

ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN INDIA: A REPORT

(Written in the prescribed template)

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1. COUNTRY DETAILS:

India, spanning approximately 3,287,263 square kilometres, is a culturally diverse country with a population of around 1.2 billion³ individuals. The majority, constituting approximately 68% of the population, resides in about 649,481 villages, illustrating the significant rural presence across the nation. India consists of a total of 28 states and 8 Union Territories.

In terms of the economy, India's GDP in 2021 stood at a robust 3.1 trillion U.S. dollars as per World Bank report. According to the World Bank, there has been a significant reduction in extreme poverty in India between 2011 and 2019. The percentage of people living in extreme poverty decreased by 12.3% during this period. In 2011, the poverty rate stood at 22.5%, whereas by 2019, it had dropped to 10.2%.

The country is having approximately 1,662 law colleges, producing an impressive number of about 70,000 law graduates each year who contribute to the pool of legal professionals. India has a robust law enforcement system with a wide network of over 15,555 police stations across the country. Its legal system is supported by an extensive network of legal practitioners, with an estimated 1.3 million registered lawyers in the country. India has courts in almost every district, providing accessible avenues for justice. The country also has 25 High Courts, which serve as important judicial institutions at the state

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³ <https://censusindia.gov.in/> (as per census 2011)

level. India's apex judicial institution is the Supreme Court of India. Millions of cases are filed in the courts, and a significant number of them are resolved or disposed of. As an example, about 25,482,578 cases were filed in the district judiciary during the year 2022. Within the same timeframe, around 23,263,148 cases were effectively resolved.

India is a melting pot of diverse cultures, traditions, and customs, and is a linguistic treasure trove, with more than 19,500 languages or dialects that serve as mother tongues for various communities. These languages not only shape regional identities but also contribute to the linguistic mosaic of the nation. According to the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, there are currently 22 officially recognized languages.

2. LEGAL AID ORGANISATION:

(a) Legislative & Structural framework: The Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987 was enacted to fulfil the constitutional vision of promoting equal access to justice for all. It came into force in 1995. This legislation established a comprehensive network of Legal Services Authorities throughout the country, operating at different levels including Taluka (or sub-division), District, State, and National levels. At the apex of this network is the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), responsible for formulating legal aid policies, implementing programs, and overseeing legal aid activities nationwide. The Legal Services Authorities are as follows:

- National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)
- Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (SCLSC)
- 37 State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs)
- 39 High Court Legal Services Committees (HCLSCs)
- 703 District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs)
- 2341 Taluk Legal Services Committees (TLSCs)

In India, the provision of legal aid activities is carried out by the Legal Services Authorities, which form a cohesive and unified system spanning the entire country. Legal Services Authorities are legislatively established autonomous bodies tasked with the responsibility of providing legal aid. These authorities are responsible for a multitude of services, which are not only restricted to legal aid in civil and criminal matters, but also extend to other important areas such as Legal awareness and implementation of ADR mechanisms. These entities function as an integrated system, effectively collaborating to ensure that legal services are accessible to every individual in need, thereby fulfilling the constitutional mandate of providing free legal aid to those who cannot afford it.

Panel lawyers and Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) form the core workforce of Legal Services Authorities. As of March 2023, there were approximately 49,126 legal aid lawyers and 42,446 Para Legal Volunteers working under the umbrella of these authorities. Among them, there are 12,022 female panel lawyers and 17,506 female para-legal volunteers. In a significant move to further bolster the delivery of legal aid, Legal Services Authorities have started to establish Legal Aid Defense Counsel Offices⁴ across the country with a target to open such office in each of the 703 districts. These offices are staffed by counsels who are exclusively dedicated to handling legal aid cases in criminal matters.

(b) Legal Aid Activities: The Legal Services Authorities undertake a comprehensive range of activities to implement the concept of legal aid, which extends beyond mere legal representation. These activities include:

1. **Legal Aid and Advice:** The provision of legal aid encompasses representation through lawyers in ‘Court⁵, covering judicial courts, tribunals, and authorities exercising judicial or quasi-judicial functions. In

⁴ Introduced in 2019 on a pilot basis, the Legal Aid Defense Counsel initiative has shown promising results. As a result, in 2022, a decision was made to expand its implementation to all districts across the country.

⁵ Section 2(aaa), Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987

addition to courtroom representation, basic units such as " Front Offices"⁶ and "Legal Services Clinics" offer free legal services in the form of advice and assistance, including the drafting of notices, replies, petitions, and other relevant documents. This assistance extends to both civil and criminal matters. To seek legal aid, individuals can submit their applications through multiple channels such as online portals/apps of legal services authorities, email communication, legal services clinics, front offices, or directly in courts. The initial assessment of the application is conducted on a prima facie basis. In criminal cases, if the applicant is an accused or convict, and in civil cases, if the applicant is a defendant, it is presumed that they have a prima facie case and may qualify for legal aid assistance.

