, and overburdened service providers.

Biggest Challenge for 2025

The biggest challenge for 2025 will be **ensuring sustainable funding for legal aid services**. With many donor-funded projects nearing completion, securing long-term resources from the government or alternative funding streams will be critical to maintaining and scaling legal aid initiatives.

Another significant challenge will be **adapting legal aid services to address emerging issues** such as digital rights, cybersecurity, and the ethical implications of AI, as these areas will increasingly affect access to justice and the rule of law.

3. COVID-19 Effects

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on legal aid services:

1. **Transition to Digital Services:** Restrictions on in-person interactions accelerated the shift to online and remote legal aid services. This transition proved beneficial in the long run by improving access for remote communities but also highlighted the digital divide.
2. **Delays in Justice Delivery:** Court closures and procedural backlogs caused significant delays in case resolution, particularly for vulnerable populations relying on free legal aid.

4. Introduction of New Legal Aid Services (2023–2024)

- **Digital Legal Aid Platforms:** There has been a significant expansion of mobile-based platforms and online tools, such as the 1022 legal aid call center, designed to offer accessible legal information and advice. These initiatives are aimed at enhancing the reach of legal services, particularly in underserved areas.
- **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and Criminal Justice Policy:** The introduction of policies focused on ADR and criminal justice aims to streamline legal processes, reduce case backlogs, and promote efficient, equitable justice delivery. These policies enhance access to justice by offering alternative pathways for resolving disputes and addressing criminal matters.