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Support to Justice Sector Project

Support to Justice Sector Project (JURE) Annual Report 2024



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|---|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| ADR | Alternative Dispute Resolution |
| BASL | Bar Association of Sri Lanka |
| CBO | Community Based Organisation |
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CELP | Centre for Environmental Law and Policy |
| CIABOC | Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption |
| CLE | Continuous Legal Education |
| CLS | Colombo Law Society |
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| CSHR | Centre for the Study of Human Rights |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| CYPO | Children and Young Persons Ordinance |
| DPCCS | Department of Probation and Child Care Services |
| EEJ | Efficient and Effective Justice |
| EU | European Union |
| GAD | Government Analyst's Department |
| GDA | Governance Diagnosis Report |
| HRCSL | Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| J4C | Justice for Children |
| JMO | Judicial Medical Officers |
| JURE | The Support to Justice Sector Project |
| LAC | Legal Aid Commission |
| LHRD | Lawyers for Human Rights and Development |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| MOJ | Ministry of Justice |
| NCPA | National Child Protection Authority |
| NAPVCW | The National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses |
| NISD | National Institute of Social Development |
| NPC | National Police Commission |
| OIC | Officer in Charge |
| PDM | Public Defenders Mechanism |
| PWD | Persons with disabilities |

| | |
|--------|--|
| RRU | Rapid Response Unit |
| RTIC | Right to Information Commission |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SGBV | Sexual and Gender-Based Violence |
| SLAPSW | Sri Lanka Association of Professional Social Workers |
| SLWLA | Sri Lanka Women Lawyers' Association |
| SLJI | Sri Lanka Judges' Institute |
| SMS | Student Management System |
| SSW | Social Service Workforce |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCAC | United Nations Convention against Corruption |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNDG | United Nations Development Group |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| USAID | The United States Agency for International Development |
| WIN | Women In Need |

Project Summary

| | |
|---|---|
| Project Title | Support to Justice Sector Project (JURE) / JP “EU-Sri Lanka Justice Reform Programme (JURE) |
| Duration | January 2022 – May 2026 |
| Reporting Period | January to December 2024 |
| Location | Sri Lanka |
| Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) | SDG 5, 10, 16 and 17 |
| Participating UN Agencies | UNDP and UNICEF |
| Overall Budget | USD 19,422,120.00 |
| 2024 Budget: | USD 4,596,769 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024, the Support to Justice Sector Project (JURE) continued making progress to foster an equitable, efficient and inclusive justice system in Sri Lanka. UNDP and UNICEF reinforced their collaborative commitments with partners in prioritizing access to justice, accountability and transparency while addressing systemic inefficiencies and corruption vulnerabilities.

Law and policy reforms being a key focus area for the JURE. In 2024, the project provided support to develop /amend five laws including the Victims Protection Act, the Act giving effect to Singapore Convention on Mediation, the bill on Civil and Commercial Dispute Resolution using Mediation, an Amendment to the Mediation Board Act to make diversion available to more children by raising the financial margin for eligible offences, and the Amendment to the Children and Young Persons Ordinance (CYPO) that extends certain protections of the Ordinance previously available only under 16-year-olds to all children under the age of 18.

UNICEF's advocacy led to new policy commitments from the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in November 2024: with the four transformative international pledges made by the GoSL to address violence against children, Sri Lanka will address a range of legislative steps, focusing on workforce strengthening, model and scale up child-friendly services for victims and focus on violence prevention and response in education settings.

Enhancing service delivery and improving understanding of the communities is one of the key areas that JURE is focusing on. During 2024, JURE reached out to **16,111 community members** (9,655 women, 5,392 men, 1,194 did not specify gender) through community level legal awareness and legal assistance programs and an additional 4,611 individuals (2,216 women, 2,395 men) received legal aid.

Building capacity of the justice sector personnel is at the heart of JURE project. During the year, the project has built capacity of **4,932 personnel (1,754 women, 3,178 men)** to enhance integrity, judicial efficiency, victims' protection and institutional coordination across key justice sector entities. As anticorruption continues one of the key priorities for the GoSL, with the CIABOC, JURE trained **2,636 personnel (928 women, 1,708 men)** including public office holders, legal officers, integrity officers, investigation officers, community police officers, and statutory board members.

UNICEF trained 104 Magistrate and District Court Judges (49 women, 55 men) on child protection and child-friendly justice services. In collaboration with the Attorney General's Department (AGD), UNICEF trained 104 (59 women, 45 men) state prosecutors and Attorneys-at-Law of the CH Unit. A milestone for UNICEF was entering in partnership with the UN Peacekeeping Mission Training Centre at Kukuleganga resulting in training of 81 officers (36 women, 445 men) of the Sri Lanka Army and Air Force on child protection in armed conflict.

Digitization and innovations remained central to JURE project. In collaboration with the MOJ and Judicial Service Commission (JSC), UNDP completed a Rapid Digital Strategy (RDS). The strategy received approval of the MOJ and JSC. In order to ensure smooth implementation of the strategy, a technical committee was constituted by the MOJ.

During the year, UNDP has laid the groundwork for a centralized data collection and management system (called the Justice Snapshot) across the key justice institutions, enabling evidence-based decision and policy formulation. In follow up of the technical assessment mission, a data snapshot technical committee was constituted to guide the implementation.

In order to streamline data related to children, UNICEF strengthened the administrative **data collection systems** of the MOJ, Department of Probation and Childcare Services (DPCS) and Sri Lanka Police. UNICEF developed indicators, with age, gender, disability and other disaggregation options have been agreed on and work on fine-tuning data collection formats is ongoing. The indicators will enable GoSL to meaningfully track progress of system's performance in relation to children in conflict with the law, child victims and children in need of care and protection.

During 2024, the project Mid Term Evaluation (MTE) exercise was initiated. Despite challenges such as the two major elections, the evaluation team successfully completed data collections and shared findings and draft report for review. The draft report identifies areas for improvement including the project logframe with clear, gender responsive and measurable indicators, building synergies with other donors' funded projects to avoid duplication, improving coordination with the development partners, and improving financial management amongst other. UN Agencies will make their joint plan to implement the recommendations of the MTE report.

2024 was not without **challenges**. Sri Lanka witnessed two major elections, which slowed down the project implementation. UN Agencies on the EU and MOJ's directions undertook an excessive exercise to align the project with the IMF GDA, GoSI/ MOJ priorities, and EU ROM report recommendations.

Going ahead, JURE will focus on improving coordination, advancing digital solutions, improve data collection, strengthen capacities of the institutions, and promoting new approaches for children in contact with the justice and protection systems and developing a unified, inter-agency reform strategy for child justice will be explored.

PROGRESS

OUTCOME 1: IMPROVED ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL, IN PARTICULAR WOMEN, THE POOR AND PERSONS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Outcome 1 focuses on transformation of the legal aid system in Sri Lanka to ensure easy access for all, particularly the most vulnerable segments, such as persons representing gender minorities, children, and persons with disabilities. The Outcome also focuses on enhancing understanding and knowledge of public and office holders on the national laws through strengthening the translation of laws from English to the local languages. Keeping people at the center of justice, being the ultimate objective of the Outcome to raise legal awareness and inexpensive and speedy justice services.

