

2025 | Background Brief 3.1

Justice Financing Framework

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





BACKGROUND BRIEF 3.1

3.1 Defining Primary Front Line Justice Services



Introduction

The JFF proposes that countries should adopt a minimum spend on primary front line justice services (Financing Ambition #2). This background brief provides a working definition of primary front line justice services for the purposes of this Financing Ambition.

The background brief:

- Explains where the concept of primary front line services comes from and explains how other sectors approached defining the concept.
- Provides an initial working definition of primary front line justice services.

1. Where the Concept of Primary Front Line Services Comes From

1.1 Learning from the health and education sectors

The focus on primary front line justice is based on the approach taken in the health and education sectors, especially over the twenty-five years since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals. The aim was to ensure that everyone, in both rural and urban areas, would have access to at least a basic or “primary” level of services. The World Health Organization (WHO) sees primary healthcare as the foundation for universal care:

“As a foundation for and way to move towards [Universal Health Care], WHO recommends reorienting health systems using a primary health care (PHC) approach. PHC is the most inclusive, equitable, cost-effective and efficient approach to enhance people’s physical and mental health, as well as social well-being.”⁵⁸

58 World Health Organization, Fact Sheet, Universal health coverage (UHC), March 26, 2025, [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)#:~:text=As%20a%20foundation%20for%20and,well%20as%20social%20well%2Dbeing.](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)#:~:text=As%20a%20foundation%20for%20and,well%20as%20social%20well%2Dbeing.)

1.2 How health and education approached defining primary front line services

To prioritize primary front line services, the health and education sectors had to define what these kinds of services looked like.

Primary education is easily defined, as it is based on the age of the children receiving education. The definition of primary healthcare is more complex has been developing over many years, and continues to evolve. It includes prioritizing the most essential health interventions, which can be delivered through close-to-client systems at health posts rather than hospitals. Box 1 below describes the international process of defining primary services in the health sector.

Box 1: The International Process of Defining Primary Services in the Health Sector

The process of reaching the definition of primary health care has continued to evolve over the past twenty-five years. In response to the creation of the Millenium Development Goals in 2000 on infant, child, and maternal mortality, the World Health Organization convened a Global Commission for Health⁵⁹ in 2001 to identify the most essential interventions, especially those which could be delivered through a close-to-client system at health posts rather than hospitals.

When a broader set of health Sustainable Development Goals were agreed to in 2015, the concept of “essential” universal health care was developed, with researchers identifying 200 specific health interventions delivered by public health mass media, community services, and local health centers.

Further detail on the process in the health sector is provided in [Background Brief 0.2](#).

2. Working Definition of Primary Front Line Justice Services

Unlike the health sector, the justice sector’s concept of primary front line services is relatively new. It is expected that, as with the health sector, the understanding of what is needed to provide comprehensive primary front line justice services will evolve over time.

⁵⁹ World Health Organisation, “Executive Summary, Commission on Macroeconomics and Health: investing in health for economic development,” 2001, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42463>.

The JAC Workstream I's forthcoming *People-Centered Justice Measurement Framework* (Measurement Framework)⁶⁰ provides a useful starting point by describing a people-centered justice system based on the OECD Framework:

A people-centered justice system would provide a range of justice and related services over a continuum from the most local and informal through to formal judicial processes, and these should be provided sufficiently accessible to those experiencing legal need to help them resolve their problem. In addition to formal judicial and non-judicial options, these can include ADR mechanisms (e.g. mediation, arbitration, conciliation, online dispute resolution [ODR]); paralegals; public legal assistance and education providers; community advocates; and collaborative services from legally trained and other professionals (OECD, 2019[6]) [...] The scope and composition of this continuum should be linked to the assessment and locating of legal need, the prioritization of targeted and vulnerable groups, and the proper understanding of what strategies work most effectively and cost-effectively for a given person with a given legal need in a given location/circumstance.⁶¹

The JFF conceives primary front line justice services as a subset of such a system. Drawing on the approach taken in the health sector, the JFF's working high-level definition of primary front line justice services is: "... universally available services that deal with people's most pressing justice problems at the local/community level."

2.1 People-centered justice functions

The JFF Measurement Framework has identified the functions required to resolve these justice problems with⁶² function-based intermediate outcomes (see [Background Brief 1.1](#)):

- Information.
- Advice and assistance.
- Dispute resolution (formal and informal).

