



**The Asia Foundation**



## USAID LEGAL AID SUPPORT

USAID Legal Aid Support, a seven-year program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by the Asia Foundation, helps Laos promote the rule of law through fairer, more consistent, and more transparent delivery of justice according to the law – inclusive of women, the poor and traditionally underserved populations.

Challenges persist for Lao citizens to access justice, especially for women and other historically marginalized groups, such as ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI individuals, and victims of trafficking in persons and gender-based violence. Legal knowledge and confidence to resolve disputes or protect their rights remains low. In the quest for justice, it can also prove challenging to resolve disputes through mediation, arbitration, administrative applications and hearings, or formal litigation before the courts and petitions. Moreover, there are a limited number of legal professionals to provide necessary services; only nine percent of Laos' 372 registered lawyers currently provide legal aid. USAID partners with Laos to promote basic understanding of rights and obligations and to provide people with practical guidance on what support is available when their rights are threatened or violated.

### IMPROVING THE LEGAL AID ENVIRONMENT

USAID works with the Government of Laos to improve the country's legal aid system by training legal aid providers at the central and provincial levels, supporting legal aid services and assisting with budget advocacy to ensure that such services are sustained.

The USAID Legal Aid Support program:

- Assists the Ministry of Justice, Lao Bar Association and Non-Profit Associations to strengthen and expand the network of legal aid providers to respond to the diverse needs of marginalized populations with timely and quality legal assistance
- Advances legal access and rights of people in Laos
- Increases sensitivity to women's rights and empowerment of marginalized populations in

law-related professions.

Under Lao PDR law, legal aid includes the following services: the provision of information (explaining what the law says), legal consultation (providing advice about how the law applies in a particular situation), assistance in preparing legal documents (such as a contract or a will) and representation during litigation or representing a person in a specific case.

## IMPACTS AND RESULTS

- In 2022, USAID assisted the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Lao Bar Association (LBA) to nearly triple the country's number of legal aid offices - from just above 50 to 150. This support has substantially increased the provision of free legal services in the form of advice, information provision, documentation, and representation to those most vulnerable to exploitation. The number of cases from marginalized communities who received legal aid counsel increased from 71 in 2019 to 552 in 2021, approximately eight-fold.
- The program set up the new Legal Aid Webpage, as part of MOJ's official website, to provide information on types of legal aid services available as well as contact information of all legal aid offices. Since 2019, USAID also assisted to produce posters and brochures on legal aid, violence against women and children, human trafficking, and notary services, as well as 15 short films, produced through video competitions on legal aid and MOJ's services. Providing legal information helps the public, including people in rural communities to have a better understanding of the law and their rights, thereby increasing access to justice.
- Since 2019, the program has assisted 45 female law graduates to complete their professional legal skills training course through scholarships and stipends, to pursue careers as judges, prosecutors, and lawyers. This will contribute to increasing greater representation of women in the legal and justice related professions and improve legal outcomes for women.
- USAID engaged over 300 law students at the National University of Laos and the University of Champasak in Clinical Legal Education where they conducted community legal teachings, street law clinics with high school students, and villages, and participated in five local mock trials and three regional mock trials. This helps law students understand the importance of basic legal concepts such as the right to a fair trial, the application of the rule of law and the transparent delivery of justice in Laos.
- Through partnering with the Association for the Development of Women and Legal Education (ADWLE), the program conducted mobile legal clinics and provided legal information on combating violence against women and children, the law on gender equality and the law on anti-human trafficking to over 500 villagers (over 250 women) in 10 target villages in Vientiane Capital. In 2021, ADWLE also started reaching out to women working in factories to ensure their awareness of legal rights especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**PARTNER:** USAID partners with The Asia Foundation to strengthen the rule of law in Laos through enhancing access to justice and improving the quality of the legal aid system.

For more information visit [www.usaid.gov/laos](http://www.usaid.gov/laos) or contact [laosinfo@usaid.gov](mailto:laosinfo@usaid.gov)