Output 1.1. Efficient and accessible legal aid including legal representation for vulnerable communities (including women, IDPs, PwDs, children)

The existing legal aid system of Sri Lanka has been under immense pressure to meet and respond to the growing needs of the island this is because of multiple reasons, including shortage of funding provided to the LAC to cater the growing needs of the people of Sri Lanka, particularly from the perspective that during the Covid pandemic earning opportunities shrined and a subsequent collapse of the country's economy pushed more than four million people (31 percent of the island population) below the poverty line. Loss of means of income and unprecedented inflation have compelled approximately 27 percent of the adult population of Sri Lanka to reduce their own meals to feed their children.¹ Heinous crimes like rape cases against women, girls and boys have seen a rise. In 2023, approximately 1,502 girls were reportedly raped in Sri Lanka out of whom 167 of them got pregnant.² Due to increased pressure on the families because of low income and ineffective implementation of laws, poor law enforcement, protracted judicial system and poor reporting system, there is a continuous rise in incidents of domestic violence. It is said that approximately 17.4 percent of the Sri Lankan women in partnership are subjected to physical and sexual violence and 7.2 percent violence from anyone else.³ As the Sri Lankan economy has been shaken by the Covid-19 pandemic, along with other factors, i.e., growing corruption, lack of accountability, and transparency that increased the already difficult condition due to slow growth rates and substantial financial strains. The economic pressure on families has intensified domestic tension and heightened domestic violence in Sri Lankan as the country has lost over half a million jobs in a period of two years (2021 and 2022). As of 2019, 31 percent of Sri Lankan population has slipped below the poverty line that has increased the need and demand for a responsive, swift and easily accessible legal aid services in the country.

¹ <https://economynext.com/sri-lankas-population-in-poverty-surges-to-31-pct-of-population-lirneasia-survey-122930/>

² <https://economynext.com/sri-lankas-population-in-poverty-surges-to-31-pct-of-population-lirneasia-survey-122930/>

³ <https://groundviews.org/2024/02/16/sex-education-and-stronger-justice-system-can-prevent-child-rape/#:~:text=In%202023%2C%201%2C502%20girl%20children,of%20them%20167%20became%20pregnant.>

https://www.defence.lk/Article/view_article/27532

The existing legal aid model in Sri Lanka is reliant on the government funding but keeping in view of ongoing financial constraints faced by Sri Lanka, it is important to think out of the box by trying some innovative solutions and exploration of multiple options, i.e., pro bono and low bono legal assistance provided by lawyers, bringing other existing and potential legal aid providers, including civil society organizations, law students, and paralegals, UN Agencies, INGOs, private sector and philanthropists under the overall umbrella of LAC and by enhancing coordination among the legal aid providers, development partners, and concerned government institutions.

Output 1.1 contributes to the improvement of legal aid network coordination; educating the public on their legal rights and responsibilities; understanding the legal aid sector, including child-friendly legal aid, through studies and assessments of sector institutions and international best practices, with enhanced focus on women, PWDs, and children.

The Output has six key activities conducted under the broader umbrella of accessibility and representation with each one bringing together two sub-activities under them, leading to a total 12 sub-activities under this Output. These activities are carried out in collaboration with the justice sector institutions including BASL, DCB, LAC, MoJ, MWCASE, WIN, and SLWLA and overall guidance of a JURE Project Steering Committee (PSC).

As a result of the project's efforts in 2024, more than **16,175 individuals** (9,565 women, 5,352 men, 1,258 individuals were recorded without gender specification) legal awareness at the community level gained access to the essential legal aid and legal awareness, enabling them to better navigate the justice system and assert their rights. Through this intervention efforts were made to enhance people's ability to access and seek redressal, fostering greater equity and inclusion within their communities. In collaboration with the LAC, the project enhanced access to justice for 237 individuals (156 women, 81 men) belong to the indigenous communities. The output contributed to an increase in the public awareness of their legal rights and responsibilities, with a particular focus on women, PWDs and children through enhanced legal aid outreach. Additionally, studies and assessments of sector institutions and international best practices informed the development of child-friendly legal aid services and innovative approaches to maximize the use of limited resources.

In partnership with WIN, **5,445 individuals (5,016 women, 429 men including 59 children)** received counselling and legal support, enabling them to navigate legal systems effectively and advocate for their rights. Part of this, 280 (278 women, 2 men) Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) victim survivors accessed legal aid for the first time and 2,693 women continued receiving legal aid services. Under the project, 2,323 women continued receiving counselling and 934 women sought SGBV counselling services approaching WIN's regional crisis centers for the first time. A considerable number of victim survivors were referred to WIN from hospitals, police stations, LAC, and WIN watch groups, highlighting the organization's collaboration with justice sector institutions. WIN also provided support for survivors of SGBV by connecting them with government services, including legal aid, medical care, counseling, through linkages with the courts, police, Women and Child Help Desks, hospitals, and the LAC.

Activity 1.1.1. Enhance the capacity and scope of the LAC, BASL and other legal aid service providers for efficient and efficacious legal aid services. (UNDP)

This activity, comprising two sub- activities, was partially achieved during the reporting period. The planned sub- activities add strategic value to Outcome 1 by strengthening the capacity of the legal aid services across the country and fostering improved coordination amongst legal aid stakeholders – both crucial in improving access to justice for all. These efforts have laid the groundwork for effective and collaborative use of resources, leveraging the unique expertise of diverse stakeholders.

Sub-Activity 1.1.1.1 Establish periodic coordination amongst legal aid service providers to capitalize on services provided to the public based on the findings of the legal aid service providers mapping and capacity assessment.

In partnership with the LAC, 237 individuals (156 women, 81 men) from indigenous communities' knowledge and access to justice enhanced through legal aid clinics and legal awareness sessions in Dalukana, Polonnaruwa and Dambana, Mahiyanganaya, provided critical legal education on child protection, family and land law, and everyday legal matters, and concluded with legal aid clinics offering personalized legal advice. Key legal issues addressed included land disputes, marriage breakdowns, lack of birth certificates, and limited access to mediation, and empowered participants with knowledge and support to navigate these challenges.

UNDP's support to the LAC resulted in improved legal representation for 62 men in the Magistrate's Courts and three men in the High Court.

Furthermore, LAC provided awareness across multiple groups enabling the access to justice for the vulnerable persons, reaching a total of **5,112 participants (3,449 women, 1,539 men)**. This included 197 Vocational Training Authority (VTA) students (133 women, 64 men), 3,395 members of the public (909 women, 2,296 men), 522 students (207 women, 315 men), and 998 government officials (290 women, 704 men). These awarenesses aimed to enhance legal awareness, access to justice, and legal literacy among diverse stakeholders.

Sub-Activity 1.1.1.2 Based on the findings of the legal aid service providers mapping and capacity assessment, support targeted capacity development initiatives.

The findings of the legal aid service providers mapping and capacity assessment, conducted in 2023, will be incorporated in the National Policy and Strategic Action Plan on Legal Aid, which is currently under review by the MOJ. Further details are provided under the relevant sub activity.

Activity 1.1.2 Operationalize the Cabinet-approved National Policy and Strategic Action Plan on Legal Aid (UNDP)

During the period, JURE explored innovative solutions to resolve the growing needs for legal aid by diversifying legal aid services and expanding legal aid providers' net. JURE closely coordinated with the MOJ and LAC, ensuring efficient resource use and addressing systemic gaps.

Sub-activity 1.1.2.1 Support the updating of the Cabinet-approved National Legal Aid Policy and Strategic Action Plan in collaboration with MOJ, BASL and LAC

In 2024, UNDP with UNICEF facilitated discussions on revising Sri Lanka's Legal Aid Policy, bringing together the MOJ and LAC. This effort led to the appointment of a committee by the MoJ, chaired by the LAC Chairman, to spearhead the policy revision process. Although the process was delayed due to a change in government, the project team ensured that relevant authorities were briefed, laying the groundwork for the initiative to resume under the new MOJ leadership. The project is liaising with the MOJ to integrate the findings of the Gender Capacity Assessments of selected institutions; Legal Aid Stakeholder Mapping and Capacity Assessment; and the Assigned Counsel Study done in 2023, to align the policy with international best practices with respect to local nuances.

Sub-activity 1.1.2.2 Support the Ministry of Justice and Legal Aid Commission to organize the launch of the Policy and the Action Plan and its operationalization.

Sub Activity 1.1.2.1. is dependent on the completion of revision of the National Policy and Strategic Action Plan on Legal Aid. The launch event will be organized after approval of the policy.

