



State of justice aid 2026 annual review

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October 2026



Financing scaled-up investments in people-centred justice

Key messages

Against the trend of the last 10 years, the share of aid provided to justice from official donors increased in 2024. The total aid to justice increased by 10% to \$3.6 billion. However, justice still only accounted for 1.2% of all official donor aid in 2024, compared to 3.1% at its peak in 2012.

Given the general aid cuts announced by donors in 2024 and subsequently, justice aid is expected to fall by 40% by 2026.

Most justice aid continues to be earmarked for human rights and ending violence against women and girls, while funding for core justice institutions, such as courts, justice ministries and legal aid systems, has fallen by three-quarters since 2012.

There was a sharp fall in the proportion of justice aid going to low-income countries, declining from 27% in 2023 to 20% in 2024. There is now an even wider difference with health aid, where 37% went to low-income countries in 2024.

Donations from private donors (mainly philanthropic foundations) for justice rose to \$350 million in 2023. However, this is still 16% below the average for 2019–21 and is only 11% of aid from official donors. Private donors are strongly focused on human rights (which receives a 60% share of their support) and provide very limited support to low-income countries (a 3% share). Their total funding position in 2024 is not yet known, as figures for two of the top three private donors have yet to be updated in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data. However, total donations from the eight other top 10 funders increased by 39% in 2024.

A key conclusion is that justice aid is not strategically targeted at low-income countries, which have much less ability to finance a nationwide basic service from their own domestic resources and hence face substantial financing gaps. Even after the expected aid cuts, if justice aid from official and private donors were as effectively targeted as health aid, the resulting increase in resources would more than finance the provision of universal coverage of front-line justice services in all low-income countries.



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About this publication

This policy brief is part of a wider research programme on justice finance that also covers global trends in domestic financing of justice and guidance on budgeting for people-centred justice (<https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/justice-finance/>).

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Acronyms and abbreviations

EU	European Union
JFF	Justice Financing Framework
LIC	low-income country
LMIC	lower middle-income country
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
OECD DAC CRS	OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System
UMIC	upper middle-income country
US	United States
VAWG	violence against women and girls

1 Introduction

1.1 Paper purpose

This policy brief presents the latest global data on justice aid. This is the latest in a series of ODI Global's annual updates on justice aid. It is a companion piece to a separate policy brief that presents the latest global data on domestic spending on justice. The two briefs aim to provide context for domestic and international justice policy-makers concerned with the allocation of public funds to the justice sector. Practical guidance on financing and budgeting for improved justice outcomes and scaled-up front-line justice services¹ can be found in the Justice Action Coalition² (JAC) Justice Financing Framework (JFF) published in 2025.³ The JFF looks at 'more money for justice' – the extent to which it is realistic to plan for increased resources for the justice sector; as well as 'more justice for the money' – how to deliver more justice outcomes from available resources.

The data presented is the latest available for 2024. The brief also estimates the likely impact of the major aid cuts that were announced in 2024 and 2025.

For the first time, this analysis also covers funding from private donors, mainly philanthropic foundations. However, the latest full set of figures for this group is only available for 2023.

The information on aid is ODI Global's seventh annual analysis. Previous analyses are presented in Manuel and Manuel, 2018; Manuel and Manuel, 2021; Manuel and Manuel, 2022; Manea et al., 2023; Manuel et al., 2024; and Manuel and Manea, 2025.

1 Defined in the JFF to be legal information, advice and assistance, and informal dispute resolution. See: <https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/justice-financing-framework/>.
2 See: www.sdg16.plus/justice-action-coalition/.
3 See: www.sdg16.plus/justice-financing-framework/.

1.2 Data sources

The data source is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS). This database captures aid data from more than 100 governments and international agencies ('official donors') as well as more than 40 private donors, mainly philanthropic foundations. Data is presented for aid to the OECD's categories of 'legal and judicial development'; 'ending violence against women and girls'; and 'human rights'. (Annex A sets out how the OECD defines each of these three categories.)

