

2025 | Background Brief 2.5

Justice Financing Framework

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





BACKGROUND BRIEF 2.5

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



Introduction

Recent developments imply significant reductions in both global aid and justice aid over the next two years. As a result, it would be unwise for lower-income countries to plan for a significant increase in external funding for justice from donors, UN agencies, or multilateral development banks. Philanthropic organizations are also likely to be affected as they consider whether to fill some of the funding gaps including pressing needs like humanitarian support.

Despite these trends, countries in receipt of significant external development support should review with partners the share of that support allocated to justice. JFF accordingly proposes a financing ambition for lower-income countries and their development partners:



Allocate 2 percent of external development support to the justice sector, with half of justice support allocated to primary front line services, research and development, and other mechanisms to drive performance.

This background brief:

- Discusses the latest developments in external aid.
- Explains how the financing ambition is derived.
- Discusses the justice financing gap and the implications of the financing ambition for funding primary front line justice services in lower-income countries.

1. Impact of Recent Trends in Overall Global Aid and Justice Aid Flows

The United States has long been the largest justice aid donor.⁴⁵ While the full details are not clear, the US announced in March 2025 that 82 percent of all United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs had been terminated with immediate effect.⁴⁶ More detailed analysis suggests that the announced cuts in USAID's rule of law and human rights programming correspond to 67 percent of total funding.⁴⁷

45 For a full list of top twelve justice donors, see: "Marcus Manuel et al. "Justice financing 2024 annual review: domestic financing and aid." ODI Global, December 6, 2024, <https://odi.org/en/publications/justice-financing-2024-annual-review-domestic-financing-and-aid>.

46 Sara Jerving. "Remaining USAID programs now under State Department, 5,200 programs canceled." Devex, March 10, 2025, <https://www.devex.com/news/remaining-usaid-programs-now-under-state-department-5-200-programs-canceled>.

47 Charles Kenny and Justin Sandefur. "The USAID Cuts: Little Sign of Mercy for 'Life-Saving' Health Programs." Center for Global Development, March 14, 2025, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/usaid-cuts-little-sign-mercy-life-saving-health-programs>.

In addition, ODI Global's analysis in January 2025 highlighted the number of donors that have announced significant cuts in overall aid volumes, including three of the other top five justice aid donors: the EU, Germany, and Sweden, as well as the UK, France, and the Netherlands.⁴⁸

Based on ODI's analysis of the latest information on aid cuts,⁴⁹ and assuming that cuts in justice aid mirror the cuts in overall aid, ODI estimates that justice aid from the top twelve donors⁵⁰ will be 40 percent less in real terms in 2026 than in 2022 (see Annex for details).

In addition to the cuts in overall aid volume, the EU—the second largest justice donor—has announced it will be reprioritizing its aid away from services to give a much greater emphasis on infrastructure, in support of the wider EU's increased focus on its "global gateway" program.⁵¹

Given the pressures on total aid, efforts to increase the share of total aid which is allocated to justice, as set out in the financing ambition, become even more crucial.

2. How Financing Ambition Is Derived

2.1 Justice share of total aid

The ambition of 2 percent of total aid being allocated to justice in low- and middle-income countries seeks to reverse (in part) recent reductions in the share of aid allocated to justice.⁵² More fundamentally, it also addresses the striking mismatch between the priority donor countries give to justice in their own countries, spending 4 percent of their own budgets on justice, while only spending 1 percent in their aid.

The 2 percent ambition is considered realistic, as this level is:

- Below past peak shares of aid of 3 percent (2011–2012).⁵³
- Only just above the latest three-year average (2020–2022) of 1.7 percent.⁵⁴
- Only half the share of spending that donors allocate to justice in their own domestic spending.⁵⁵

48 For example, see Nilima Gulrajani. "Donors In A Post-Aid World January 2025 update." ODI Global, January 24, 2025, <https://odi.org/en/insights/donors-in-a-post-aid-world-january-2025-update>; Nilima Gulrajani and Jessica Puduserry. "With the knives out on development spending, have we reached 'peak aid'?" *The Guardian*, January 23, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/23/global-development-economics-donor-spending-refugee-oecd-world-bank-peak-aid>.

49 Based on information available on March 29, 2025.

50 For a full list of top twelve justice donors, see Manuel et al., Justice financing 2024 annual review.

51 EU Commission, "Global Gateway overview," last accessed March 2025, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/global-gateway-overview_en.

52 Manuel et al. "Justice financing 2024 annual review."

53 Ibid

54 Ibid

55 See [Background Brief 2.1](#) on justice sector's share of total government expenditure.

2.2 Share of justice aid to primary front line services, research and development, and other mechanisms to drive performance

The financing ambition proposes that half of justice aid should be allocated to primary front line services, research and development, and other mechanisms to drive performance improvements. This builds on Financing Ambition #2 which proposes that 33.3 percent of the total domestic justice budget should be targeted on primary front line services in lower-income countries, and Financing Ambition #4 which suggests an additional 0.5 percent to be spent on research and development and on mechanisms to drive performance improvements. This implies a combined share of 33.8 percent.