Furthermore, for non-legal issues, individuals are referred to the respective government departments, with the Legal Services Authorities providing necessary support in drafting applications and filling out forms. The number of individuals benefiting from legal aid and advice, particularly through representation before the courts during the last four years are as follows: 1,505,216 in 2018-19, 1,212,137 in 2019-20, 631,758 in 2020-21, 6,369,643 in 2021-22, and 12,14,769 in 2022-23⁷.

During April 2022 to March 2023, a total of around 11,711 Legal Services Clinics remained operational. 1177 clinics are in jails to provide legal services to jail inmates. 1,644,367 persons visited legal services clinics during this period, and out of these, legal assistance was provided to 1,014,464⁸ individuals, addressing their legal concerns and ensuring access to justice. During April 2021 to March 2022, 2,742,624 persons visited these clinics and 2,413,928 persons were provided legal assistance.

⁶ Each Legal Services Authority is mandated to establish a dedicated Front Office, which operates in accordance with the guidelines set by NALSA.

⁷ Available at Statistics - National Legal Services Authority (nalsa.gov.in)

⁸ Ibid

Legal aid and assistance is also provided at early stages of criminal justice. Table below depicts the number of suspects and arrested persons provided legal assistance at early stages of criminal justice.

Years	Suspects Provided Legal Assistance at Pre-Arrest Stage at Police Station	Such Suspects Not Arrested by Police	Arrestees Provided Legal Assistance at The Police Station Before Producing Them Before Courts	Arrestees provided Legal Assistance at Remand Stage	Number of Bail Applications Filed at Remand Stage	Number of Cases in Which Bail Granted
2021	9,652	1,976	10,042	122,675	49,593	24,590
2022	14,756	4,601	14,397	140,288	44,220	31,390

2. Legal Services Outreach Activities: The Legal Services Authorities actively engage in outreach initiatives to empower vulnerable and marginalized sections of society. These initiatives include legal awareness programs, legal empowerment camps, targeted campaigns with specific objectives, establishment of students' legal literacy clubs, collaboration with print and electronic media, and the deployment of legal aid vehicles to reach remote areas. Through these efforts, the Authorities aim to enhance legal awareness and provide accessible legal services to those in need. In the last four years, a series of legal awareness programmes were conducted, contributing to increased knowledge and understanding of legal rights among participants. Here is the data⁹ reflecting the number of programmes organized and the corresponding number of attendees:

- 2018-19: 176,916 programmes organized, with 1,98,56,363 attendees.
- 2019-20: 227,394 programmes organized, with 3,16,31,228 attendees.

⁹ Id.

- 2020-21: 126,541 programmes organized, with 1,30,69,637 attendees.
- 2021-22: Remarkably, 1,134,086 programmes were organized, attracting a significant attendance of 58,41,26,827 individuals.
- 2022-23: 490,055 programmes were conducted, and 6,75,17,665 individuals participated.

These legal awareness initiatives have served as effective platforms for disseminating legal knowledge, empowering people with information about their rights, and fostering a better understanding of the legal system.

In recent years, a significant number of awareness programmes have been organized through television, radio, and digital platforms. The data reveals the following:

- In 2020, 2,328 programmes were broadcasted on TV, radio, and YouTube, while 1,45,386 programmes were conducted through Facebook, webinars, and other digital platforms.
- In 2021, the numbers rose to 5,261 programmes aired on TV, radio, and YouTube, along with 61,901 awareness programmes conducted through digital platforms.
- In 2022, 2,688 programmes were aired on TV, radio, and YouTube, accompanied by 15,423 awareness programmes conducted through digital platforms.

These awareness initiatives have effectively utilized various media channels to disseminate legal information and reach a diverse audience, enhancing awareness of legal rights and fostering informed decision-making.

3. **Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms:** Recognizing the significance of resolving disputes through non-adversarial means, the Legal Services Authorities implement alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as "Lok Adalat" and "Mediation." The Legal Services Authorities have a remarkable network of 415 ADR Centres, and alongside those, there are 596 exclusive Mediation Centres in operation.

Lok Adalat, commonly referred to as the People's Court, holds statutory recognition under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. It facilitates the amicable settlement of cases, including those pending in courts and pre-litigation matters. Litigants can avail themselves of the services of Lok Adalats without incurring any costs, as this mode of settlement is provided free of charge. Moreover, the Legal Services Authorities have developed the capacity to conduct Pan India Lok Adalats, known as National Lok Adalats, simultaneously across the country. Similarly, the Authorities also promote and implement Mediation as an effective alternative dispute resolution method. Legal Services Authorities also organize E-lok Adalats where parties involved in a legal dispute can participate remotely through electronic means, such as video conferencing or other digital platforms.

Cases settled in National Lok Adalat¹⁰

Subject	2020	2021	2022	2023 (upto Feb.23)
Pre-litigation	12,64,935	72,06,294	3,10,15,215	1,75,98,095
Pending Cases	12,83,433	55,81,743	1,09,10,795	30,25,724
Total	25,48,368	1,27,88,037	4,19,26,010	2,06,23,819

Case settled in State Lok Adalat¹¹

Subject	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pre-litigation	79493	142549	114278	94939
Pending Cases	466258	601524	418251	756370
Total	545751	744073	532529	851,309

¹⁰ Available at Statistics - National Legal Services Authority (nalsa.gov.in)

¹¹ Ibid

Legal Services Authorities have developed capacities for conducting E-Lok Adalats, enabling effective resolution of a significant number of cases virtually. From June 2020 to March 2023, 3,36,67,206 pre-litigation cases and 96,20,222 pending cases in courts were taken up in E-Lok Adalats. Through these virtual platforms, 70,84,125 cases were successfully settled¹². These figures are included in the data for National Lok Adalats and State Lok Adalats.