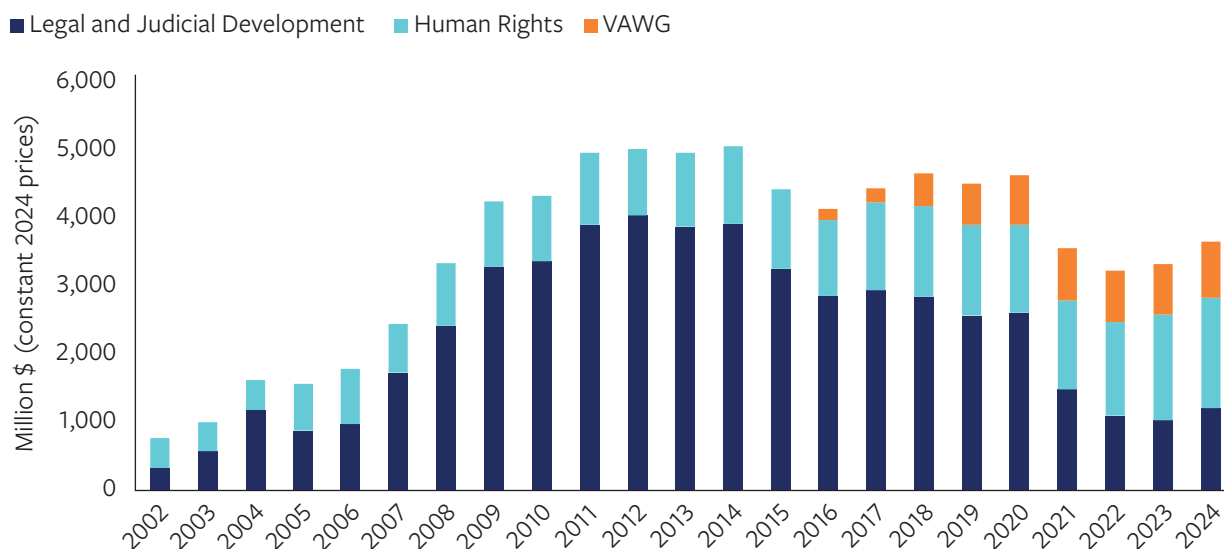
2 Official donor aid for justice

2.1 Justice aid continues to fall

As Figure 1 shows, justice aid from official donors (governments and international agencies) rose rapidly in the 2000s, peaking at \$4.8 billion in 2014. Aid then fell to around \$4 billion until 2019 and then fell further to nearer \$3 billion in 2021–23. In 2024, there was the first major rise – of 9.6% – to \$3.6 billion. However, as noted in last year’s report (Manuel and Manea, 2025), the general cuts in aid announced by many governments in 2024 and 2025, especially by the United States (US), mean that total justice aid is expected to fall by 40% by 2026.

Two-thirds of justice aid in 2024 was earmarked for human rights and ending violence against women and girls (VAWG). Funding for core justice institutions (OECD aid category ‘legal and judicial development’)⁴ fell by three-quarters between 2012 and 2022 and has shown little growth since then.

Figure 1 Justice aid disbursements



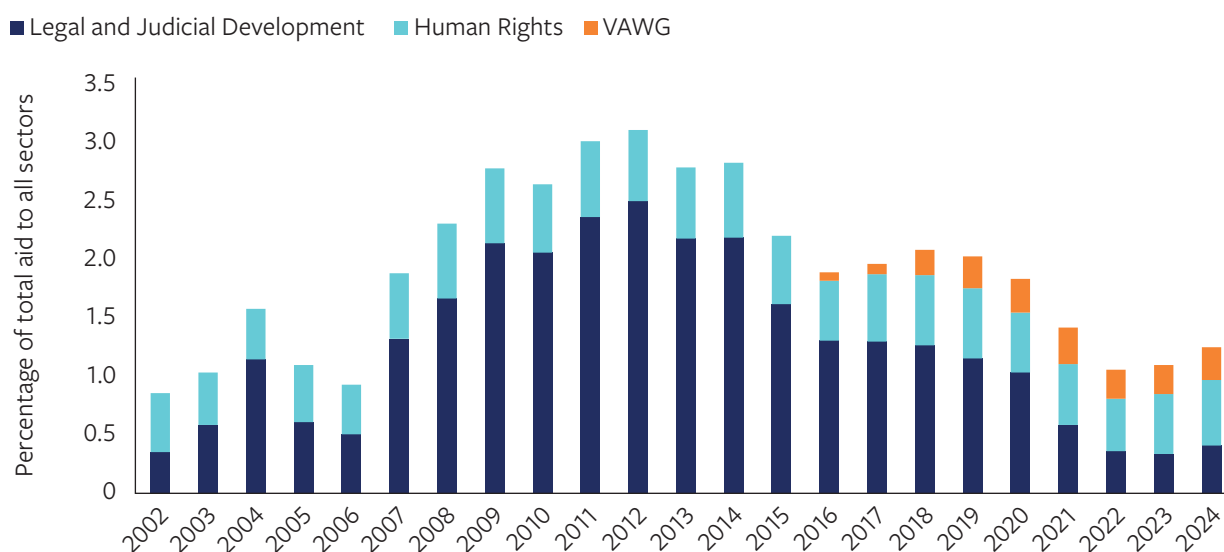
Source: OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database

As Figure 2 shows, the share of aid provided to justice increased in 2024, against the trend of the last 10 years. However, justice still only accounted for 1.2% of all official donor aid in 2024, compared to 3.1% at its peak in 2012.

4 See Annex A for detailed definition of justice aid categories.

The 1.2% of donor funds allocated to justice is less than a third of the amount donors spend on justice at home, where they allocate 3.9% of their domestic spending to justice (Manuel and Uraz, 2026). When compared with recipient countries' domestic spending on justice, the proportion of aid given to justice is just one-fifth of the amount low- and middle-income countries allocate to justice from their domestic resources. This mismatch between aid and domestic priorities is at odds with donor commitments that aid should reflect local priorities.⁵

Figure 2 Justice aid disbursements as a percentage of total aid to all sectors



Source: OECD DAC CRS database

2.2 The rise and fall of justice aid is predominantly due to trends in US aid

The United States continued to be by far the largest justice donor in 2024. US justice aid has been provided by a range of government agencies, including the State Department and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). US support to justice peaked at \$2.7 billion in 2011, 2012 and 2014, but by 2024 had fallen by 69% to just \$0.8 billion.