Long-established partnership principles for effective development cooperation point to donors at least matching recipients' own priorities. A key argument for donors exceeding the domestic combined share (50 percent vs. 34 percent) is that front line services are underfunded. Moreover, investment in mechanisms to drive performance improvements enables countries to become self-sufficient in the longer term.

Donor prioritization of primary front line services also mirrors the approach in the education sector: donors agreed to prioritize primary education, setting a target of 50 percent of all education aid, matching the 50 percent target share that national governments set for their education budgets.⁵⁶

3. The Justice Financing Gap

3.1 Implications of Financing Ambition #2 for funding primary front line justice services in lower-income countries

2024 analysis of government spending⁵⁷ reveals a justice financing gap in low-income and lower-middle-income countries (together termed "lower-income countries"). This means that there is a substantial shortfall of resources available to fund even a basic "primary" system of justice. This would be the case even if lower-income country governments were to meet the JFF's Ambition #2 of allocating a third of justice spending to primary justice (see [Background Brief 3.2](#)). As noted in Background Brief 3.2, for upper middle-income and OECD countries, there is sufficient budget in theory to fully fund primary front line justice services. In practice, however, funding these services is likely to require significant reprioritization.

The total financing gap for primary front line justice services in lower-income countries could be filled if donors were to meet the two financing ambitions: doubling justice share aid to 2 percent of total aid and allocating half of justice aid to primary front line services. The only further step would be to allocate a third of total justice aid to low-income countries. The proportion of the gap in lower-middle-income countries that could be filled would depend on how the remaining aid was allocated between lower- and upper-middle-income countries.

⁵⁶ UNESCO, "Pricing the right to education: the cost of reaching new targets by 2030. Policy Paper 18, Education for All Global Monitoring Report." 2015, <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/pricing-right-education>.

⁵⁷ Manuel et al. "Justice financing 2024 annual review."

Annex

Table 1: ODI Estimates of Justice Aid in 2026

Top twelve donors (average 2020–2022)	Justice aid in 2022 (in 2022 constant USD millions)	Reduction in cash terms (negative implies increase)	\$ Inflation 2022–2026	ODI projected justice aid in 2026 (in 2022 constant USD millions)
United States	457	67%	10%	136
EU institutions	455	37%	10%	259
Sweden	192	50%	10%	87
Norway	138	-14%	10%	142
Germany	211	26%	10%	142
Canada	135	15%	10%	104
Australia	159	-7%	10%	154
United Kingdom	170	40%	10%	92
France	133	50%	10%	61
United Nations	122		10%	110
Netherlands	115	51	10%	52
World Bank	82		10%	74
Total	2370	40%		USD 1413

These estimates were made on March 29, 2025, based on the following sources:

- OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) CRS data for 2022 justice data (see [Background Brief 2.5](#) for full details).
- Gideon Rabinowitz. "The Chancellor's Spring Statement adds to the expected pain of the UK aid cuts." Bond, March 27, 2025, <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2025/03/the-chancellors-spring-statement-adds-to-the-expected-pain-of-the-uk-aid-cuts>.
- Kenny, Charles and Sandefur, Justin. "The USAID Cuts: Little Sign of Mercy for 'Life-Saving' Health Programs." Center for Global Development, March 14, 2025, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/usaids-cuts-little-sign-mercy-life-saving-health-programs>.
- Chadwick, Vince. "A look back at European aid's slash-and-burn year." Devex. January 3, 2025, <https://devex.shorthandstories.com/looking-back-at-a-slash-and-burn-year-for-european-aid/index.html>.
- Chadwick, Vince. "Scoop: The EU aid cuts revealed." Devex, September 26, 2024, <https://www.devex.com/news/scoop-the-eu-aid-cuts-revealed-108390>.
- Bollag, Burton. "How Germany is cutting billions from foreign aid." Devex. February 19, 2024, <https://www.devex.com/news/how-germany-is-cutting-billions-from-foreign-aid-107055>.
- SciDevNet, "Swedish aid cuts dent 'decades of work' in global South," May 15, 2024, <https://www.scidev.net/global/news/swedish-aid-cuts-dent-decades-of-work-in-global-south>.
- Chase-Lubitz, Jesse. "Europe is cutting development spending, and it's not because of Trump." Devex, March 25, 2025, <https://www.devex.com/news/europe-is-cutting-development-spending-and-it-s-not-because-of-trump-109668>.
- Government of the Netherlands, "Foreign trade and development minister Reinette Klever: Dutch interests at the heart of development policy," February 20, 2025, <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2025/02/20/minister-reinette-klaver-dutch-interests-at-the-heart-of-development-policy>.
- "Donor Profile: Canada," Donor Tracker, last accessed August 2025, https://donortracker.org/donor_profiles/canada#budget.
- "Donor Profile: Norway," Donor Tracker, last accessed August 2025, https://donortracker.org/donor_profiles/norway#budget.
- "Donor Profile: Australia," Donor Tracker. Last accessed August 2025, https://donortracker.org/donor_profiles/australia.
- Howes, Stephen, "2025 Australian aid update," DevPolicy. March 26, 2025, <https://devpolicy.org/2025-australian-aid-update/>.