In 2021-2022, 118,136 cases were settled by the Permanent Lok Adalats for Public Utility Services. In 2022-2023, the number rose to 171,138 cases.

Cases settled in Mediation¹³

Year	Cases Settled Through Mediation
2019-20	94,865
2020-21	28,301
2021-22	52,968
2022-23	92,446

4. **Victim Compensation Schemes:** The Legal Services Authorities are actively involved in the implementation of Victim Compensation Schemes, aiming to provide compensation to victims of crime. The Victim Compensation Fund primarily receives funding from State governments. This responsibility is carried out by the Legal Services Authorities in accordance with the amendments made in 2009 to the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973. Through these schemes, the Authorities endeavour to alleviate the suffering of crime victims and provide them with the necessary support. Data¹⁴ regarding implementation of Victim Compensation Schemes is as follows:

¹² Data provided by NALSA.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Id.

years	Compensation Awarded (in ₹)
2019-20	2,15,31,48,146
2020-21	1,45,62,36,012
2021-22	2,21,87,47,426
2022-23	3,47,80,37,352

By adopting this comprehensive approach, the Legal Services Authorities ensure that the concept of legal aid encompasses a wide range of services, beyond the traditional confines of legal representation, to promote access to justice and empower those in need.

5. Unique Features of the legal aid system: The unique features of legal aid system in India are as follows:

- Women, Children, persons in custody, persons with disabilities, victims of disaster, victims of trafficking, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, an industrial workman, are eligible for free legal aid irrespective of their income¹⁵. Apart from this, people having income less than INR.500000/-(US \$ 6860 per annum can avail legal aid in Supreme Court and those having less than INR 300000/-(US \$ 4,116) can avail legal aid in District and High Courts.
- Counsel assignment system is primarily followed in which Legal aid lawyers are paid on a case-to-case basis. In counsel assignment system, lawyers also take private cases. In the year 2019, NALSA has introduced “ Legal Aid Defense Counsel System” to enhance quality of legal representation in Criminal matters. In this system, lawyers engaged deal exclusively with legal aid cases, and are paid monthly

¹⁵ Section 12 of Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987

salaries. Legal aid defense counsel offices are being opened across the country.

- Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms such as Lok Adalats and Mediation, implemented by Legal Services Authorities, are free of cost to the litigants.
- Lok Adalat, an indigenously developed ADR mechanism is the largest ADR mechanism, and millions of cases every year are resolved at the prelitigation stage and pending stage in Lok Adalats.
- Specific schemes have been formulated for provision of legal services to a wide range of beneficiaries.¹⁶
- Free Legal aid services in court cases includes all incidental expenses, apart from free legal representation through legal aid lawyers.
- Legal assistance is available to all persons in custody at all stages of a criminal proceeding including pre-arrest, arrest, remand stages¹⁷.
- Jail Legal aid Clinics are established in almost all the prisons across the country to provide legal assistance to the prisoners.¹⁸
- Legal Services Authorities are also implementing Victim Compensation Schemes.

3. BUDGET AND SPEND:

The Central Government provides funds to NALSA on an annual basis to support its functions as outlined in the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. NALSA then distributes these funds to the State Legal Services Authorities. The State Legal Services Authorities, in turn, allocate the received funds to the District Legal

¹⁶ For instance, NALSA (Legal Services to Disaster Victims through Legal Services Authorities) Scheme, 2010; NALSA (Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation) Scheme, 2015; NALSA (Legal Services to the Workers in the Unorganized Sector) Scheme, 2015; NALSA (Child Friendly Legal Services to Children and their Protection) Scheme, 2015; NALSA (Legal Services to the Mentally Ill and Mentally Disabled Persons) Scheme, 2015; NALSA (Effective Implementation of Poverty Alleviation) Scheme, 2015; NALSA (Protection and Enforcement of Tribal Rights) Scheme, 2015; NALSA (Legal Services to the Victims of Drug Abuse and Eradication of Drug Menace) Scheme, 2015; NALSA (Legal Services to Senior Citizens) Scheme, 2016; NALSA (Legal Services to Victims of Acid Attacks) Scheme, 2016; NALSA's Compensation Scheme for Women Victims/Survivors of Sexual Assault/other Crimes, 2018.

¹⁷ NALSA Early Access to Justice at Pre-Arrest, Arrest and Remand Framework 2019 (<https://nalsa.gov.in/acts-rules/guidelines/early-access-to-justice-at-pre-arrest-arrest-and-remand-stage>).

¹⁸ These are regulated by the NALSA Standard Operating Procedures for Representation of Persons in Custody 2016.