European Union (EU) institutions have been the second largest donor since 2005. Their aid peaked much later – in 2020 – at \$1.0 billion. By 2024, their support had fallen to \$0.5 billion.

Based on average disbursements for 2022–24, the five other largest current donors are⁶ Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, with each providing between \$0.2 and \$0.3 billion a year on average. The other top 12 donors – the Netherlands, United Nations agencies, France,

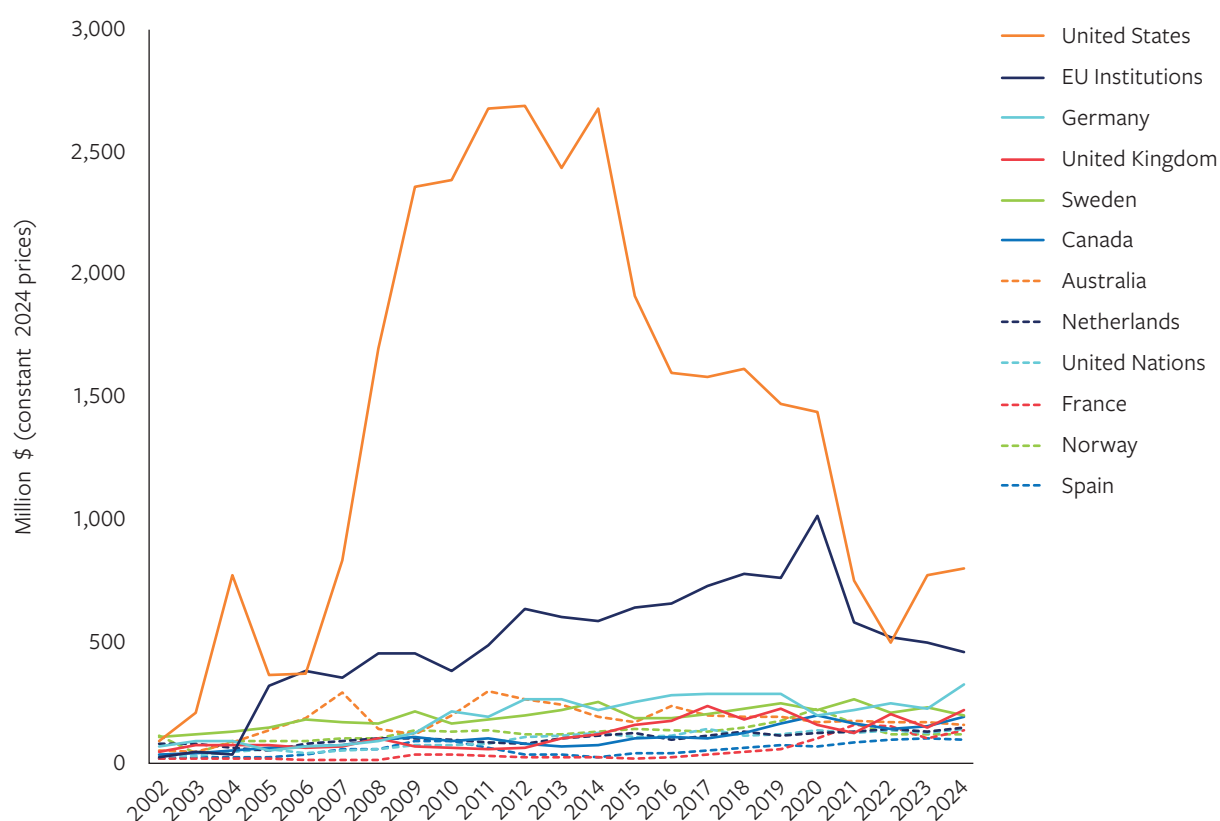
⁵ See, for example, the collective donor statement at the 2022 Effective Development Cooperation Summit in Geneva: <https://effectivecooperation.org/Summitoutcomedocument>

⁶ In declining order of disbursements

Norway and Spain – all provided at least \$0.1 billion. There are also another three donors – Denmark, Switzerland and Japan – that are only just outside the top 12; all gave at least 90% of the amount Spain provides.

Core funding for justice from UN agencies makes them the ninth largest donor (for 2022–24). However, UN agencies, especially the UN Development Programme (UNDP), also manage substantial earmarked funding from bilateral funders, so the total amount they manage is much larger. In Figure 3, this is all credited to the original bilateral funder.

