



StarMUN 2025, ECOSOC:

Research Report on the issue of Equal access to justice for all

Definition of Key Terms

Access to Justice: The ability of individuals to seek and obtain a remedy through formal or informal justice institutions for grievances in compliance with human rights standards.

Discrimination: Unfair treatment of individuals based on characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, disability, or economic status, affecting their ability to access justice equally.

Legal Aid: Assistance provided to individuals who cannot afford legal representation and access to the court system.

Rule of Law: The principle that all people and institutions are subject to and accountable to law that is fairly applied and enforced.

Vulnerable Groups: Populations at greater risk of injustice or denial of rights, such as women, children, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities.

General Overview, Historical Context

The concept of equal access to justice has deep historical roots. Foundational documents like the **Magna Carta (1215)**, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**, and the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)** emphasize fair legal treatment as a basic human right.

However, despite legal declarations, structural inequalities have historically hindered marginalized groups' access to legal remedies. Colonization, systemic racism, gender inequality, and economic disparities have all contributed to unequal justice systems worldwide.

In 2015, the international community recognized access to justice as integral to sustainable development by including **Target 16.3** in the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which calls to "*promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.*"

Root Causes for the Issue

- **Economic Barriers:** High legal fees and procedural costs prevent low-income individuals from seeking justice.
- **Geographic Barriers:** Rural and remote communities often lack nearby legal institutions.
- **Discriminatory Practices:** Bias within legal systems can marginalize minority groups.
- **Lack of Legal Awareness:** Many individuals are unaware of their legal rights or how to pursue them.

- **Underfunded Justice Systems:** Many countries struggle with overloaded courts, inadequate legal aid services, and a shortage of trained judges and lawyers.

Current Situation

Today, access to justice remains deeply unequal. In many low- and middle-income countries, approximately **5 billion people** — two-thirds of the world's population — lack meaningful access to justice, according to the **World Justice Project**. Even in developed countries, marginalized groups continue to experience systemic barriers to fair treatment.

Crucially, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, as court closures and backlogs left millions without timely access to legal remedies. There is growing recognition that achieving SDG 16 is fundamental to realizing the entire 2030 Agenda.

Timeline of Key Events

- **1215:** Signing of the Magna Carta, asserting the right to justice and a fair trial.
- **1948:** Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, establishing the right to an effective remedy for human rights violations.
- **1966:** Ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, reinforcing access to courts and fair trials.
- **1990:** Adoption of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.
- **2015:** Inclusion of Access to Justice in the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 16).
- **2019:** Launch of the Task Force on Justice by the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies.
- **2020:** UN policy brief "COVID-19 and Human Rights" highlights the urgent need for accessible justice systems during crises.

Major Parties Involved

Countries

- **Netherlands:** Advocates for innovative justice models, such as online dispute resolution platforms.
- **Kenya:** Implementing mobile court systems to bring justice to rural populations.
- **Canada:** Promoting Indigenous Justice Systems and restorative justice programs.
- **Brazil:** Working to increase access to legal aid through federal initiatives but facing challenges in urban and rural disparity.

International Organizations

- **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):** Supports rule of law and access to justice initiatives in over 170 countries.
- **International Development Law Organization (IDLO):** Focuses on empowering marginalized communities through legal empowerment.

- **World Justice Project:** Provides data and analysis on rule of law trends globally.
- **Open Society Justice Initiative:** Funds projects that seek to enhance legal empowerment and accountability.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening Legal Aid Services

- **Expand Public Legal Assistance:** Ensure free or affordable legal representation for low-income individuals.
- **Community Paralegals:** Train local community members to provide basic legal assistance and advice.

Utilizing Technology

- **Online Dispute Resolution Platforms:** Enable remote access to court services and mediation processes.
- **Legal Information Apps:** Provide accessible information about rights and legal procedures.

Promoting Legal Literacy

- **Rights Education Campaigns:** Conduct public campaigns to inform citizens of their legal rights.
- **School-Based Programs:** Integrate basic legal education into national school curricula.

Addressing Discrimination and Bias

- **Anti-Discrimination Laws:** Strengthen legislation that prohibits bias in legal proceedings.
- **Cultural Competency Training:** Require training for legal professionals to address implicit biases.

Judicial and Institutional Reform

- **Court System Modernization:** Improve court efficiency through digitization and process simplification.
- **Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish independent bodies to oversee fairness in legal institutions.

Further Reading

- World Justice Project: "Measuring the Justice Gap"
- UNDP: "Enabling Access to Justice and Rule of Law in Crisis Contexts"
- IDLO: "Accessing Justice: Models, Strategies and Best Practices on Legal Empowerment"
- Open Society Foundations: Reports on "Justice Initiative Projects"

Conclusion

Equal access to justice is the cornerstone of peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable societies. While the global community has made important strides, persistent barriers continue to deny millions the full protection of the law. Through innovation, investment, and international cooperation, delegates at ECOSOC can champion the rights of every individual to seek justice without discrimination or hardship, advancing the core values of human dignity, equality, and rule of law.