Services Authorities. At the state level, the State Governments primarily cover salaries and other administrative expenses. Additionally, in several states, the state governments also contribute funds for legal aid programs in addition to salaries and related expenses.

Here are the details of funds allocated by the Central Government for legal aid programs and the amount utilized by NALSA in the past two financial years:

Financial Year	Grant released by the Govt.	Amount utilised
2021-22	1,450,000,000 (INR) i.e (17,617,500.00 (US\$))	1,450,000,000 (INR)
2022-23	1,900,000,000 (INR) i.e (230,850,000 (US\$))	1,900,000,000 (INR)

4. SCOPE, CASELOAD AND ELIGIBILITY

a) **Scope:** Legal aid services are available to ensure representation in various courts, including judicial courts, tribunals, and other authorities involved in judicial or quasi-judicial functions. Legal aid is available in civil as well as criminal matters. These services encompass all stages of criminal proceedings, such as questioning, arrest, remand, trial, and appeal. They encompass legal representation, legal advice, and assistance in obtaining copies of orders and documents. Additionally, legal aid covers all incidental expenses related to litigation. Legal aid services are available not only in trial courts but also in appellate courts. Legal Services Authorities, as autonomous bodies, have the legislative authority to formulate their own schemes, including strategic and preventive schemes. This empowers them to proactively address legal service needs and implement initiatives that can prevent legal issues before they arise.

- b) Caseload:** The caseloads across different states typically vary and undergo periodic evaluations by the Legal Services Authorities. These reviews ensure that the number of panel lawyers is appropriately aligned with the caseload. If required, decisions are made to either expand or reduce the lawyer count accordingly. It is worth mentioning that the Legal Services Authorities are responsible for a range of activities, and the caseload is considered in conjunction with other tasks assigned to lawyers. In the Legal Aid Defense Counsel system, lawyers exclusively handle criminal legal aid cases.
- c) Eligibility:** According to Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, the following groups of individuals are eligible to avail free legal services for filing or defending their cases in civil or criminal matters in judicial courts, tribunals, and other judicial or quasi-judicial forums:
- All women and children
 - Members of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes
 - Industrial workmen
 - Victims of mass disasters, violence, floods, droughts, earthquakes, or industrial disasters
 - Persons with disabilities
 - All individuals with an annual income not exceeding INR 300,000 for cases in District & High courts, and INR 500,000 for cases in the Supreme Court
 - Victims of human trafficking or beggary
 - Persons in custody

The aforementioned categories of individuals, except for point number 6, are entitled to receive free legal services regardless of their income. Some states have also included additional eligible categories such as senior citizens and transgender individuals.

5. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Legal Services Authorities have been steadfastly engaged in providing quality legal services to individuals seeking legal aid. To this end, several strategies have been implemented. These strategies encompass:

a) Selection of Panel lawyers:

Panel Lawyers in Legal Services Institutions are selected as per National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations of 2010. The process involves soliciting applications from legal practitioners, assessing their experience in relevant cases, and conducting a thorough examination by designated authorities. The selection is followed by the formation of distinct panels for different types of cases. Data reveals that about 27,327 lawyers with a law practice spanning 10 years or more are on the panels of Legal Services Authorities. The entire process of panel lawyer engagement reflects the following principles:

- i. A focus on engaging experienced lawyers to ensure quality representation for eligible groups.
- ii. The possibility of forming distinct panels to handle various types of cases such as civil, criminal, constitutional law, environmental law, labour law, matrimonial disputes, and juvenile justice.

b) Monitoring and Mentoring Committees:

Regulation 10 of the NALSA (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulation, 2010 establishes a Monitoring and Mentoring Committee¹⁹ for each Legal Services Institution. This committee is responsible for closely monitoring legal services provided in court-based matters, tracking the progress of legal aid cases, and offering guidance and advice to Panel Lawyers. Regulation 11 outlines the procedures to be followed by the Monitoring and Mentoring Committees and defines their duties and functions.

¹⁹ In the year 2018, NALSA amended Regulations 10 & 11 of the NALSA (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulation, 2010 in order to make Monitoring Committees as Monitoring and Mentoring Committees.

To ensure quality, NALSA has developed Monitoring and Mentoring Guidelines²⁰. These guidelines set performance standards that assist legal aid lawyers in aligning their activities and achieving desired outcomes. One of the performance standards highlighted in the guidelines is quick response. It requires the assigned Panel Lawyer to have a meeting or initial interaction with the legal aid client within 24 hours of receiving the case assignment²¹. If a legal aid counsel is unavailable for an extended period, they must inform the litigant and the relevant District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) to take appropriate action²². The guidelines also expect the legal aid lawyer to document the first briefing on the NALSA Portal or report it at the Front Office. Feedback from the litigant and examination of information on the NALSA Portal serve as methods for assessing whether the performance standard of a quick response has been met.