2.2 Services required to deliver the functions

The precise nature and composition of the services required to deliver these functions will vary from country to country, and will depend on the most pressing justice needs in particular contexts. Table 1 below provides examples of service providers that may be considered to be "primary front line," making a distinction between two forms of dispute resolution: informal and formal/state. This distinction is useful in lower income countries, where many people access informal dispute mechanisms such as customary justice.

60 References to the JAC People-Centered Justice Measurement Framework refer to JAC Working Group I's March 13, 2025, preliminary document.

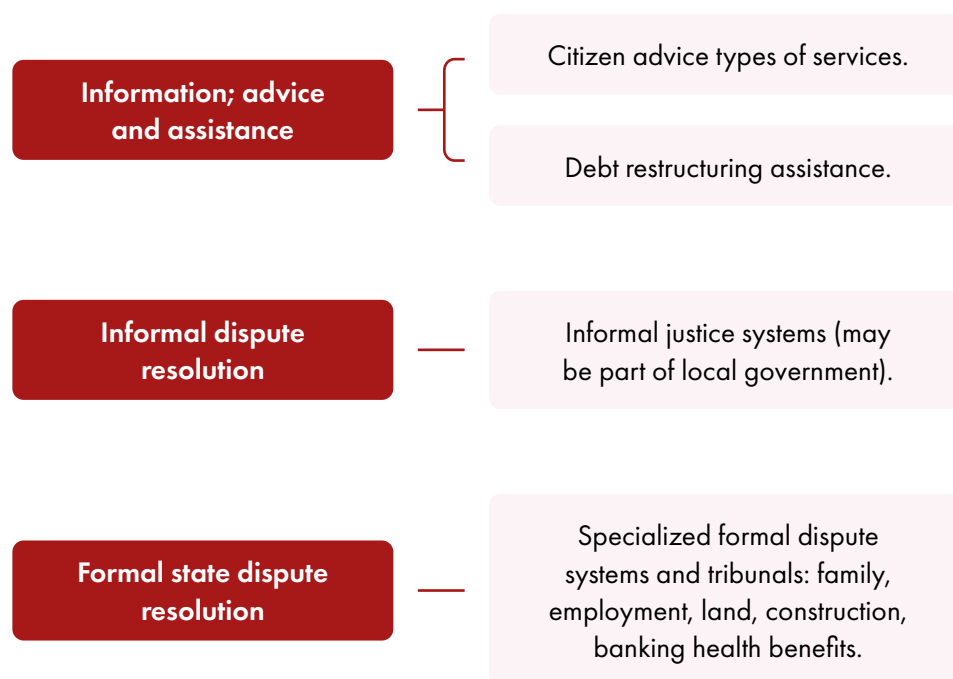
61 Ibid., 37s.

62 JAC Working Group I draft as shared in June 2025.

Table 1: Primary Front line Justice Service Providers

Function	Primary Front Line Service Provider
1. Information 2. Advice and assistance	Usually provided by non-lawyer community justice workers (e.g., community-based paralegals, mediators, advice centers, community leaders, judicial facilitators). Includes national information (e.g., websites, radio soaps). Providers may be state or nonstate.
3. Informal dispute resolution	<p>Informal justice systems (e.g., community/village/customary/market courts). Should fulfill most (but not necessarily all) of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jurisdiction: Relatively low value or less serious for everyday justice problems. • Accessibility: Local or community-based. • Headed or presided over by non-lawyer or non-expert (but lawyer could provide general training and/or support). • Procedures: Informal, flexible, often non-adversarial. • Enforcement: Limited powers of enforcement, operating in the shadow of the law.
4. Formal, state dispute resolution	First-tier formal civil and criminal courts, tribunals, ombuds services, community police, public prosecutors, probation services, correction services.

It is important to note that some service providers may be funded from budgets outside the justice sector. Examples may include:



2.3 Operational oversight and accountability services

The inclusion of informal organizations in the primary justice system does not imply unconditional support. Key considerations when investing in informal mechanisms will include the equity and transparency of their operations; their compliance with constitutional and national laws; and their interaction with formal justice systems, including any delegated responsibilities.

In addition, the formal justice sector can be a source of state oppression and injustice. Courts and the police are frequently cited as the most corrupt of all public sector institutions, and traditional leaders have also been found to be exploitative and rent-seeking.