Activity 1.1.2 a) Provide technical support to the LAC to strengthen access to child-friendly legal aid. (UNICEF)

During the reporting period, the Project's advocacy with the LAC led to key advancements in child-sensitive legal aid. LAC issued details of legal aid officials to provincial probation commissions to enhance referrals for children in need and initiated steps to develop a comprehensive framework, including child-friendly guidelines, and improved information provision, laying the foundation for systematic legal aid for children.

Sub-activity 1.1.2.(a) 1. Hold discussions with the Legal Aid Commission (LAC) of Sri Lanka to update existing practices, coordination and referral mechanisms on child-friendly legal aid. (UNICEF)

The LAC has increasingly recognized its mandate towards the provision of legal aid for children, who come into contact with the law, and the need for child-sensitive approaches. The project's continued advocacy efforts with the leadership of LAC during the reporting period contributed to two strategic interventions. Firstly, LAC issued details of legal aid officials to all provincial probation commissions through the DPCCS, aiming to increase the referrals of children in need of legal aid to LAC, in line with the legislative provisions on free legal aid for all children. Secondly, in consultation with LAC, the project conceptualized an outline for a comprehensive framework to expand child-friendly legal aid. This includes the development of guidelines on child-friendly legal aid, training curriculum for LAC and other legal professionals to a comprehensive information provision on legal aid for children in contact with the law.

Sub-activity 1.1.2.(a)2. Issuance of Circular/letter by Legal Aid Commission to National Probation Commissioner details of LAC offices indicating provision of LA by LAC Lawyers to children. (UNICEF)

Following the directive/letter received from LAC, the DPCCS issued the letter/circular mentioned above 1.1.2.(a) 1 in June 2024. The ongoing JURE intervention (Outcome 2.1) that supports DPCCS to accurately track referrals to legal aid (and other support services) will enable assessing the impact of these referrals in the years to come. The 2024 data by

the LAC indicates that **24,203 children (17,325 girls and 6,878 boys)** were supported with legal aid, as compared to **18,864 cases** supported during the previous year.

Sub-activity 1.1.2.(a)3. *Training of relevant lawyers (first batch - 40 Nos] associated with LAC on laws related to children, child psychological aspects and delivering child-friendly legal aid. (UNICEF)*

This activity did not take place this year. In November 2024, UNICEF agreed with LAC to develop a sustainable training programme, invest in training of LAC trainers, and link it with the overall specialization concept for justice professionals in the next year of the project.

Activity 1.1.3 Improve and strengthen “Assigned Counsel System” in High Courts and Magistrate’s Courts and improve the knowledge and capacity of lawyers especially those working on pro-bono cases. (UNDP)

Under the Sri Lanka Assigned Counsel System, on the request of an accused, the State shall provide an attorney-at-law for his/ her defense. This ensures that no accused person goes unrepresented in a criminal trial. However, there is limited documentation on the functioning of the Assigned Counsel System, even though Section 195 and 353 of the Code of Criminal Procedure provides for this in the High Court and the Court of Appeal. The activity is part of the overall inclusivity of the criminal justice system, where accused persons should have access to counsel. This activity contributes to Outcome 1 by enhancing access to justice and promoting inclusivity in the criminal justice system and the right to a fair trial. As part of the project, the Assigned Counsel System and Public Defenders were assessed and insights from these studies will inform the MOJ’s ongoing efforts to revise the National Policy on Legal Aid, ensuring a more strategic and effective approach.

This activity adds strategic value to the overall outcome as an internationally accepted method of strengthening free legal aid. As the MOJ is revising the National Policy on Legal Aid, incorporating the learnings from this assessment will improve the strategic approach to state-led legal aid. This activity is partially completed. Specific details are mentioned under the sub activities.

Sub-activity 1.1.3.1 *Complete the study on the Assigned Counsel System with stakeholder discussions and comparative analysis to identify recommendations for Sri Lanka.*

This activity was completed in 2023. The Assigned Counsel System Study has been shared with the Annual Progress Report 2023. The key findings of this study will be incorporated in the revised National Legal Aid Policy intended to be completed in 2025.

Sub-activity 1.1.3.2 *Support the relevant sector stakeholders to implement selected findings of the two studies on criminal legal aid - (i.e. Public Defender Mechanism, conducted last year, and Assigned Counsel System).*

As mentioned under 1.1.3.1, the key findings and recommendations of the Assigned Counsel System Study will be considered during revision of the National Action Plan on Legal Aid. The

project team has been actively engaging with the MoJ to expedite the revision process expected to be completed in 2025.

Activity 1.1.4 Enhance sensitivity and responsiveness, by training of 'first point of contact' individuals, such as JMOs, police officers, other similar professionals, especially when assisting girls and women victims of violence. (UNDP)

The first responders are the first point of contact for the victims of crime in a criminal justice system. In Sri Lanka, the judicial medical officers, development officers such as social service workers, child protection officers, child rights officers, counsellors, counselling assistants, women development officers, child rights promotion officers and police are the first responders. As violence, including gender-based violence, is a regular phenomenon in Sri Lanka, strengthening the capacity of first responders will improve conditions, including safety and services for the victims in general and vulnerable persons, including women, children, transgenders, persons with disabilities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) community, in particular. This aims to enhance sensitivity and responsiveness of the first responders by building their capacity on laws, counseling, and referral to legal aid and necessary medico legal and social services available for Sexual and SGBV survivors.

The outcome of this activity is to ensure that SGBV survivors have access to legal aid, medicolegal and other social services. This activity adds strategic value to the overall Outcome 1 as it is crucial that sensitivity and responsiveness of these individuals are enhanced, enabling the victims to share their issues openly and without fear. As a result, their rights could be ultimately vindicated.

During the reporting period, the project's efforts in collaboration with WIN resulted in raising legal awareness and supporting local community leaders to combat SGBV. The project empowered 278 local community women leaders by training them representing all nine provinces. These sessions helped the participants increase their knowledge of legal frameworks related to SGBV and referral pathways for accessing remedies. These women leaders, many of whom hold significant roles within women's rights organization in rural areas, were equipped to serve as master trainers to disseminate this vital knowledge to their communities and to support their communities. A key output of this activity was the development of a training manual tailored to the needs of community leaders, ensuring the sustainability of these efforts.

Sub-activity 1.1.4.1 Implementation of key recommendations of the Gender Gap Analysis of the Police Force.

This activity is intended to provide the police with gender sensitivity related skills when responding to victims, as the police force is a key first-point-of-contact in the criminal justice sector. Initial conversations were held with the National Police Commission to identify specific areas for potential support, however, due to the prevailing socio-political uncertainty, this activity was not implemented in 2024. Under the 2025 annual work plan, this activity will be considered under UNDP's overall collaboration with the Police Department.

Sub-activity 1.1.4.2 Roll out of the paralegal training at national and sub-national level among WDOs and Counseling Assts to initiate legal clinics and identify SGBV survivors.

This activity is strategically significant as Women Development Officers (WDOs) and Counsellors, Counselling Assistants, and Child Protection Officers are key first responders in situations related to crimes. It is crucial that they have basic legal knowledge to understand where to channel cases as relevant. If not for this training, there is leeway for the victims to be referred to institutions that cannot provide the required support, leading to delays in solutions and mistrust of public institutions providing justice services.

Note: The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Activity 1.1.5. Develop sustainable mechanisms to provide for legal protection of economic and property rights of vulnerable communities and women, including legal protection from predatory lending. (UNDP)

In Sri Lanka, it has become a popular and commonplace practice to pledge immovable property, such as agricultural and residential property, as security for short term financial needs, at high interest rates. To avoid the long court procedure, a 'Deed of Transfer' simply transfers ownership of the property in favour of the creditor if/ when the debt is in default. Finally, when it is not possible to repay the loans within the agreed time, there have been instances of suicide attempts, especially with regards to women mainly in rural households, as financial decisionmakers.⁴ Most debtors with financial difficulties have no access to proper legal advice or legal representation, therefore, sustainable mechanisms are necessary for the legal protection of vulnerable communities. This activity was designed to strategically address the absence of effective legal safeguards and improve access to justice under Outcome 1, protecting economic and property rights of marginalized communities.