Figure 3 Justice aid disbursements – top 12 donors



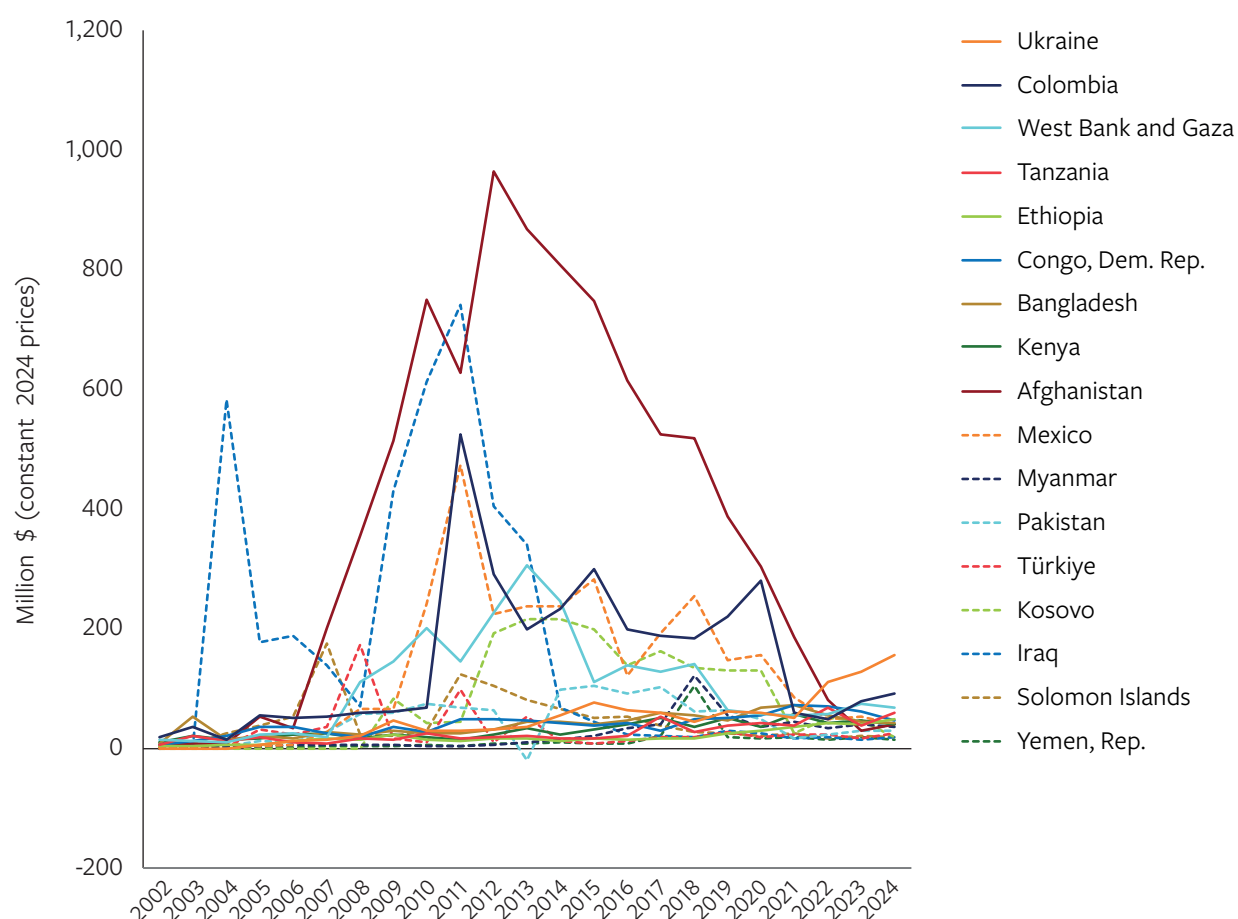
Source: ODI calculations using OECD DAC CRS data

2.3 Only 20% of justice aid goes to low-income countries

Based on average amounts received in 2022–24, most of the top 10 recipients of justice aid are middle-income countries. The latest data shows that the only three low-income countries in the top 10 are Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia.

For many years, most justice aid was focused on a small set of countries. At different times, Afghanistan and Iraq received over \$700 million in a year, Colombia and Mexico over \$400 million, and the West Bank and Gaza and Kosovo over \$200 million. These choices appear to reflect the geopolitical interests of the two largest justice aid providers, the US and EU, particularly their interests in supporting post-conflict countries and countries combating drug trafficking. Justice aid is now more evenly spread between recipient countries. In 2024, Ukraine was the only country to receive more than \$100 million in justice aid. Figure 4 shows the top 10 recipients of justice aid in 2022–24, along with any other recipient that has received over \$100 million in any year since 2002.

