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## **JUSTICE SYSTEMS FAIL TO HELP 1.5 BILLION PEOPLE RESOLVE THEIR JUSTICE PROBLEMS, NEW GLOBAL REPORT FINDS**

Justice systems fail to resolve justice problems for 1.5 billion people, finds a new report by the Task Force on Justice. The report, released today at the World Justice Forum in The Hague, points to a hidden epidemic of injustice that affects all countries but hits the poorest hardest.

Whether they are victims of violence, seeking a divorce, facing harassment at work, dealing with debt or in need of a business permit, people have nowhere to turn. They are deterred by cost and complicated procedures, a lack of trust that they will be treated fairly, or a lack of justice services that are able to meet their needs.

**The report, “Justice for All,” may be downloaded here:**  
<https://justice.sdg16.plus/report>.

The Task Force on Justice is chaired by ministers from Argentina, the Netherlands, and Sierra Leone, and by the Elders, an independent group of global leaders working together for peace, justice and human rights. An initiative of the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies – a global partnership hosted by New York University’s Center on International Cooperation – it works to accelerate delivery of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and their commitment to provide justice for all by 2030.

The Task Force identifies a global justice gap with three dimensions:

- At least 253 million people live in *extreme* conditions of injustice – they are modern slaves, are stateless, or their countries or communities are engulfed in conflict, violence, and lawlessness.
- 1.5 billion people cannot resolve their everyday justice problems – they are victims of crimes they do not report or have a serious civil or administrative problem they cannot resolve.
- 4.5 billion people are excluded from the opportunities the law provides – they lack legal identity or other documentation related to employment, family, or property, and are therefore unable to access economic opportunities and public services, or the protection of the law.

Overall, 5.1 billion people—two-thirds of the world’s population—lack meaningful access to justice. While people in all countries are affected, the burden of this injustice is not randomly distributed.

“The justice gap is both a reflection of structural inequalities and disparities in power, and a contributor to these inequalities,” says Hina Jilani, a pioneering lawyer and pro-democracy

campaigner who is an Elder and a co-chair of the Task Force. “The burden of injustice falls all too heavily on women, children, and other vulnerable groups who face the hardest struggle to access the justice system and exercise their rights.”

The failure to provide justice is costly, the report’s authors note:

- People with unresolved justice problems face a deterioration of their health and financial situation. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development estimates that countries lose between 0.5 and 3 percent of their GDP due to the costs of seeking justice, lost income, and stress-related illnesses and other health problems.
- At a global level, conflict costs the world around \$2,000 per person each year, while countries may lose up to a fifth of their GDP when levels of non-conflict violence are very high.

“Lack of justice is stopping countries from reaching their economic and social potential,” says Priscilla Schwartz, LL.D, Task Force co-chair and Sierra Leone’s first female Attorney General and Minister of Justice. “Injustice feeds further injustice. It creates conditions for populist and extremist movements to prosper. Formal legal institutions are important, but they are too slow and too expensive to slake the thirst for justice felt by countries such as my own that have young and growing populations.”

“Access to justice is a responsibility of the state. And it needs many different players and actors to render justice truly effectively. People and justice need to go hand in hand,” says Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and International Development Cooperation, the Netherlands and co-chair of the Task Force on Justice. “Society benefits if its citizens have a better understanding of the law and know how justice is served.”

The Task Force makes recommendations on how to empower people to understand, use, and shape the law, and on how countries can meet people’s justice needs through informal and formal justice services. Its action plan emphasizes enhanced innovation, smarter financing, and more inclusive partnerships among governmental and non-governmental bodies.

“Many justice reformers around the world have made impressive strides in expanding and improving the quality of the justice people receive, including creative strategies that bring justice services directly to those who need it most,” says co-chair Germán Garavano, Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Argentina.

Garavano has overseen the creation of a network of centers that target the communities in Argentina that most need justice, reaching nearly half a million people each year. In these centers, lawyers, social workers, and psychologists work together to help people solve their justice problems, assisting victims of domestic violence for example, or helping community members deal with eviction.