In Sri Lanka DCB is the only entity addressing debt related issues attached to land, aims to offer relief arrangements for the repayment of loans involving immovable property, along with facilitating recovery of such property through negotiations, such as installment payments and negotiated rates. Sub-activities under this provide strategic value to Outcome 1 by protecting economic and property rights of vulnerable populations. Despite the fact that DCB was established in 1941, a platform for conciliation to resolve debt related disputes in Sri Lanka with a core function to provide relief for debtors to recover immovable property mortgaged as a security to meet their urgent financing needs. However, people are largely unaware of the services offered by the DCB mainly because of financial and human resources constraints with just three regional branches in Galle, Gampaha and Kurunegala. Activity 1.1.5 was partially completed due to the reasons outlined in the sub activities.

In 2024, the Project built on the findings of the 2023 DCB capacity needs assessment by prioritizing three key areas: developing case management software, revising regulations with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to streamline operations, and finalizing a communication strategy to enhance public awareness of DCB services. A technical committee comprising MOJ officials, judges, and legal experts was established to guide these initiatives, ensuring efficient and transparent dispute resolution processes while improving

⁴ Sri Lanka's rural women caught in debt trap with no end in sight accessed via [Sri Lanka's rural women caught in debt trap with no end in sight - ABC Asia](#)

service accessibility and public trust in DCB. Furthermore, a communications strategy has been developed to improve public awareness of DCB services.

Sub-activity 1.1.5.1 Conduct capacity needs assessment of the Debt Conciliation Board.

The DCB study / capacity needs assessment was completed in 2023. The study report highlighted key capacity gaps identified, such as lack of training and supervision of the members of DCB, lack of expertise in debt restructuring, failure to give prominence to core skills needed in conciliation of the proceedings, representation by lawyers, etc.

Sub-activity 1.1.5.2 Based on the findings of the assessment, provide support to the Debt Conciliation Board to enhance capacity.

The project held a series of discussions in 2024, including with members of the DCB, a supreme court judge, and MOJ officials on enhancing the operational procedure of DCB based on the assessment. Following which three areas were prioritized for implementation by DCB:

- Development of software for DCB to keep track of the cases, collect data and online application to improve service delivery; and
- Revise DCB regulations/ procedures and develop SOPs to improve efficiency to standardize procedures resulting in a predictable, faster, fairer and a user-friendly debt resolution process; and iii) Develop a communication plan to improve public awareness of DCB.

The project established a technical/ working committee consisting of the MOJ and key stakeholders such as judges and local experts having expertise in mediation techniques. This committee has been tasked to propose procedural, functional and policy changes in the overall legal and operational framework of the DCB, enabling the DCB to provide services efficiently and establish a mechanism to provide regular progress updates of cases and necessary monitoring information. This committee will help draft SOPs to enhance dispute resolution mechanisms, ensuring DCB's operations are efficient, transparent, and widely recognized. The timeline for the committee to complete these tasks is set in 2025.

As part of the three recommendations, the project developed a communication strategy and action plan for DCB in 2024, which was finalized and approved by stakeholders. The communication strategy aims to improve the understanding and awareness of DCB services among government agencies and the public. This will support better interagency coordination and provide the public with practical information on accessing DCB's resources.

Output 1.2. Equal Access to Justice strengthened including through language mainstreaming across the justice sector (through improved translation/ interpretation capacities)

In Sri Lanka, laws are written in English and translated into Sinhala and Tamil, but due to complex legal terminology and language barriers, public legal literacy and knowledge of legal support mechanism remain low. The country has struggled to establish an efficient translation

system, resulting in delays that prevent people, particularly those who are literate in their native language only, from accessing and understanding the newly enacted laws.

Output 1.2 has three activities under its purview, consisting of nine sub-activities. Out of these, all sub-activities are under way except 1.2.1.1 and 1.2.1.4, and reasons are provided below.

Activity 1.2.1. Enhance capacity for legislative drafting, translation, consolidation and simplification of laws and set up a sustainable mechanism that facilitates (real time) public access (including online) to laws and subsidiary legislation. (UNDP)

Activity 1.2.1 focuses on the demand side and supply side of the justice sector. The overall objective of this activity is to enhance knowledge and understanding of the public and capacity building of the personnel of justice sector institutions on the newly enacted laws and amendments in the existing laws. The main intention was to introduce software solutions for translation for the first draft of translations of legislations from English to local languages.

This activity was discontinued due to the reluctance on part of the Legal Draftsman Department and to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report. Also, instead of development of translation software, cheaper and faster AI solutions are in the market that can be utilized for the first draft translation.

In 2023, UNDP completed simplification of selected 30 laws in local languages, presented in a consultative workshop in 2024, however following suggestions received from the experts during the workshop, a national media partner was engaged to develop innovative media and communication tools and technologies to raise awareness on these selected laws. The partner will start awareness campaigns in 2025.

In 2024, UNDP has also completed the compilation of Legislative Enactments from 2019 to 2023 and made accessible to legal professionals, addressing a critical gap and supporting uninterrupted judicial processes.

Sub-activity 1.2.1.1 In collaboration with the University of Moratuwa, operationalize a customized translation software for the Legal Draftsman's Office to expedite translation of Bills. (UNDP)

The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 1.2.1.2 Simplification of selected key legislation/ legislative enactments and key provisions of selected laws (including Penal Code, the Consumer Affairs Act, Domestic Violence Act, Companies Act, National Environmental Act).

As mentioned above, the project organized a consultative workshop inviting key justice sector stakeholders on the selected 30 laws. Following suggestions received from the experts, UNDP engaged a communication partner to develop low-cost innovative communication tools

and techniques including expert-led podcasts to enhance public awareness of these laws. The campaign was named "*Know Your Neethi*" developed in 2024 and will be launched in 2025.

Sub-activity 1.2.1.3 Updating the glossary.

The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 1.2.1.4 Conduct media campaign on selected laws, including on traditional media and social media (including on laws enacted in the past 6 months).

As mentioned, in 2024 UNDP designed "*Know Your Neethi*" campaign, which will be launched in 2025. The campaign will bridge the gap between legal frameworks and public understanding, using innovative approaches, including expert-led podcasts, to simplify and disseminate knowledge of key laws and provisions through social media platforms. The campaign test launch was carried out in late 2024 and full-scale implementation will commence in 2025.

Sub-activity 1.2.1.5 Support the setting up of the mechanism to print a supplement to the Legislative Enactments every five years and update and print Sri Lanka Law Reports

In collaboration with the MOJ, the Legislative Enactments from 2019 to 2023 were compiled and made available to lawyers and judges from January 2024. Legislative Enactments are used and referred by lawyers and judges in delivering justice. Prior to this intervention, legislative enactments from 2019 to 2023 were not available for legal professionals in printed form. Unrestricted access to these resources has supported access to uninterrupted court processes and contributed to the advancement of Outcome 1.

Activity 1.2.2. Improve interpretation and translation services at all stages of judicial proceedings (including through special translation units in Courts). (UNDP)

Throughout Outcome 1, language has been flagged as a main barrier impacting both the demand and supply sides of the justice system. A significant issue demonstrating the disconnected nature of the legal and judicial system is that the Magistrate Courts and District Courts conduct proceedings and write judgements in Sinhala, while the High Court and Supreme Court level in English. This requires litigants to translate court files into English, causing delays in filing of and processing appeals. To address this, the MOJ and Judicial Service Commission (JSC) were aiming to strengthen the translation unit, enabling free translations for all, especially vulnerable groups, ensuring timely access to justice and aligning with Outcome 1 of access to justice for all in a timely and efficient manner. The project supported building the capacity of the translation unit through the provision of equipment such as printers, scanners, etc. to aid the smooth operation of the unit and cut down on delays.

