

2025 | Background Brief 0.1

Justice Financing Framework

A Guide to Budgeting and Financing for
People-Centered Justice for the Justice Sector





BACKGROUND BRIEF 0.1

0.1 Introduction and Purpose



1. Commissioning, Development, and Endorsement of the Justice Financing Framework

The Justice Action Coalition (JAC) is a multi-stakeholder alliance of countries and organizations working to achieve measurable progress in justice outcomes for people and communities by the third Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) summit in 2027 and beyond.

The JAC Workstream IV on Justice Financing seeks to arrive at and promote a shared understanding of how to invest effectively in justice, providing a roadmap for interested policymakers. One of the ways in which Workstream IV intends on achieving its objectives is through the creation and adoption of the Justice Financing Framework (JFF). Pathfinder coordinates the work of Workstream IV, in partnership with ODI Global and The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiIL) who lead on the technical work.

The JFF was produced by the Justice Action Coalition with the aim of supporting scaled up investments in people-centered justice. Its aims are contributing to transforming justice as it is delivered to and experienced by users, reducing the number of unresolved justice problems by delivering fair outcomes¹ and ensuring respect for human rights. It guides country-level justice financing, providing policy guidance, benchmarks, and ambitions to deliver people-centered justice. It enables effective strategies and policies to transform justice systems to respond to the unmet legal needs of billions of people.

The JFF's foundation is the [2019 Hague Declaration on Equal Access to Justice for All by 2030](#) and the [OECD Recommendation on Access to Justice and People Centred Justice Systems](#). It is part of the JAC's commitment in the Hague Declaration² and the [2023 Justice Appeal](#)³ to pivot to people-centered justice, take concrete steps to promote access to people-centered justice, and convince others to do the same.

The development of the JFF comes from the understanding that without transforming financing structures and processes, ministries of justice and judiciaries will not be able effectively to make the transition to people-centered justice programming. The Framework draws inspiration from the approach to financing in other sectors (especially health and education) that have scaled up primary front line services and improved outcomes.

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- 1 Justice Action Coalition, "The 2023 Justice Appeal," 2023, <https://www.sdg16.plus/resources/the-2023-justice-appeal/>.
 - 2 Justice Action Coalition, "Hague Declaration on Equal Access to Justice for All by 2030," February 7, 2019, <https://www.sdg16.plus/resources/hague-declaration-on-equal-access-to-justice-for-all-by-2030>.
 - 3 Justice Action Coalition, "The 2023 Justice Appeal."

Development of the JFF has been highly participatory, comprising more than ten consultation events and many bilateral meetings during 2024 and 2025 with JAC members and partners and external stakeholders—including civil society organizations, academia, and members of the public.

The JFF is publicly available and the JAC hopes that, as well as challenging ourselves, it will be widely adopted by other countries and organizations committed to pivoting justice systems toward delivering people-centered services to deal with people’s most pressing justice problems.

2. Who Is the JFF For

The JFF is primarily intended to guide people-centered justice financing at the country level, with its key audience being country-level justice sector decision makers and executives. The people and institutions involved will depend on the country’s context and could include:



Individual justice sector organizations delivering justice services, such as ministries of justice and judiciaries. Some of the guidance is also relevant for nongovernmental organizations delivering justice services.



The justice sector, where it has developed a cross-sectoral approach to justice sector policy, planning, and resource allocation and has a cross-sectoral coordinating mechanism.



Ministries of finance and national development planning departments

The framework is also a guide for **external justice funders**. This includes donors; United Nations (UN) agencies; multilateral development banks; global funds; and global philanthropic foundations.

3. A Vision of People-Centered Justice

Every country needs to provide basic security and justice for families at their places of work, regarding their housing and the use of land, for their businesses, in their communities, and in their markets for essential goods and services. Delivering on this promise is a foundation for stability, for economic growth, and for trust in government. The infrastructure for providing justice is an essential public good. Everyone benefits—but markets do not provide it.

People-centered justice recognizes these issues and delivers on them by starting with users and the need to deliver effective pathways to solve their most pressing justice problems (see the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies' 2019 [Justice for All Flagship Report](#)). Recent and practical thinking on people-centered justice has been helpfully developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their 2023 [Recommendation of the Council on Access to Justice and People-Centered Justice](#), accepted by the OECD Council. This sets out detailed guidance on what people-centered justice services should look like in practice in relation to:

1. Developing a people-centered purpose and culture (political commitment).
2. Delivering people-centered justice services.
3. Ensuring governance and regulatory structures that support people-centered justice.
4. Empowering users, as well as professionals, to participate in the transformation process.
5. Basing reform on evidence-based planning, evaluation, and monitoring.

It is clear that pivoting to people-centered justice means not continuing with business as usual. It will instead involve a transition toward new approaches focused on solving people's most pressing justice problems, and improved service delivery at the community level, incorporating sectoral and regulatory reform with a strong emphasis on research and development.