Approaches of this kind are highly cost effective:

- Community advice officers working in historically marginalized communities in South Africa deliver a return of \$6 for every dollar invested.
- Providing legal counsel for low-income individuals who risk losing their housing saves New York City \$320 million annually.
- The United Kingdom's Citizen Advice Service generates two pounds in direct savings for every pound invested and more than £10 (approximately \$13) in social and economic benefits.

To understand what it would cost to provide universal access to basic justice around the world, the Task Force commissioned research from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). ODI's estimates were as follows: \$20 per person annually in low-income countries, \$64 in middle-income nations, and \$190 in high-income countries. While this is within reach for most of the middle- and high-income countries, the research made clear that low-income countries are unable to make these investments on their own.

The report also calls for prevention strategies that address the root causes of injustice.

“The justice gap is so big that we cannot wait for justice problems to occur,” says David Steven, who leads the Pathfinders program at the Center on International Cooperation. “Justice systems should analyze the root causes of injustice and act much earlier to avert violence and prevent disputes from happening.”

As the world prepares for the first SDG Summit in September of this year, the report calls for urgent action: “To accelerate the progress made, the Task Force calls on governments, justice professionals, civil society, and international organizations to come together in a global and sustained effort to deliver justice for all by 2030.”

**Editor's Note:**

The Center on International Cooperation (CIC) is a non-profit research center housed at New York University. Its vision is to advance effective multilateral action to prevent crises and build peace, justice, and inclusion. CIC co-founded and hosts the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, and serves as the secretariat for the Task Force on Justice. For more, please visit [cic.nyu.edu](http://cic.nyu.edu).

The Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies are a group of member states, international organizations, global partnerships, civil society, and other partners working on accelerating the delivery of the SDG targets for peace, justice and inclusion (SDG16+).

The Task Force on Justice is an initiative of the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Justice and Inclusive Societies. It is chaired by minister from Argentina, the Netherlands, and Sierra Leone and by the Elders. It brings together a distinguished group of justice leaders and experts from civil society, governments and the private sector, providing knowledge and experience that can increase justice around the globe.

The “Justice for All” report benefitted from contributions from a wide range of justice partners, including UN agencies, other multilateral organizations, civil society, foundations, research institutes and campaigning groups. A full list is available in the Task Force report.

The analysis on the size and scope of the justice gap was conducted by the World Justice Project, in collaboration with the Hague Institute for Innovation of Law, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of Argentina, the NYU Center on International Cooperation, the OECD, the Open Society Justice Initiative, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), University College London, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNODC-INEGI Center of Excellence, White & Case LLP, and the World Bank.

The Task Force on Justice commissioned the independent, global think tank, Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to develop the first estimate of the costs to provide universal access to basic justice in countries around the world.

### **What they are saying about “Justice for All”:**

“The “Justice for All” report represents an extraordinary effort on the part of the world’s best legal minds and organizations to put real numbers behind the global justice gap. Understanding the problem is the first step to building and delivering truly people-centered justice.” – Hina Jilani, an Elder and co-chair of the Task Force on Justice

“The justice gap is huge, but we have the leadership and expertise to close it. There are people and organizations all around the world who have fought for justice in their countries for decades. Together, we can trigger a rapid acceleration in the provision of justice to the billions of people who currently live outside the protection of the law.” – Germán Carlos Garavano, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Argentina and co-chair of the Task Force on Justice

“This report puts people-centered justice at its heart. We are not merely focusing on institutions that fail to serve people’s needs, we’re calling on the people themselves to play a central role in the creation of a just world.” – Priscilla Schwartz, LL.D, Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Sierra Leone and co-chair of the Task Force on Justice

“We estimated the ‘justice gap’ based on how people – not institutions – experience justice. The World Justice Project worked with other justice organizations and data producers to base this estimate on the results of surveys and other sources of data from over 100 countries. The result is a truly people-centered framework for understanding legal needs and assessing the prevalence of people’s justice problems around the world.” – Elizabeth Andersen, Executive Director of the World Justice Project

“Our initial estimate is that it would cost a typical low-income country \$20 per person to provide universal access to basic justice services. Based on our analysis, we conclude that two billion people live in countries that cannot afford even half of these costs. The justice sector needs urgently to catch up with other service delivery sectors such as health and education in terms of ambition, scale and financing.” – Marcus Manuel, Senior Research Associate, Overseas Development Institute (ODI)