Sub-activities under 1.1.2 contribute to the overall strategic value of the project under outcome 1 ensuring better access to justice and overcoming language barriers in the process.

Sub-activity 1.2.2.1 Lay the groundwork to set up a Special Translations Unit in the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court, in collaboration with the MoJ, AC and SC.

As mentioned, delays in translations of judgements into local languages impact the time taken to carry out appeal procedures and related court processes. Such delays are a barrier to effective access to justice and can result in public distrust in judicial processes.

Recognizing the critical role language plays in securing justice, the project provided equipment to the existing translation unit to strengthen its capacity in 2024. The project supported building the capacity of the translation unit through the provision of equipment such as printers, scanners, etc. to aid the smooth operation of the unit and cut down on delays.

Sub-activity 1.2.2.2 Support the development of a language mainstreaming strategy, in consultation with justice sector stakeholders.

The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 1.2.2.3 Introduce Code of Conduct for ISD and Sworn Translators

This activity was concluded with the development of the ISD Manual. JURE did not proceed with the development of a Sworn Translator manual based on discussions with the donor and partners following the realignment of JURE in 2024.

Activity 1.2.2 a) Update and translate legal documents relevant for all children in contact with the law. (UNICEF)

UNICEF's engagement with stakeholders indicated that many existing lengthy technical documents are not meaningfully used by stakeholders. Furthermore, online tools are freely available for those interested in pursuing translations. Therefore, this activity was implemented with some adjustments during the year, to address the most pertinent translation needs. For instance, the project supported the translation of Concluding Observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports issued by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Sinhala and Tamil languages, since the non-availability of the document was identified as an hinderance to implementation by the HRC together with a few selected UN guiding principles that are essential for their training programme⁵.

Sub- Activity 1.2.2. (a). 2. Selection of 3-4 guidelines where stakeholders express commitment to implement among stakeholders

The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Output 1.3. Improved legal awareness amongst the public (especially vulnerable communities)

⁵ . General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child , Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure (2011)

Output 1.3 has two key activities conducted under its purview with a total of six sub-activities. Under activity 2, sub-activities 1.3.2.3 – 1.3.2.5 are ongoing, while sub-activities 1.3.2.1 and 1.3.2.2 have not been conducted due to reasons detailed below.

JURE with the collaboration of UOC held a legal aid camp, specifically to address issues faced by PwDs and the LGBTIQ community in accessing justice, with **29 persons (8 women, 21 men)** identified as PwDs receiving services. Participants accessed legal aid through the presence of lawyers to obtain legal advice pertaining to aspects such as land and family matters.

Activity 1.3.1 Conduct awareness-raising programmes on Justice for Children and the law in relation to young people and ensure its inclusion in curriculum reform. (UNICEF)

In 2024, HRC, with the project's support, partnered with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the National Institute of Education (NIE) to conduct two comprehensive human rights and child rights programmes for 35 curricula developers. As a follow-up, HRC advocated for incorporating human rights and child rights into ongoing education reforms and initiated the development of a “Guidebook on Human Rights and Child Rights” for curricula developers.

Sub-activity 1.3.1.1. Support HRC to develop manual/curricula on human rights and child rights for curricula developers of the National Institute of Education

Embedding human rights and child rights into the school curricula is gaining global momentum as one of the best approaches to improve awareness among children. Building on 2023 efforts, the HRC through the Project's support led an intervention aiming at introducing comprehensive human rights and child rights content for children through the formal education system.

Firstly, partnering with the MoE and NIE, HRC conducted two comprehensive programmes on human rights and child rights for Curricula Developers. The programme included 35 officials of the MoE: 17 Sinhala officials (10 female, 7 male) and 18 Tamil officials (5 female, 13 male). Following this initiative, HRC and the programme participants agreed to also produce a “Guidebook on Human Rights and Child Rights” for Curricula Developers.

Following the positive outcome of these programmes, HRC advocated with the Director General of the NIE and senior officials of the MOE to incorporate and mainstream human rights and child rights into the ongoing education reforms.

Sub-activity 1.3.1.2. Support the institutionalization of Child Protection as a Human Right for armed forces engaging in peace keeping operations. (UNICEF)

During the reporting period, UNICEF conducted four essential orientation sessions focused on child protection in conflict situations for officers of the Sri Lanka Army and Sri Lanka Air Force, who have been selected to participate in UN peacekeeping missions. A total of **481 officials (36 women and 445 men)** were trained during these sessions.

Activity 1.3.2. Improve the capacity and level of awareness of right holders (including vulnerable groups), CSOs (non-state organizations, think tanks, lawyers, law faculties and colleges and professional research institutions) involved in access to justice, defense of

human rights, children and women's rights; and support their dialogue with duty-bearers, including on environmental justice. (UNDP)

Lack of legal awareness continues to be a major challenge in the country, worsened by the enactment of new laws to respond to the changing socio-economic conditions. This activity aims to develop an engagement strategy for CSOs, addressing reluctance from some justice sector institutions to engage with CSOs, thereby providing a space for CSOs communication and collaboration. The second part of this activity is to enhance public knowledge of laws. The project, in collaboration with WIN, raised awareness about women's rights and laws among local women community leaders across 9 provinces, through a series of trainings from May to July 2024. This resulted in training of 278 women leaders from remote areas. The participants gained essential knowledge to assist vulnerable women and girls affected by SGBV. These women leaders will assist vulnerable women and girls affected by SGBV. A bilingual manual on laws and referral pathways for victim/survivors was used for the training of these women leaders. The training subjects covered counseling, legal aid, and medical support, ensuring a sustainable, community-driven approach to addressing SGBV. Moving forward, WIN will leverage these master trainers to conduct ripple-effect training for local communities, further amplifying the impact at the grassroots level.

The project enhanced access to justice by supporting CSHR and CELP at UOC in providing free legal advice on human rights and environmental law. A public hotline, regional coordination, legal aid clinics, and law students' engagement enabled **5,294 individuals (2,512 women and 2,781 men)** to receive legal aid by December 2024.

The Sri Lanka Law College (SLLC) began reforming its curriculum and digital infrastructure through the development of a Student Management System (SMS) and Learning Management System (LMS) to enable SLLC supply competent and trained lawyers/ legal experts to Sri Lanka and bring Sri Lanka legal profession on par with the international standards. The SMS and LMS and the Curriculum revising will be completed and launched in 2025.

Sub-activity 1.3.2.1 Support the development of a CSOs engagement strategy for the sector with input from the justice sector stakeholders to improve collaboration between CSOs and the sector.

The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 1.3.2.2 Support the implementation of selected initiatives of the CSO engagement strategy in collaboration with the justice sector stakeholders and CSOs.

The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 1.3.2.3 Conduct awareness raising campaigns (including media campaigns) on selected civil (including Small Claims Court), criminal (including Bribery Act) and commercial

laws (including arbitration) and remedial mechanisms collaborating with Ministry of Justice, Law Faculties, CIABOC, HRC.

This activity aims to enhance awareness of laws, through partnerships with the MOJ, Faculty of Law of UoC, CIABOC and HRC. During the reporting period, the CSHR, UOC held six radio programs and one TV program on increasing public awareness of selected laws mentioned above.

Sub-activity 1.3.2.4 Supporting the University of Jaffna, Peradeniya and Colombo to set up/strengthen Legal Aid Centre and the Clinical Legal training mechanism, environmental justice, improving mootting skills, legal English, specialized skills on analyzing case law and collaborating with UOJ to conduct research on selected areas of the law.

This sub-activity is directly relevant to the achievement of Outcome 1 as it seeks to strengthen academia who are key players in enhancing access to justice processes.