Another performance standard tied to a quick response is conducting an effective interview with the client, for which feedback can be obtained from the litigant. The guidelines suggest evaluating the panel lawyer's performance in handling a case by randomly checking drafted pleadings, cross-examinations of witnesses, and arguments advanced by reviewing files or through interaction with the Presiding Officer of the courts. Punctuality in attending court hearings and reporting day-to-day proceedings at the Front Offices²³ are also deemed important performance indicators. The guidelines provide a suggested questionnaire for obtaining regular feedback from litigants and Presiding Officers.

These guidelines and performance standards aim to improve the quality and effectiveness of legal aid services by establishing monitoring mechanisms, promoting accountability, and encouraging continuous improvement.

c) Engagement of Senior Lawyers:

²⁰ Monitoring and Mentoring guidelines were circulated to all SLSAs by NALSA on 18th April 2019

²¹ *Ibid*

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Id*, point 8(viii)

In an effort to involve senior lawyers more effectively, a provision has been incorporated into sub-regulation (2) of Regulation 8, which allows the Executive Chairman or Chairman of the Legal Services Institutions to empanel any legal practitioners at their discretion.

Regulation 9 calls for the establishment of a separate panel of Senior Advocates by the Executive Chairman or Chairman of the Legal Services Institution. The Regulation also empowers the Member Secretary of the Legal Services Institution to request Senior Advocates to provide pro-bono services whenever necessary.

Additionally, Regulation 10 stipulates the formation of Monitoring and Mentoring Committees, which should include Senior Advocates or Advocates with at least 15 years of standing.

The NALSA (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010 further allows for the special engagement of senior advocates in certain cases. According to these regulations, a senior advocate not included in the approved panel of lawyers may be engaged by the Legal Services Institution if deemed necessary by the Monitoring and Mentoring Committee or the Executive Chairman or Chairman.

d) Assignment of cases as per expertise and skill:

The NALSA (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010 mandate that only legal practitioners with at least three years of experience in a court of law can be empanelled. This ensures that Legal Services Institutions do not enlist fresh graduates or legal practitioners with minimal legal knowledge as Panel Lawyers, thereby safeguarding the interests of litigants.

These regulations also dictate that cases be assigned to Panel Lawyers based on their area of specialization. As per sub-regulation (7) of Regulation 8, competent authorities are required to maintain distinct panels for legal practitioners who handle different types of cases, such as Civil,

Criminal, Constitutional Law, Environmental Law, Labour Laws, Matrimonial disputes, Juvenile Justice, and more. This ensures that cases are assigned to lawyers according to their expertise and skill set, maximizing the quality and effectiveness of the legal services provided.

e) Delisting of panel lawyers and Reconstitution of panel:

The Monitoring and Mentoring Committees of respective Legal Services Institutions periodically evaluate the performance of Panel Lawyers²⁴. These committees can request status reports from Panel Lawyers within a specified timeline. The Regulations grant Legal Services Institutions the authority to withdraw a case from a Panel Lawyer, including a Retainer Panel Lawyer, at any stage of the legal proceedings²⁵. If legal services are found to be unsatisfactory, legal aid lawyers may be delisted from the panel of the Legal Services Authorities. In case of any service deficiency on the part of Panel Lawyers, the Legal Services Institutions take necessary action. The panel undergoes reconstitution every three years to continually uphold the standards of legal aid services.

f) Capacity Building of Panel Lawyers:

Legal Services Authorities periodically organize training programs for legal aid lawyers, a requirement also stipulated by the NALSA Regulation 2010²⁶. In alignment with this, the National Legal Services Authority has created three Training Modules²⁷. These modules encompass various methodologies for effectively imparting training to Panel Lawyers. Following table depicts the number of training programmes conducted of panel lawyers:

²⁴ Sub-regulation of (7) of Regulation 11 of the NALSA (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulations, 2010, provides for the check on the progress of the legal aided cases of the Panel Lawyers by the Monitoring and Mentoring Committees

²⁵ Id at regulation 8(14)

²⁶ Regulation 8 (18) of the NALSA Regulations, 2010 provides that the panel lawyers shall undergo periodic trainings. It is envisaged that the modules shall be prepared by the National Legal Services Authority as well as, the respective State Legal Services Authority. As per the regulation, non-participation in capacity building programmes can result in de-panelment of a panel lawyer.

²⁷ Training Modules 1 and 2 were released on 21.3.2015 & 09.04.2016 respectively while Training Module 3 was released on 13.12.2018 (<https://nalsa.gov.in/training-modules>).

Period	Number of Training programmes for Panel Lawyers
2020-21	1,471
2021-22	1,550
2022-23	1,770

g) Documentation and Reporting:

In 2020, NALSA adopted the Handbook of Formats, a tool designed to solidify its internal procedures of documentation and reporting, consequently facilitating the delivery of effective, efficient, and high-quality legal services. This handbook delineates the responsibilities of legal service providers and provides templates for duty notes, appointment letters, reporting, and case documentation for legal aid providers. Additionally, it includes formats for the registers that legal services authorities are required to maintain.