Figure 4 Major recipients of justice aid

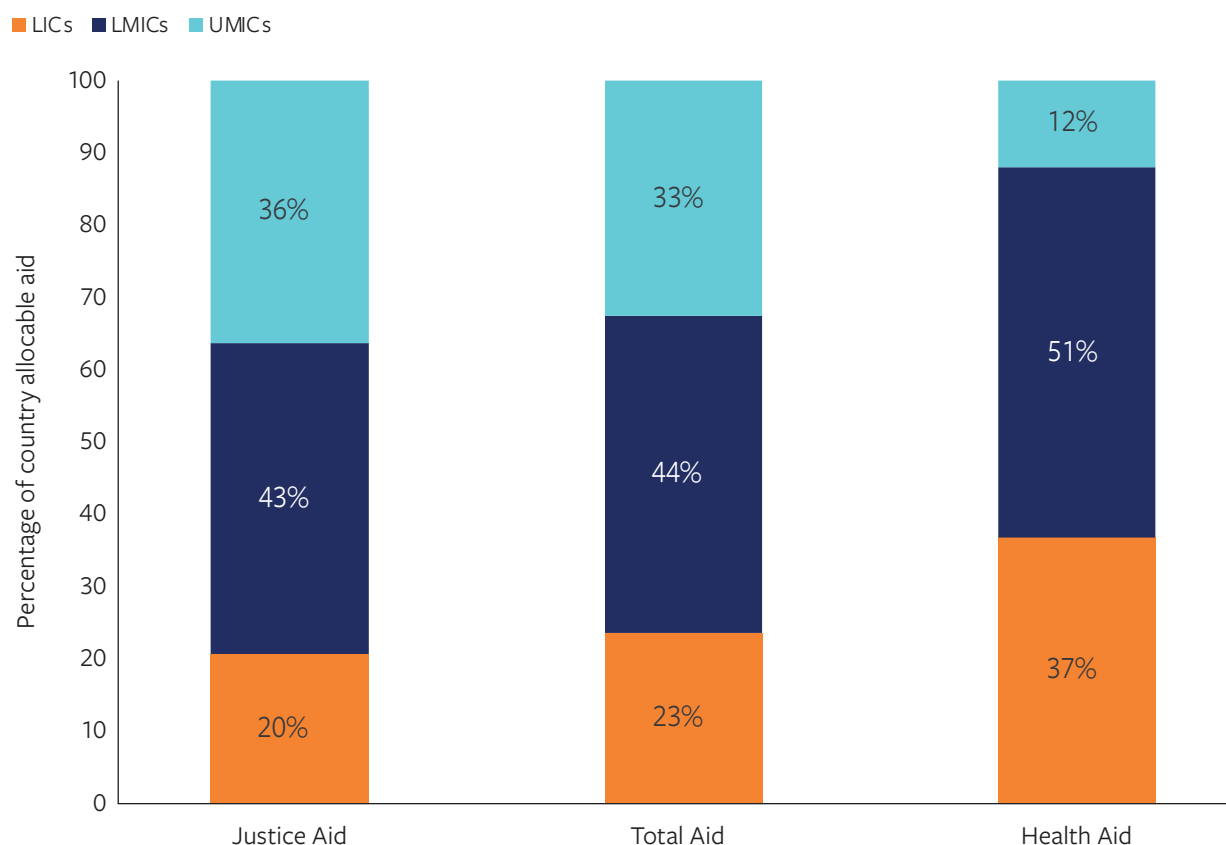


Source: ODI calculations using OECD DAC CRS database

Justice aid is increasingly poorly targeted relative to justice financing gaps, which are much larger in low-income countries. Just 20% of justice aid went to low-income countries in 2024, a marked fall from the 27% share in 2023 and a further continuation of the downward trend over the last 10 years.

As Figure 5 shows, aid to health is much better focused, with low-income countries (LICs) receiving a 37% share of the total. And in response to the announced general aid cuts, this is expected to become even more strongly focused on lower-income countries.⁷ The argument for targeting aid in this way is that it is poorer countries that have much less ability to finance a nationwide basic service from their own domestic resources and hence face substantial financing gaps (Manuel et al., 2019; Manuel et al., 2023). Even if justice aid does fall by 40%, if this aid were as well targeted on low-income countries as health aid, this would provide low-income countries with an additional \$240 million a year for justice. This increase would be nearly enough to finance the scaling up of front-line justice services⁸ to the whole population in all low-income countries, which is estimated to cost \$250 million (Manuel and Manuel, 2023).

Figure 5 Allocations of all aid, justice aid and health sector aid by recipient income group in 2024