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

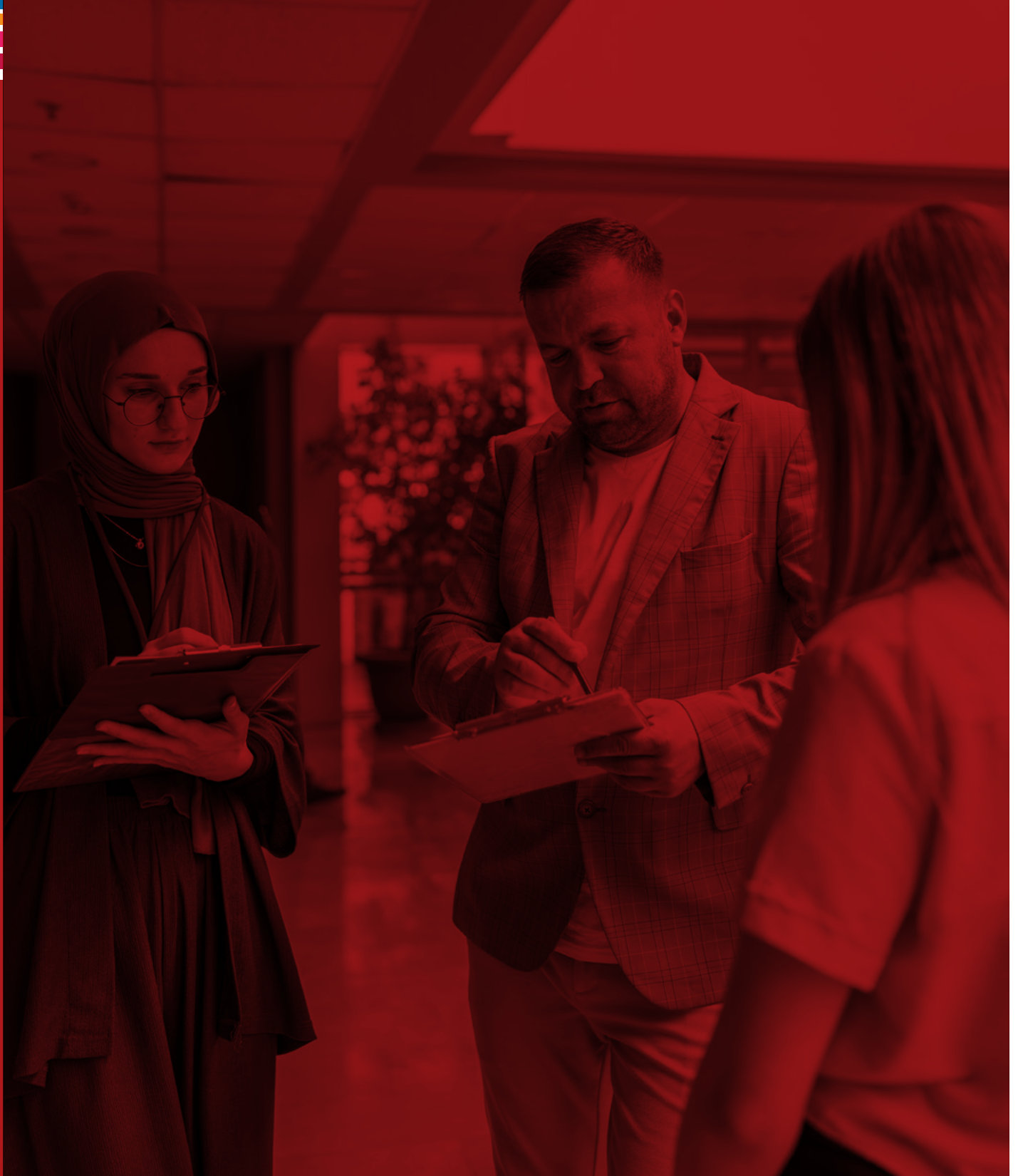
4.3 Systematic Efficiency and Effectiveness Expenditure Reviews

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.