The context for the JFF is the justice sector (including judiciaries and ministries of justice) which is facing funding challenges in a resource-constrained environment. The need for more accessible justice services is recognized, but there are concerns that improving access to justice will result in the system becoming overwhelmed. Addressing this concern based on the OECD Recommendation points to approaches involving the integration of legal services with broader community-based justice solutions. The JFF terms these "community-based solutions" which provide people with information, advice and assistance, and informal dispute resolution services. This aim is to ensure that justice is embedded within communities where disputes are most likely to arise, and where they can be more promptly resolved through just agreements.

4. JFF Scope

The JFF is focused on financing and budgeting for services to deliver people-centered justice. In the JFF, this means financing and budgeting for services which enable people to solve their most pressing justice problems through primary front line justice services, and in particular through community-based approaches. Countries may have other objectives for their justice systems beyond community service delivery—for example, to deliver high-level rule of law objectives, to combat organized crime, or to boost growth. Such objectives may to some extent involve people-centered approaches, but financing and budgeting to deliver directly on these objectives is not the focus of the JFF. However, the JFF's functional, outcome-focused approach is relevant across the entire justice sector.

5. Lessons from Other Sectors That Have Taken People-Centered Services to Scale

The JFF draws on over 25 years' experience from other service delivery sectors, especially health and education, that have successfully scaled up front line services to millions of people. While there are key differences between justice and other sectors (including the constitutional independence of the judiciary), the JFF adopts relevant lessons about financing scaled up services including:

1. Focusing on outcomes and resolving people's problems, rather than on institutions.
2. Prioritizing spending on primary front line services, which in a resource-constrained environment means making 'tough choices.'
3. To put (2) into effect, setting funding ambitions for spending on primary front line services.
4. Within (2), prioritizing activities with the strongest evidence base for being scalable and cost-effective ('scalable best value-for-money activities').

6. Guidance on Financing and Budgeting for People-Centered Justice

The JFF provides guidance on financing and budgeting aimed at increasing the resolution rates of people's most pressing justice problems. To this end, the JFF considers justice sector funding sources and the scope to increase available funding. It also addresses the fact that pivoting to people-centered justice must be underpinned by changes in what is funded, along with budgeting that ensures available financial resources are deployed efficiently and effectively in a resource-constrained environment. A key aspect of the JFF is setting clear outcome objectives and using these to drive budget processes, rather than responding to institutional demands.

The guidance highlights seven key recommendations for financing justice in a way that puts people first:

1 Set clear goals based on what matters most to people. Set outcome objectives such as halving the number of unresolved justice problems that affect people's lives the most.

2 Align budgets with the goal of resolving people's justice problems. Develop justice sector budgets based on the functions needed to deliver outcome objectives, rather than basing them on the needs of justice institutions.

3 Encourage those who can afford it to cover the cost of their own services. Where appropriate, explore options for people or organizations with sufficient means to pay for the justice services they use. This helps ensure that limited public resources can better support those with fewer options.

4 Encourage responsible private sector involvement. Create opportunities for businesses to invest in justice services in ways that are fair, effective, and appropriately regulated, while enabling them to earn a reasonable return.

5

Develop structures and systems to deliver people-centered justice. Structures and systems need to focus on delivering integrated and accessible services to solve people's justice problems.

6

Review how money is being spent across the justice system. Identify ways to use resources more efficiently so that essential front line services can be strengthened.

7

Make realistic plans based on available resources. Focus on the most impactful activities and ensure that people-centered justice plans can be implemented within existing and projected budgets.

7. Financing Ambitions

In addition, the JFF establishes four financing ambitions for countries' justice sectors as first steps in re-balancing budgets toward people-centered justice in the medium term. These financing ambitions sit alongside the JFF policy recommendations' guidance on ensuring funds are well spent. They provide a quantitative framework to set the direction of travel toward a more people-centered justice system, and to align funding priorities with the objective of resolving people's justice problems.

Financing Ambition #1: Set justice spending in line with cross-country benchmarks.



The justice sector should review the share of government budget allocated to it in light of the international benchmarks set out in the JFF.

Financing Ambition #2: Ensure focus on people-centered justice with a minimum recommended level of spending¹ on primary front line services.



Addressing currently unresolved justice needs will involve re-focusing justice services on universal coverage of primary front line services. This follows the transformation achieved in the health and education sectors over the last 25 years through prioritizing nationwide primary services in order to improve health and education outcomes.

⁴ Based on spend per capita and share of total spend.