For these reasons, the JFF also includes mechanisms for improving operational accountability as a low-cost primary front line justice service

2.4 More work needed

The JFF presents a first attempt at a working definition of primary front line justice services. This forms the basis of the JFF's costing of these services, and in turn the development of Financing Ambition #2. As with the health and education sectors, the expectation is that this definition will be refined and improved over time, ideally through broad international consultation.

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

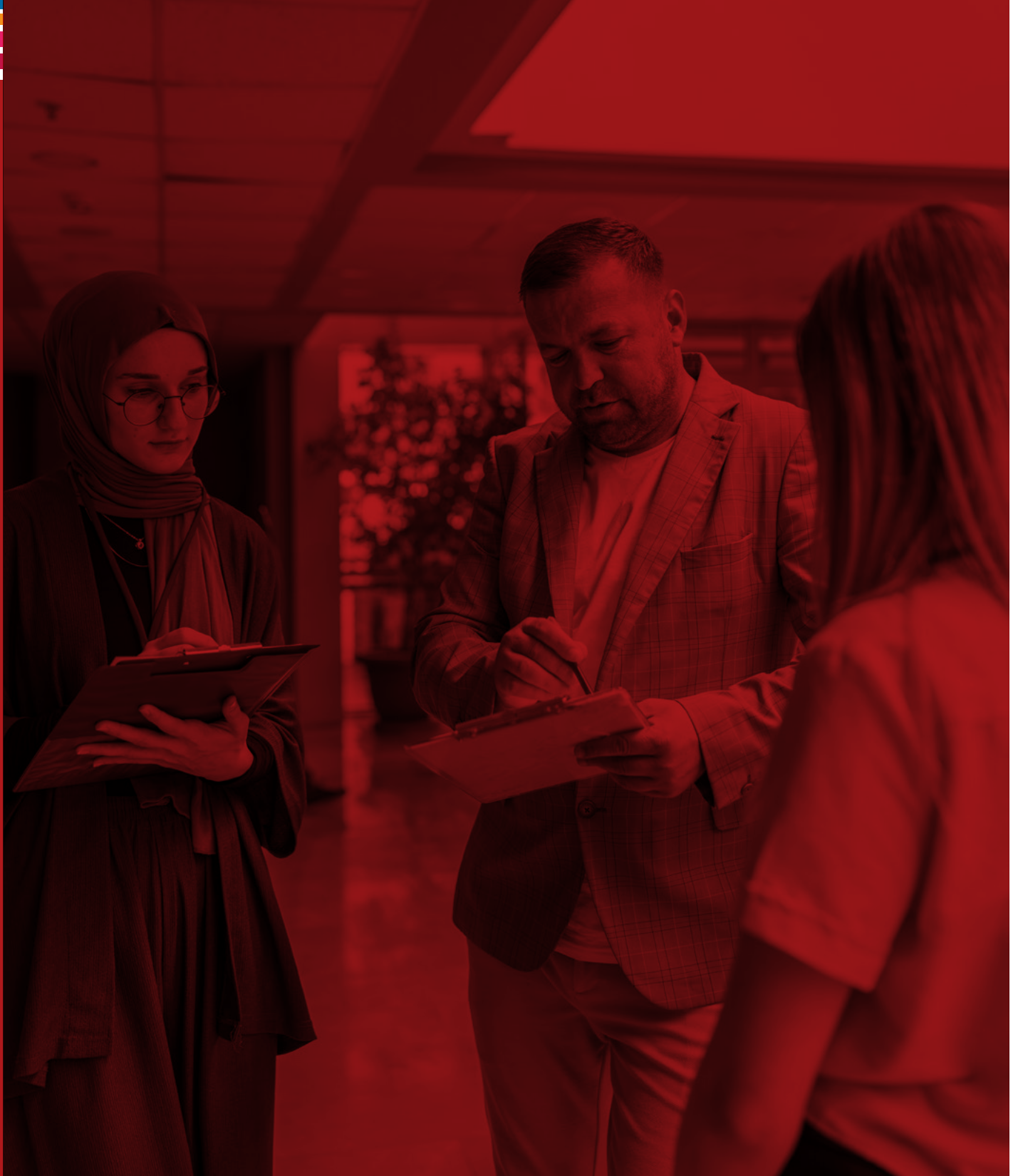
4.3 Systematic Efficiency and Effectiveness Expenditure Reviews

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.