Strengthening the LAC at the Universities of Jaffna, Peradeniya, and Colombo directly improves access to justice for vulnerable individuals, enhances the capabilities of young lawyers, and boosts their research skills. This, in turn, enables them to develop creative and innovative solutions to the legal challenges faced by the public.

Environmental Justice:

JURE supported the LLM programme in **International Environment and Climate Change Law**. The programme was launched in November 2023 with a batch of 22 students. These students successfully completed their LLM on 20th December 2024, marking a significant milestone for this programme designed for both national and international graduate students.

The project advanced access to justice and legal empowerment by supporting the CSHR and the Centre for Environmental Law and Policy (CELP) at the UOC to offer free legal advice services on human rights and environment law related matters. Through the establishment of a free public hotline, enhanced regional coordination, and the engagement of law student interns, **5294 persons (2512 women and 2781 men)** benefited from legal consultations and aid camps by December 2024. These services were delivered through CSHR's Colombo-based center and its expanded provincial network, ensuring nationwide reach.

JURE's resources have been catalytic to broaden the vision of the UoC and strengthen their institutional capacity for sustained legal service delivery and further innovation. Furthermore, the integration of legal aid provision with clinical legal education benefitted **419 law students (345 women and 64 men)**, equipping them with practical skills and fostering a culture of pro bono legal service. These efforts not only directly addressed immediate legal needs but also strengthened long-term resilience by embedding legal awareness within communities. **115 law students (68 women and 47 men)** gained exposure to community legal education through facilitating 16 school legal awareness programmes benefitting **2446 secondary school students (1212 female and 1234 male)** as a mechanism to educate students aspiring to explore the legal arena.

The project achieved significant outcomes in environmental legal education and youth engagement. The CELP “*Green Road Trip*” continued its momentum increasing legal awareness among students, government officials and the public on environmental legal matters. Targeted workshops equipped **36 public officers (11 women, 25 men)** in the Eastern Province with knowledge and practical skills related to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), Environmental Protection Licenses (EPL), and public officers’ environmental duties. Delivered primarily in Tamil, the sessions were tailored to the region’s linguistic context. Youth engagement activities reached **52 students (30 girls, 22 boys)** from advanced-level classes, deepening their understanding of environmental laws, pollution, conservation, and biodiversity protection. Both groups received certificates, recognizing their participation and learning outcomes.

Supported by JURE, the first volume of **Environmental Law and Governance in Sri Lanka: Multidisciplinary Perspectives** has been edited and submitted for technical review in 2024, marking a significant step in documenting and disseminating multidisciplinary insights on environmental law.

The research publication, advocating for a regional agreement on the environmental protection, also progressed during the reporting period. Component 1 (Climate Change), translated into Sinhala and Tamil, underwent technical review by UNDP. Components 2 (Biodiversity) and Component 3 (Marine Protection) were initiated concurrently. Component 2 has been concluded research and in the review phase, while Component 3 is in its final review stage. On finalization, these research studies/articles will be shared with the EU.

Similarly, research on international crimes against future generations has progressed with the successful completion of research reports for both phase 1 and phase 2.

The 2024 International Conference on Environmental Justice provided a dynamic platform for interdisciplinary dialogue and intellectual exchange, featuring distinguished contributions from global institutions, including Jindal Global Law School (India), Lewis and Clark Law School (USA), and the University of Catania (Italy). The virtual conference engaged **88 participants (63 women, 25 men)**, fostering collaboration among academics, researchers, and law graduates to address pressing environmental justice issues.

Environmental justice activities were phased out in 2024 to align JURE with the IMF recommendations.

Human Rights:

UNDP supported institutional capacity building of the UOC, CSHR and the HRC to foster enhanced access to justice. CSHR provided technical assistance to the HRC, expediting case management for 11,026 individuals, which includes more than 50% of cases who sought recourse under Article 12 of the Constitution. This support has been discontinued. Additionally, 199 fundamental rights cases were summarized for integration into a digital database, enhancing accessibility for legal practitioners and students.

UNDP also supported a curriculum development for a Master's in **Business and Human Rights and Advanced Diploma in Human Rights and Gender**, and the finalized course outline was approved internally in 2024 and has been reshared with the UOC for finalization. UNDP, with the support from its Global Business and Human Rights Unit, reviewed the course and shared feedback with the UOC which will improve the course contents with a global B&HRs angle.

UNDP with UOC-CSHR had commenced development of a Higher Diploma Course on a Human Rights-based Approach to Prisons Administration and a Code of Ethics focusing on Human Rights and Gender Sensitivity for the Department of Prisons resulted in the development of preliminary activity outlines, however, the activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

The development of a database with important fundamental rights judgements for students, law journal subscription and the publishing of a law journal on access to human rights were phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 1.3.2.5 Support the development of Sri Lanka Law College Curriculum including Legal English and on latest ADR mechanisms, provide digital infrastructure including Learning Management Systems.

Stakeholder consultations, including with the Principal of SLLC, revealed longstanding deficiencies in the curriculum, teaching methods, and manual administrative processes, which lag international standards. To address these challenges, the Council of Legal Education, led by the Honorable Chief Justice of Sri Lanka Supreme Court, approved a threefold reform plan: curriculum revamp; digitalization of learning and teaching processes; and the introduction of a specialized legal English course.

After securing approval of the Board of Studies, a panel of experts was constituted by the Sri Lanka Law College in 2024 to build study guides for all subjects. The experts were divided into several sub-committees based on different disciplines of law. The sub-committees then formed the learning outcomes of each subject and prepared the study texts and lecture guides.

The project has engaged an international academic expert for a high-level vetting of the learning outcomes, study structure and study guides prepared. Nevertheless, due to the administration change during the last quarter of 2024, UNDP is closely engaged with the new administration on all activities.

The SLLC website was identified as outdated and a barrier to integrating future digital systems. In response, the project supported the successful revamp of the Law College website, launched in August 2024. The new website features user-friendly navigation, providing streamlined access to administrative, educational, and informational resources. It is designed to support future integration with the LMS and SMS, aligning with the project's

broader digitalization goals. SLLC staff received training to manage real-time updates, ensuring the website remains current with exam schedules, results, and notices, enhancing student engagement and experience and ensuring sustainability of the intervention. Preparations for developing the SMS and LMS are scheduled to begin in quarter one of 2025. Insights from user interactions with the revamped website will inform the design and functionality of these systems, ensuring they meet the needs of students and staff effectively. These outcomes mark significant progress in modernizing the digital infrastructure of SLLC, setting the foundation for improved administrative efficiency and enhanced student learning experiences.

OUTCOME 2: IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND CREDIBILITY OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Outcome 2 focuses on improving internal and external mechanisms to improve accountability, transparency, and credibility of the justice sector institutions in Sri Lanka. The Outcome aims to achieve these milestones through enhancing data collection and dissemination enabling the decision makers to make informed decisions, rationalize budget allocation, and blocking ways for corruption.

Output 2.1. Strengthened data collection, analysis and dissemination capacities of government institutions, sector professionals, CSOs, and other accountability organizations on justice sector performance for the public.

This Output significantly advances Outcome 2 by strengthening data collection, management, analysis, and dissemination across the justice sector, including police and prisons. Key achievements include the development of a communications strategy to enhance transparency and accountability and capacity-building for justice sector institutions and personnel, addressing critical gaps identified during project inception and subsequent assessments. The project collaborated closely with senior leadership and functional cadres to improve job-related skills, institutional service delivery, and foster internal and external accountability through digital solutions. These efforts align with the Sri Lanka's national priorities and IMF GDA for financial stabilization of Sri Lanka. Through fostering partnerships with development actors and ensuring coordination with complementary justice sector projects, this initiative avoids duplication and maximizes impact. Enhanced accountability and transparency contribute to institutional responsiveness, improved service delivery, and increased public trust in the justice system, supporting not only Outcome 2 but also broader governance and institutional outcomes.