Source: OECD DAC CRS data

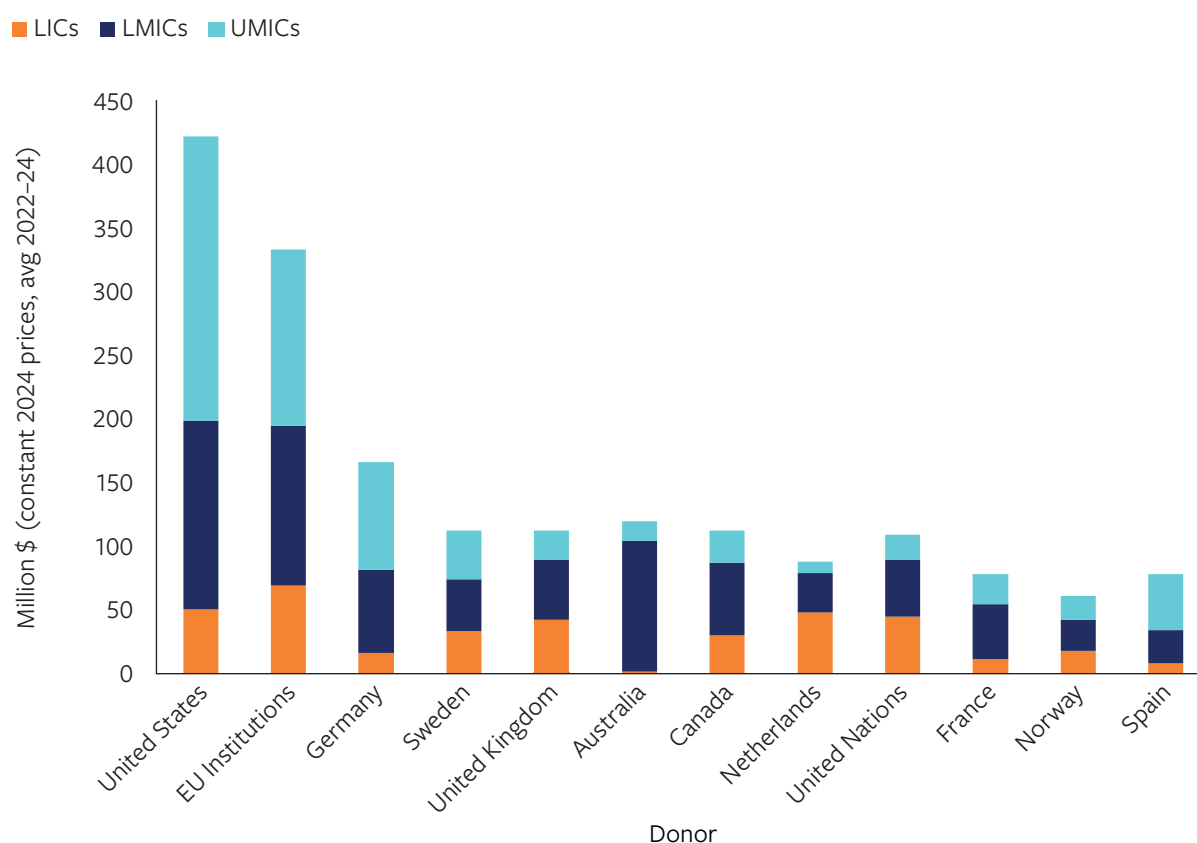
⁷ For example, see: www.devex.com/news/global-fund-cuts-signal-sharper-shift-toward-poorest-countries-112285.

⁸ Legal information, advice and assistance, and informal dispute resolution. See: <https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/justice-financing-framework/>.

Some justice donors give greater priority to low-income countries (both in 2024 and on average over 2022–24). The Netherlands gives them the greatest focus, with over half its justice aid going to low-income countries, and five of the other top 12 donors provide at least a quarter of their justice aid to low-income countries (see Figure 6 for the average for 2022–24).

As noted in previous analysis (Manuel and Manuel, 2022), donors could have greater impact on the justice gap if they also better targeted the kind of support they provide. Donor justice programmes in the past have largely focused on top-down institutional reform and capacity development of core justice institutions largely delivered by consulting firms or international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). There is growing evidence that donors would achieve greater impact if they shifted towards direct funding of service provision, including through results-based pooled funding mechanisms.

Figure 6 Allocation of justice aid by country income group by top 12 donors



Note: Calculations are based on three-year average justice aid 2022–24

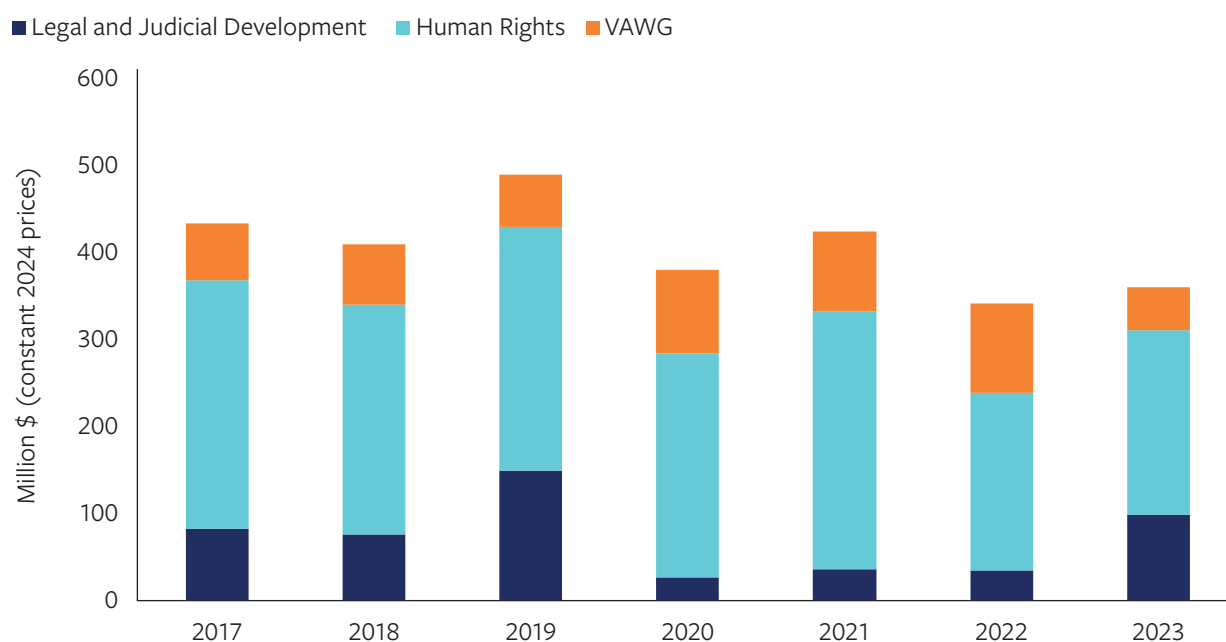
Source: ODI calculations based on OECD DAC CRS data