- h) Regional Meet & All India Meet:** Every year, Regional Meets and an All India Meet are organized where vital aspects related to the functioning of Legal Services Authorities are deliberated. These meetings also serve as a platform to discuss measures related to the quality of legal aid, ensuring continuous improvement and adherence to high standards in service delivery.
- i) Complaint to Bar Association:** To address instances of misconduct by a lawyer, individuals have the option to approach either the disciplinary committee of the State Bar Council or the Bar Council of India. Section 35 of the Advocates Act specifically outlines malpractices committed by lawyers. This mechanism serves as an important avenue for ensuring and upholding quality standards within the legal profession.
- j) Termination & Code of Ethics in Legal aid defense counsel office:** The termination of services and the code of ethics in the Legal Aid Defense Counsel office Scheme serve as quality assurance measures. Termination

can occur in cases of substantial breach of duty, accepting pecuniary gains, conviction of an offense, engaging in political activities, incapability to meet required standards, and more. The code of ethics prohibits personal or financial interests, disclosure of confidential information, promotion of outside activities, engaging in private practice, accepting inappropriate gifts, and requires devotion to duties and public confidence. These measures ensure high ethical standards and quality legal aid services.

6. PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

In empowering individuals and communities by enhancing their understanding of the law and their legal rights six key strategies employed by legal services Authorities to accomplish this goal: Legal Awareness Programmes, Legal Services and Empowerment, Awareness Campaigns, Legal Literacy Clubs, Utilizing Print and Electronic Media, and Legal Aid Vehicles.

(a) Legal Awareness Programmes:

To address the lack of legal literacy, Legal Services Authorities conduct legal awareness programs nationwide. These initiatives cover various laws and welfare schemes, targeting different groups such as children, laborers, disaster victims, Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and individuals with disabilities. Booklets and pamphlets in simple language are distributed, and programs are held in remote areas, featuring legal aid lawyers, judicial officers, government experts, and civil society members as resource persons.

(b) Legal Services and Empowerment:

In order to cater to the vulnerable sections of society, the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has designed and implemented a unique Module for Legal Services Camps. This initiative deviates from the traditional approach of spreading general legal awareness and aims to empower the target community based on their specific needs. These Legal Empowerment camps

focus not only on marginalized sections but also those in remote and hard-to-reach areas. The primary aim of these camps is to fill the information gap and ensure access to rightful entitlements. The camps involve identifying marginalized individuals, assessing their legal needs, completing necessary formalities, and delivering benefits through stalls set up by various government departments. Legal Services Authorities provide legal advice and assistance, and follow-up actions are taken for unresolved matters.

(c) Awareness Campaigns:

Legal Services Authorities initiate targeted campaigns as an effective outreach strategy. These campaigns involve identifying a specific group and designing a project to address their socio-legal issues within a limited time frame. The Legal Services Institutions at the district and state levels have the discretion to devise and implement these campaigns based on local conditions and circumstances. The last two pan India campaigns are briefly mentioned here.

In the Empowerment of Citizens through Legal Awareness and Outreach 2022 campaign, the duration of the campaign was two weeks, from 31st October, 2022 to 13th November, 2022. The camps held in villages attracted a significant number of attendees, with 151,100 camps held and a total of 38,723,058 individuals participating. Among them, 1,021,533 people were provided with legal assistance, benefiting from the program. In other areas, 36,505 camps were conducted, with 6,506,440 people attending and 268,762 individuals receiving legal assistance.

The campaign also focused on court-based services, where 7,073 individuals were provided with panel lawyers to address their legal needs. Furthermore, 64,077 people received advice or counseling, while 21,993 individuals benefited from other services offered during the campaign.

Moving on to the Pan India Legal Awareness and Outreach Campaign 2021, this initiative lasted from 2nd October, 2021 to 14th November, 2021. The campaign was divided into four phases, each with its specific time frame.

Throughout the campaign, a total of 640,727 villages were covered, with 341,545 villages visited three times or more. There were 36,659 villages that were not visited during the campaign.

In terms of towns and cities, a total of 7,684 were included in the campaign. Among them, 4,188 towns/cities were visited once, 3,276 were visited twice, 3,768 were visited three times, and 2,211 were visited four times or more. Only 146 towns/cities were not visited at all.

Overall, the Pan India Legal Awareness and Outreach Campaign 2021 reached a total of 6,545,310 beneficiaries across villages and towns/cities, aiming to provide legal awareness, guidance, and services to empower citizens throughout the campaign duration.

(d) Legal Literacy Clubs:

Legal Services Authorities are committed to promoting equal access to justice, part of which involves educating children about legal literacy and rights awareness. To achieve this, Legal Literacy clubs have been established across the country, with about 18745 such clubs operating in schools and colleges. Various engaging methods, such as skits, on-the-spot painting, and declamation, are used to educate students about different laws.

(e) Utilizing Print and Electronic Media:

Print and Electronic media play a significant role in disseminating legal awareness to the general public. Short films and videos about various laws are showcased via electronic media. Regular TV and radio shows are also conducted on legal topics, and social media platforms are used to reach a wider audience.

(f) Legal Aid Vehicles:

Legal Services Authorities operate about 78 legal aid vehicles equipped with video and audio systems. These vehicles travel to remote areas to spread legal

awareness. Panel lawyers and Para Legal Volunteers are assigned to these vehicles to provide villagers with legal advice.

7. ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF LEGAL SERVICES

In India, legal services are primarily provided by the Legal Services Authorities established under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. These authorities ensure access to justice for those who meet the eligibility criteria. However, there are alternative sources of legal services available to address the needs of different sections of society.

- **Tele-law:** The Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice has implemented various initiatives to enhance the reach of legal services. One such initiative is Tele-Law, which utilizes technology to bridge the gap between individuals seeking legal assistance and lawyers. Through Tele-Law, individuals in remote areas can connect with lawyers via video conferencing and receive legal advice and guidance. The individuals in need can connect with lawyers through the video conferencing facilities provided at Common Service Centres (CSCs). These CSCs are accessible in rural and remote areas, ensuring widespread availability of legal assistance. There are approximately 409,949²⁸ Common Service Centres (CSCs) available in rural areas. This initiative aims to make legal services more accessible, especially for those residing in rural and remote areas.
- **Nyaya Bandhu:** The Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono Legal Services)²⁹, another initiative of the Department of Justice, aims to create a comprehensive framework for the provision of pro bono legal services throughout the country. Through this program, practicing advocates who are interested in offering legal

²⁸ www.csc.gov.in

²⁹ <https://www.probono-doj.in/>

pro bono work are connected with eligible marginalized beneficiaries using mobile technology.

- **Amicus in Jail Petitions:** When a prison inmate wishes to file a criminal appeal or a special leave petition in the Supreme Court, they can submit the petition, along with the necessary documents and written arguments, to the designated officer at the prison facility. The officer in charge then forwards the petition to the Registrar of the Supreme Court. These petitions, commonly known as Jail Petitions, are processed by the Supreme Court's Registry. To represent the interests of the inmate, an advocate practising in the Supreme Court is appointed as Amicus, and the fees for the Amicus are borne by the respective State government.
- **Civil Societies:** Civil societies also contribute to the provision of legal services, although their operations are often limited to specific areas or target specific issues. These societies collaborate with Legal Services Authorities and other organizations to enhance their impact and effectively address legal needs.
- **Law Colleges:** Legal aid clinics in law colleges across India serve as platforms for spreading legal awareness and providing primary legal assistance. These clinics offer legal advice, guidance, and information to individuals who require basic legal support. However, the availability and reach of such clinics vary across locations.

8. HOLISTIC LEGAL SERVICES

Recognizing the interconnected nature of legal issues with social, health, and economic factors, legal services Authorities have developed holistic legal services to address individuals' challenges. These services involve various initiatives and collaborations that go beyond legal aid to provide comprehensive support.

- **Expanding the scope of assistance in Legal Empowerment Camps:** These camps serve as platforms where legal services Authorities collaborate with government departments, including social welfare, health, women and children, and others. Through these collaborations, individuals attending the camps not only receive legal assistance but also become aware of the range of services and welfare measures provided by different government departments, and are connected to their entitlements. In addition to government collaborations, legal services Authorities, in these camps also work in partnership with NGOs such as those specializing in providing artificial limbs and appliances. This collaboration ensures that individuals have access to necessary resources, such as artificial limbs, calipers, and other aids, which are provided free of charge. By addressing non-legal needs alongside legal challenges, holistic legal services aim to promote individuals' overall well-being.
- **Collaboration with One-Stop Centers for greater impact.:** One-Stop Centres, managed by the Women and Child Department, collaborate with the Legal Services Authorities to provide legal services to women victims who seek assistance at these centers. These collaborations aim to ensure that women visiting One-Stop Centres receive comprehensive support, including legal aid, to address their specific needs and challenges. The collaboration between One-Stop Centres and the Legal Services Authorities recognizes the importance of addressing legal issues faced by women victims in a holistic manner. It facilitates the provision of legal assistance and guidance directly at the One-Stop Centres, where women can access multiple services under one roof.
- **Strategic and preventive NALSA schemes:** NALSA schemes embody the provision of holistic services through their comprehensive approach and the specific areas they target. These schemes showcase the commitment to address individuals' multidimensional needs by integrating legal aid with social, health,

and economic support. Outlined below is a concise summary of key NALSA schemes envisaging delivery of comprehensive services:

- NALSA (Legal Services to Disaster Victims Through Legal Services Authorities) Scheme, 2010: This scheme recognizes the importance of providing comprehensive support to disaster victims. It encompasses legal aid, social welfare collaboration, and facilitating rehabilitation to address the immediate and long-term needs of individuals affected by disasters.
- NALSA (Victim of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation) Scheme, 2015: This scheme demonstrates the holistic approach in addressing the complex challenges faced by victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. It incorporates legal aid, awareness, social support, rehabilitation programs, and counselling services to ensure comprehensive assistance at preventive, rescue and rehabilitation stages, and promote the overall well-being of the survivors.
- NALSA (Legal Services to the Workers in the Unorganized Sector) Scheme, 2015: This scheme reflects the holistic focus on the rights and well-being of workers in the unorganized sector. It combines legal aid with social welfare initiatives, such as facilitating access to government schemes, health services, and social security measures, to provide a comprehensive support system for these vulnerable individuals.
- NALSA (Child Friendly Legal Services to Children and their Protection) Scheme, 2015: This scheme highlights the comprehensive approach in addressing the legal, social, and protection needs of children. It encompasses legal aid, and collaboration with other department and agencies for child welfare programs and preventive steps, education support, counselling services, and rehabilitation efforts to ensure the holistic well-being and protection of children.
- NALSA (Legal Services to the Mentally Ill and Mentally Disabled Persons) Scheme, 2015: This scheme recognizes the interconnectedness of legal and mental health support. It integrates legal aid with mental health services,

counselling, and rehabilitation programs to provide comprehensive assistance to individuals with mental illnesses or disabilities.