Output 2.1 has three key activities under the broader umbrella of accountability, transparency, and credibility of the system. There are eight sub-activities under these. While the other sub-activities are underway, sub-activity 2.1.1.2, 2.1.1.3, and 2.1.3.1 have not been conducted during the reporting period, as outlined in the respective sections.

Activity 2.1.1. Capacity building of justice sector institutions to collect and analyze disaggregated data (including on gender-based violence and environmental justice) as well as to disseminate these data (public access and monitoring of statistics) (UNDP)

Mapping of data management practices and understanding the gaps and potential improvements is a key requirement to enhance transparency and accountability in the justice sector, which is linked to Outcome 2 of the project. This will lead to improved sector efficiency and enhance sharing of information in the public domain, contributing to increased trust.

*Activity 2.1.1. is partially completed as preliminary data mapping of selected justice sector institutions was completed, to be utilized as a basis for the development of the **Justice Sector Data Snapshot**. A scoping visit was carried out in 2024 by an international consultant. The findings of this visit were presented to the relevant justice sector stakeholders. A technical committee was constituted to guide the implementation of the Snapshot in 2025.*

Sub-activity 2.1.1.1 Complete the data mapping exercise covering the justice sector to understand existing data management processes, gaps, and potential improvements.

The Justice Snapshot, developed from the 2023 justice data mapping exercise, is a major JURE initiative to improve Sri Lanka's justice system through data-driven reforms. Key achievements include the appointment of a technical committee, facilitating collaboration between MoJ and Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) to begin conducting a Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping of judicial zones. The next steps include the development of dashboards to monitor performance. The activity will deliver an Action Matrix and Roadmap to address gaps in access, accountability, and efficiency.

In 2024 the International Consultant conducted a scoping visit to Sri Lanka and met with all the institutional partners namely MOJ, DCS, Police, Prisons, Judiciary, LAC and secured an institutional buy in for the snapshot process. The IC subsequently provided UNDP with a report based on the scoping study on how to proceed with the implementation of the snapshot in Sri Lanka.

With support from the MoJ, DCS, and other key institutions, the initiative focuses on sustainable reform by building institutional capacity. It strengthens transparency, accountability, and public trust, advancing SDG 16 data gathering.

The progress on starting to develop the software remained slow due to the delay in the appointment and convening of the technical committee to make key technical decisions and oversee the implementation of the software. UNDP has been requests to the MOJ to appoint the committee and convene meetings as soon as possible.

Sub-activity 2.1.1.2 Support Prisons Department to enhance prison related research.

Please refer to the outline in the Prison Management Information System (PMIS) under Sub-activity 3.3.7.2.

Sub-activity 2.1.1.3 Support the sector with SDG16 indicator tracking.

There is currently no systemized collection of data from the justice sector in correlation to SDG16 tracking and reporting. To better support SDG 16 indicator tracking, UNDP Regional Office Bangkok has been approached for technical support. The Justice Sector Snapshot

planned for 2025 will support the identification of capacities required for indicator tracking and provide an action plan for periodic tracking of the same.

Activity 2.1.1 a) Improve the collection, analysis and use of routine data on Justice for Children and undertake research on key J4C issues. (UNICEF)

Following the recognition and importance of data collection for justice for children from the GoSL, UNICEF has partnered with the Institute for Participatory Interaction in Development (IPID) to update data systems accordingly. Consultative workshops were conducted to develop a standard set of indicators and disaggregation criteria (including age, gender, disability status and other relevant categories) and review and enhance data collection formats used by respective agencies. Additionally, action research in the Western Province was completed, generating evidence and tools for effective reunification and case management of children in the justice system.

Sub-activity 2.1.1.(a).1. Provide technical support to the MOJ, Courts, Police and DPCCs to update their forms and data collection formats to collect at least 8 of the Juvenile Justice Indicators

The GoSL has increasingly recognized the importance of collecting data in relation to justice for children. UNICEF started the implementation of recommendations of the Assessment of Routine Data Collection Systems in relation to Justice for Children by reviewing and updating indicators and data collection tools of three selected justice sector institutions: the DPCCS, Sri Lanka Police and the MOJ. UNICEF contracted the Institute for IPID to provide expert support with updating data systems. With this partnership, UNICEF conducted consultative workshops with DPCCS (including national and provincial representatives) and the MOJ and agreed on a set of new indicators on justice for children, in line with international indicators. These indicators are aligned with the national reform efforts and the transformative objectives of the JURE project (e.g. Introduction of diversion practices, enhancing the use of legal aid, supporting the implementation of the alternative care reform) and will help effectively measure impact of reforms and interventions for children. Systematic and harmonized data across justice institutions on children in conflict with the law; children in need of care and protection and child victims will enable the GOSL to have a bigger picture of the justice sector interventions for children and pave the way for a more data-driven policy making, budget allocation and service design.

Additionally, the Action Research on Children Deprived of Liberty in the Western Province generated evidence and lessons learned for effective reunification of children in need of care and protection, victims, and offenders. This research also led to the development of tools and models for coordinated case management, ensuring DPCCS's coordinated work with the education sector, LAC and Sri Lanka Police.

Sub-activity 2.1.1.(a).2. Support the Police WCD connect and share information with INTERPOL Child Abuse and Justice databases.

UNICEF initiated a partnership with the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women of the Sri Lankan Police (BPACW) and INTERPOL to provide technical equipment to BPACW that would connect Sri Lanka to INTERPOL's global secure network - i24/7 and enable access to International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database. ICSE database is a powerful global intelligence and investigation tool, offering specialized investigators

worldwide instant access to data and tools for upload and analysis of seized Child Sexual Exploitation Material (CSEM). By connecting Sri Lanka to relevant global resources, UNICEF aims to further strengthen investigation capacity and data on child abuse for prevention and response purposes.

Activity 2.1.2. Enhance the criminological knowledgebase of the Sri Lanka Police through targeted research to promote evidence-based policy and reform. (UNDP)

*This activity aims to enhance the criminological knowledge base of the Sri Lankan Police by identifying key crime trends in collaboration with divisions such as the Crimes Division, CID, Crime Record Division, Women and Child Desks, and the Protection Division. The insights will inform the **National Sentencing Policy**, guide preventive measures, strengthen community policing, and improve early warning systems. By ensuring access to high-quality, inclusive data, the activity supports evidence-based policymaking, legal reform, and transparency within the justice sector. These efforts directly contribute to **Outcome 2**, promoting accountability, transparency, and credibility of a critical justice stakeholder.*

This activity is partially completed. Accordingly, the preliminary review of the existing mechanisms and gaps and the linkages with the justice sector data snapshot have been undertaken. In parallel, a Criminal Victimization Survey is ongoing to complement the work under this activity.

Sub-activity 2.1.2.1 Conduct capacity assessment of Sri Lanka Police (Criminal Records Division) and support to enhance institutional and individual capacities, including data management and related skills.

A preliminary review of the existing mechanism for data collection/analysis within the criminal records division was undertaken and the gaps in the existing (largely quantitative) model identified. Discussions were held with the Criminal Division (CD) and the Criminal Record Division (CRD) to identify the way forward in terms of incorporating international best practices on police data. The types of data (beyond what is traditionally collated) to be collected, analyzed and disseminated (for greater transparency) were also discussed including with the support of an international justice sector data expert. The linkages with the justice sector data snapshot (to be developed in 2024) were also identified.

The (island-wide) Criminal Victimization Survey was also rolled out (on going) by the National Victims and Witness Protection Authority, the Police Protection Division and Police CD and CRD. In 2024, comprehensive data processing, coding, and analytics were conducted as part of the Crime Victimization Survey, ensuring accurate and detailed insights to aid the final report compilation. The survey will contribute to enhance the criminological knowledgebase in Sri Lanka by strengthening qualitative analysis (transcending beyond the mere quantitative analysis conducted at present) and inform the development of the national crime prevention strategy.