3 Private donors

3.1 Funding from private donors is only 11% of aid from official donors and only 3% goes to low-income countries

Disbursements from private donors/philanthropic organisations for justice were \$350 million in 2023. As Figure 7 shows, this was a small increase over 2022, but is still 16% below the average for 2019–21. The total funding position in 2024 is not yet known, as figures for two of the top three private donors for justice in 2023 have yet to be included in OECD data.⁹ However, total donations from the eight other top ten funders increased by 39% in 2024.

Figure 7 Justice aid from all private donors



Source: OECD DAC CRS data

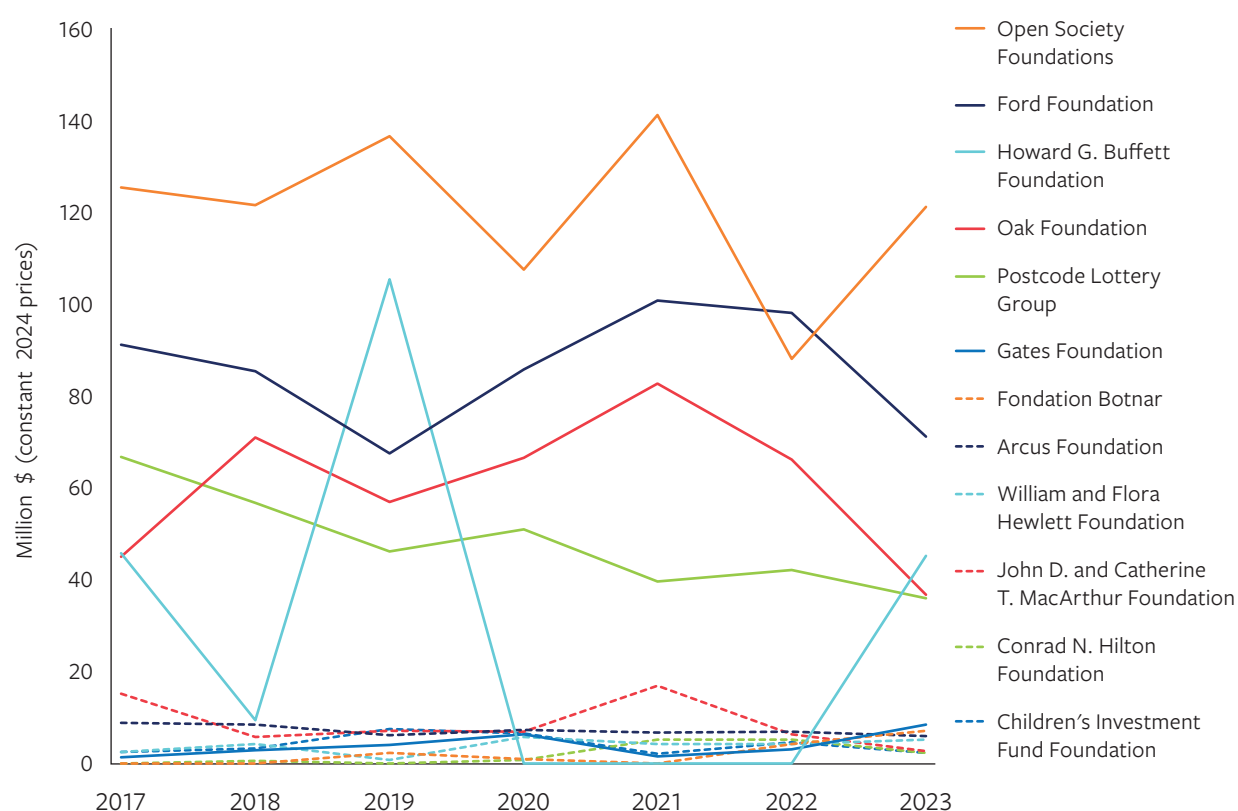
In 2023, donations from private donors/philanthropic organisations corresponded to 11% of justice aid from official donors. As Figure 7 shows, private donors were strongly focused on human rights (with a 60% share of the total). This is a much sharper focus than is the case for official donors (with a 45% share).