- NALSA (Effective Implementation of Poverty Alleviation Schemes) Scheme, 2015: This scheme exemplifies the holistic approach in addressing poverty-related legal challenges. It combines legal aid with facilitating access to poverty alleviation measures, social welfare programs, and skill development initiatives to empower individuals, break the cycle of poverty, and ensure comprehensive support.
- NALSA (Legal Services to Senior Citizens) Scheme, 2016: This scheme recognises the holistic focus on the needs of senior citizens. It combines legal aid with social welfare initiatives, healthcare support, and awareness programs to address the legal, social, and health-related challenges faced by the elderly.

By implementing these NALSA schemes, a comprehensive support system is established that integrates legal aid with social welfare, health services, preventive measures, and empowerment initiatives.

9. UN SDG 16.3

- The Legal Services Authorities are playing a crucial role in promoting SDG 16.3 through various initiatives. These include organizing Lok Adalats, conducting outreach programs targeting marginalized sections of society, establishing legal aid clinics, prioritizing legal aid in remote areas, providing free legal assistance regardless of means, and leveraging technology. Their collective efforts are contributing significantly to the advancement of SDG 16.3.
- Lok Adalats, being one of the largest alternative dispute resolution (ADR) programs in the world in terms of number of cases taken up and settled, provide a platform for resolving cases at the pre-litigation stage and for pending cases referred by courts. Their cost-free and simplified nature allows individuals to

seek resolution without financial burdens, enhancing access to justice for all. The active participation of millions of individuals in Lok Adalats demonstrates the widespread trust and confidence in their effectiveness and accessibility. Lok Adalats are held across the country by Legal Services Authorities.

- In addition, the Legal Services Authorities conduct legal awareness campaigns/programmes. These campaigns play a pivotal role in educating individuals about their rights and informing them about the available avenues for seeking justice. By empowering individuals with comprehensive legal knowledge, the authorities enable them to make informed decisions, assert their rights, and effectively engage with the legal system. Every year, millions of such awareness programmes are being held across the country.
- Moreover, the authorities organize legal services camps, strategically positioned to bring legal assistance closer to communities, particularly in areas where access to legal services is limited. These camps serve as vital platforms, for connecting people to their entitlements. Various departments of the government also participate in such camps. By organising these camps, the Legal Services Authorities are promoting equal access to justice for individuals who may face geographical or socio-economic constraints. Panel lawyers and para-legal volunteers actively identify and assess the legal requirements of weaker and marginalized sections before organisation of legal services camp
- Furthermore, the Legal Services Authorities have established legal aid clinics in prisons, offering legal advice, updates on court cases, and assistance with drafting petitions. These clinics operate across India, providing prisoners with access to legal guidance and support, aligning with the principles of SDG 16.3.
- To bridge the gap between remote areas and legal assistance, the authorities have also established fully equipped legal assistance centres with technology

resources. These centres enable people in remote regions to participate in online modes of alternative dispute resolution and seek advice from legal aid lawyers. Online Lok Adalats and an online portal facilitate the process, making it accessible and efficient. Additionally, legal aid helplines operate in all states, providing legal advice and information to those seeking assistance.

Additional endeavours supporting Sustainable Development Goal 16.3

- As mentioned earlier, Tele-Law, initiative of Department of Justice, utilizes technology to overcome geographical barriers and provide virtual legal aid services to people, particularly those living in remote areas. Since its inception in 2017 until April 2023, tele-law has provided invaluable advice to an impressive number of 3,813,139 individuals.
- Hybrid hearings and e-filing in the Supreme Court, some High Courts and District Courts are significantly enhancing accessibility to justice. These advancements are resulting in overcoming geographical barriers by allowing individuals, particularly those in remote areas, to participate in court proceedings and submit petitions online. This digital revolution in the Indian judicial landscape including live streaming ensures that litigants, regardless of their physical location, are no longer left in the dark, but rather equipped with real-time access to the unfolding legal discourse surrounding their matters. This enhanced accessibility ensures equal opportunities for all individuals to seek justice, promoting inclusivity and advances the objectives of SDG Goal 16.3.
- The establishment of e-Sewa Kendras in Supreme Court, High Courts and many District Courts signifies a significant stride towards enhancing access to justice for the common man. These centres offer a multitude of services, including providing information on case status, facilitating the acquisition of

certified copies of judgments and orders, and assisting in the e-filing of petitions.