Appendix of Background Briefs

Introduction and Purpose

0.1 Justice Financing Framework: Introduction and Purpose

0.2 Lessons for Justice Financing from the Health Sector

People-Centered Culture and Purpose

1 Setting High-Level People-Centered Justice Objectives

1.1 Outcomes Focused on the Resolution of People's Justice Problems

"More Money for Justice"

2 Assessing the Scope for Increasing Resources

2.1 Financing Ambition #1: Justice Sector Share of Total Government Expenditure

2.2 Judicial System Share of Total Government Expenditure

2.3 Contributions to Costs by Beneficiaries

2.4 Private Sector Investment in Justice

2.5 Financing Ambition for Countries in Receipt of Significant External Development Support

"More Justice for the Money:" More Justice Outcomes from Available Resources

3 Setting Spending Priorities in Line with People-Centered Justice Objectives

3.1 Defining Primary Front Line Justice Services

3.2 Financing Ambition #2: Primary Front Line Justice Services

3.3 Financing Ambition #3: Information, Advice, Assistance, and Informal Dispute Resolution

3.4 Scalable Best Value-for-Money Activities

4 Improving Efficiency and Effectiveness of Spending

4.1 Governance and Regulation of Justice Services

4.2 Financing Ambition #4: Research, Development, Governance, Evidence-Based Practice, and Continuous Improvement

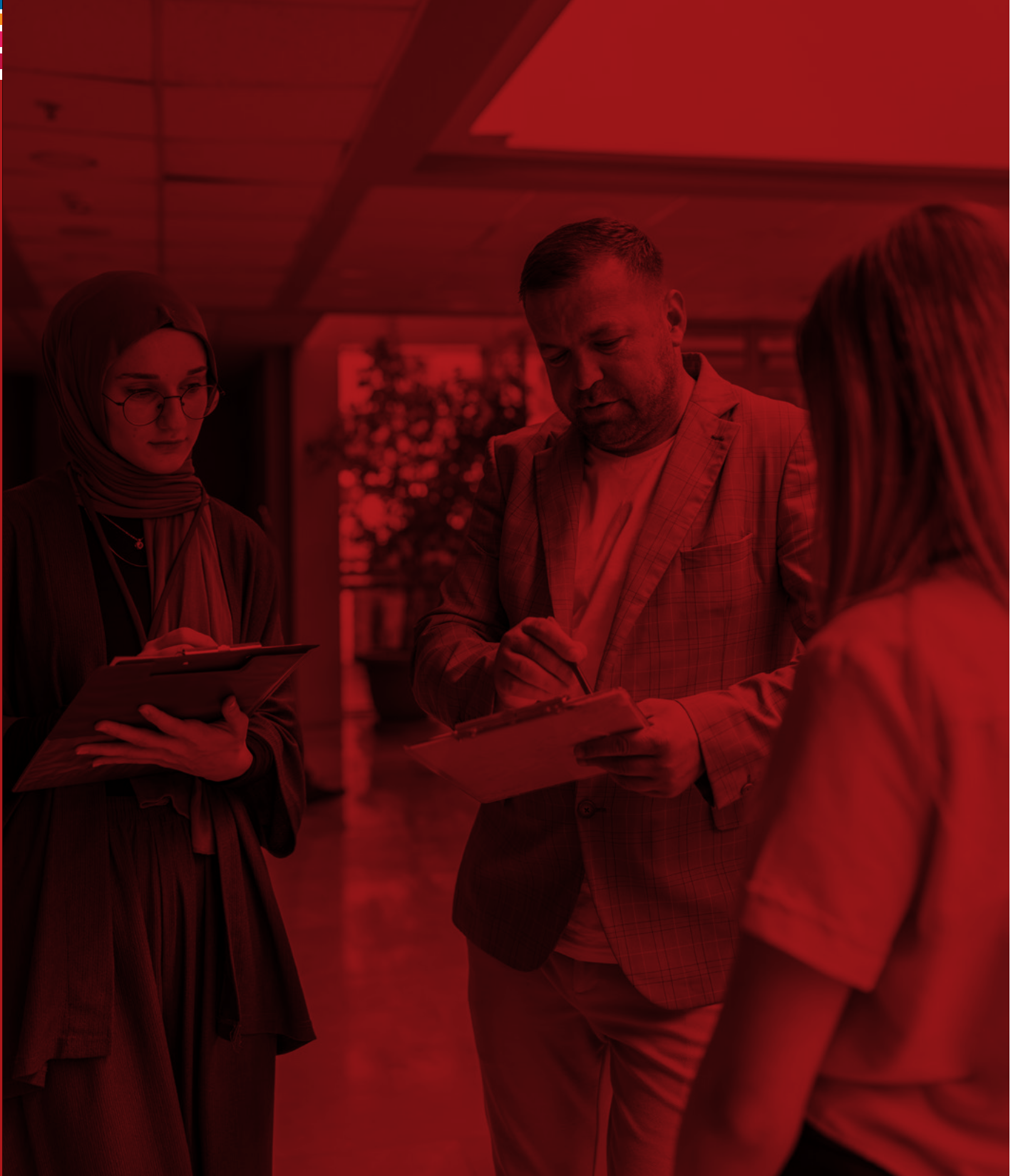
4.3 Systematic Efficiency and Effectiveness Expenditure Reviews

Implementation

5 Developing Achievable, Costed, Prioritized, Transparent, and Accountable Plans

5.1 Achievability, Costing, and Prioritization

5.2 Transparency and Accountability



This Background Brief is an excerpt from the Justice Action Coalition Workstream IV, "Justice Financing Framework," November 2025. For more information, see www.sdg16.plus/justice-financing-framework.