⁹ Analysis based on data available August 2026.

In 2023, two-thirds of the donations were to ‘unspecified countries’ and greater transparency on this would be helpful. Of the funding that was specified, only 3% went to low-income countries, far lower than the 20% share of aid from official donors. If private donors matched the 37% share of health aid to LICs, this would increase funding by an extra \$40 million. In combination with a similar reallocation of the shares of official donor aid (worth \$240 million), this would more than cover the \$250 million costs of scaling up basic front-line services to the whole population in all low-income countries (Manuel and Manuel, 2023).

The top three private donors, based on average disbursements in 2021–23, were Open Society Foundations, Ford Foundation and Oak Foundation. If they were ranked by just 2023 disbursements, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation would be just higher than Oak Foundation (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Justice aid from top ten private donors



Source: ODI calculations using OECD DAC CRS data

4 Conclusions

More aid for justice?

Although justice's share of total aid rose this year to 1.2% (from 1.1%), it is still less than a third of the 3.9% share that OECD donors allocate to justice in their own domestic spending. In view of this difference, the JFF sets a financing ambition for donors to allocate 2% of their aid to justice. Such an increase would reverse the 40% cut in justice aid that is expected by 2026.

While aid from private donors (mainly philanthropic foundations) has been increasing, it still represents only 11% of aid from official donors. Private donors are therefore unlikely to be able to fully offset the expected cuts.

More justice for the aid

The JFF also calls for justice aid to be better targeted to increase the impact of current funding. One smart use of aid would be to increase funding for front-line justice services. ODI Global analysis (Manuel et al., 2025) shows there are more than 50 examples from 18 countries and six continents of innovative cost-effective front-line services that are making a direct impact on the justice gap. These are currently being provided at affordable benchmark unit costs and there is scope to scale them up. Scaling up these kinds of services across all LICs would be relatively cheap – costing an estimated \$250 million a year (Manuel and Manuel, 2023).

The JFF sets an additional ambition for half of all justice aid to be allocated to front-line justice services, research and development, and other mechanisms to drive performance improvements. The first step towards this would be for the OECD DAC purpose codes to be amended to allow spending on these purposes to be identified.

The JFF also notes that if aid were also better targeted at low-income countries, then they could fully afford to fund national-scale front-line justice services. Based on the latest aid data, if justice aid from official and private donors were as effectively targeted as health aid, the resulting increase in resources for low-income countries would more than finance the provision of universal coverage of front-line justice services in these countries.

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Annex A Definitions of justice aid

There are three OECD DAC CRS components that make up ODI's definition of justice aid:¹⁰

1. Aid for 'legal and judicial development' is reported under code 15130. This covers support to institutions, systems and procedures of the justice sector, both formal and informal; support to ministries of justice, the interior and home affairs; judges and courts; legal drafting services; bar and lawyers associations; professional legal education; maintenance of law and order and public safety; border management; law enforcement agencies, police, prisons and their supervision; ombudsmen; alternative dispute resolution, arbitration and mediation; legal aid and counsel; traditional, indigenous and paralegal practices that fall outside the formal legal system. This also covers measures that support the improvement of legal frameworks, constitutions, laws and regulations; legislative and constitutional drafting and review; legal reform; integration of formal and informal systems of law; public legal education; dissemination of information on entitlements and remedies for injustice and awareness campaigns. (Not included are activities that are aimed primarily at supporting security system reform or undertaken in connection with post-conflict and peacebuilding activities or capacity building in border management related to migration.)
2. Aid for 'human rights' is reported under code 15160. This covers measures to support specialised official human rights institutions and mechanisms at universal, regional, national and local levels in their statutory roles to promote and protect civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights as defined in international conventions and covenants; translation of international human rights commitments into national legislation; reporting and follow-up; human rights dialogue. This also covers human rights defenders and human rights NGOs; human rights advocacy, activism, mobilisation; awareness raising and public human rights education as well as human rights programming targeting specific groups, for example, children, persons with disabilities, migrants, ethnic, religious, linguistic and sexual minorities, indigenous people and those suffering from caste discrimination, victims of trafficking, victims of torture. (Not included are activities in the context of a peacekeeping operation nor for ending violence against women and girls.)
3. Aid for 'ending violence against women and girls' is reported under code 15180. This covers support to programmes designed to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls/gender-based violence. This encompasses a broad range of forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence including but not limited to: intimate partner violence (domestic violence); sexual violence; female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); child, early and forced marriage; acid throwing; honour killings; and trafficking of women and girls. Prevention activities

10 See: <https://development-finance-codelists.oecd.org/Codeslist.aspx>

may include efforts to empower women and girls; change attitudes, norms and behaviour; adopt and enact legal reforms; and strengthen implementation of laws and policies on ending violence against women and girls, including through strengthening institutional capacity. It also covers interventions to respond to violence against women and girls/gender-based violence, which may include expanding access to services including legal assistance, psychosocial counselling and healthcare; training personnel to respond more effectively to the needs of survivors; and ensuring investigation, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of violence.



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