Activity 2.1.3. Enhance the trust between the justice sector and the public through the development and implementation of a communication strategy for the justice sector. (UNDP)

This activity strengthens public trust in the justice sector by developing a communication strategy to enhance awareness of rights, entitlements, and redress mechanisms, directly

supporting Outcome 2 through fostering credibility and transparency in justice sector institutions.

This activity was not completed during the reporting time due to reasons detailed under the sub activity.

Sub-activity 2.1.3.1 *Develop the communication strategy for the justice sector to enhance trust between the sector and the public and provide support to implement the key findings (linked to awareness raising work in outcome 1 as well)*

This activity was not implemented during the reporting period. Although effective communication is vital for improving transparency and accountability, consultations with partners and international experts concluded that developing a communication strategy for the entire justice sector was not feasible. Instead, the focus will be on ensuring timely communication of key developments, such as new legislation, landmark judgments, and relevant statistics, to strengthen public confidence in the judicial system.

Output 2.2. Increased capacities of different justice sector actors to develop and implement codes of ethics and professional conduct.

Output 2.2 has three key activities conducted under it and five sub-activities altogether. Activity 2.2.3 under this was not conducted during the reporting period while all other sub-activities have been initiated and are ongoing. This output involves the development of policies, manuals, procedures and processes in the justice sector, in enhancing transparency and accountability in the sector, by streamlining and providing guidance for ethical conduct.

Activity 2.2.1. Support the Judicial Service Commission to better regulate the discharge of judicial function of judges through the introduction and improvement of policies (including non-discriminatory human resource policies), manuals, procedures and processes. (UNDP)

This activity envisages the development of policies, manuals and procedures and processes required for the effective and efficient discharge of judicial duties and responsibilities. Another expectation of this activity is incorporating international best practices into the policies, procedures and processes. These endeavors directly contribute to enhancing accountability and credibility of the judiciary.

This activity is partially completed. *This sub-activity contributes to Outcome 2 as it involves the development of policies, manuals, procedures and processes in the justice sector, as judges wield enormous authority and responsibility in ensuring transparency and accountability.*

Sub-activity 2.2.1.1 *Support the Judicial Service Commission to develop policies, manuals, procedures and processes.*

*Update is linked to **Sub-activity 3.4.2.3** Develop a Bench Book for Commercial High Court Judges.*

After series of consultations with SLJI, the project-initiated development of a manual on the Role of the Magistrate, while the Handbook on Partition Law is being revised and amended. Upon the advice of the JSC, the need for comprehensive resource material for CHC judges

was identified. The bench book will act as a reference point for judges in delivering judgements and will be completed in 2025.

Activity 2.2.2. Develop/revise codes of conduct and procedural manuals for sector professionals. (UNDP)

The Code of Conduct for justice sector professionals establishes ethical principles, expected behaviors, and standards, fostering transparency and discouraging misconduct. By promoting ethical practices and building trust, it directly contributes to Outcome 2, enhancing the accountability, transparency, and credibility of justice sector institutions.

This activity is partially completed. Accordingly, the project has supported the development of a Code of Ethics for the HRC that is currently under review by the relevant HRC officials.

Sub-activity 2.2.2.1 Develop/ revise codes of conduct and/ or procedural manuals for Prisons, JMO, Inquirer of sudden deaths, HRC.

The first draft of a Code of Ethics for the Prison Officers was developed with the UOC -CSHR however the later it was discussed and agreed with the Department of Prison (DoP) that UNDP will directly work with the DoP to enhance ownership and sustainability of the initiatives for the DoP.

Activity 2.2.2 a) Provide support to the professionalization of the justice for children workforce and the development of Codes of Conduct and HR Policies that support child friendly justice. (UNICEF)

UNICEF's advocacy elevated the importance attributed to strengthening the Social Service Workforce (SSW), whereby the GoSL pledged to clarify the roles of the social services workforce in responding to violence against children and train them by the end of 2026 as detailed below.

Sub-activity 2.2.2.(a).1. Support the National Institute of Social Development, the Social Work Association, Universities (Rajarata University) and other relevant institutions to implement the roadmap for professionalizing social work in Sri Lanka, including the development of a model for practice supervision

UNICEF made progress in strengthening the SSW in partnership with Child Frontiers, the Professional Association of Social Workers, and the National Institute for Social Development, and in overall coordination with the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. The social work curricula of four universities were reviewed, and preliminary findings are available. UNICEF's advocacy elevated the importance attributed to strengthening the SSW in addressing child protection issues. At the Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children held in Bogota, Colombia in November 2024, the GOSL pledged (as one of the 4 high level pledges⁶ to clarify the roles of the SSW in responding to violence against children and train them by the end of 2026. UNICEF played a crucial role in advocating for these pledges that emanated from the consultations with the government

⁶ Government pledges - First Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children

stakeholders, civil society organizations and children convened by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs with UNICEF support in September 2024.

Activity 2.2.3 Support the establishment and implementation of a plan of action to strengthen women's representation within the sector (UNDP)

Studies highlight the low representation of women in Sri Lanka's justice sector, including in parliament and the judiciary, due to cultural biases, lack of mentorship, and limited access to training and networking opportunities. Addressing these barriers is crucial for enhancing the credibility of justice sector institutions (Outcome 2), as women's underrepresentation hinders the system's ability to effectively address gender-specific issues and fully meet the needs of female litigants, particularly in cases related to gender-based violence or family law.

UNDP has commenced an assessment on Women Engagement in 2024 and a Gender Capacity Development Plan for the justice sector, expected to be completed in Q1 2025. The initiative will also help to address the observations raised in the EU ROM report to improve integration of gender across the project initiatives.

Output 2.3. Strengthened capacity of independent institutions to carry out their mandate.

Strengthening the capacity of target independent institutions, namely the HRC, CIABOC and NPC, is crucial to advance transparency and accountability in the justice sector.

Output 2.3 has two key activities conducted under it. Out of that, there are five sub-activities. Sub-activity 2.3.1.3 was not carried out as per the direction of the PSC. The basis of this decision was the need to limit the number of activities strategically. All other activities are underway.

Activity 2.3.1. Strengthening the capacity of independent institutions to implement their respective mandates (HRC, JSC, NPC, CIABOC). (UNDP).

Independent institutions like the HRC and CIABOC play a critical role in promoting accountability, transparency, and the rule of law by investigating wrongdoing, exposing corruption, and advocating for reform. Strengthening their capacity enhances their ability to safeguard fundamental rights, build public trust, and contribute to the accountability and credibility of justice sector institutions, directly supporting Outcome 2.

This activity was partially completed during the reporting period.

Sub-activity 2.3.1.1 *Strengthen individual and organizational capacity of HRC - this includes support to their inquiry and investigation mandate, setting up of sub offices in Nuwara Eliya and Rathnapura Districts to safeguard plantation sector community, and reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.*

The project trained **260 officers (92 women, 168 men, including 65 disabled persons)** from government institutions on conducting accessibility audits following workshops held across

the island⁷. Following the capacity building, audits have been completed in 18 districts⁸ targeting select government buildings. These audits evaluate the physical, digital, and social environments for barriers that hinder access, enabling organizations to identify and address shortcomings. By ensuring compliance with accessibility standards and laws, these audits are critical to promote equality, independence, and dignity for individuals with disabilities.

With the HRC, the project trained **54 prison officers (46 men, 8 Women)** from the Anuradhapura Prison on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and international standards and practices in rehabilitation and correctional policies. The training helped officers to improve their conflict resolution skills to promote peaceful interactions within correctional settings.

Meeting with the civil society of Ratnapura district and Hatton was conducted with the aim of enhancing the awareness on human rights, human values, and the role of civil society representatives in promotion and protection of rights of the plantation community. A platform was established to foster a civil society network aimed at enhancing coordination and effectively identifying and resolving human rights challenges encountered by workers and their families.

With the HRC, the project made **112 police officers (59 men, 53 women)** aware of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and human values in the Rathnapura and Nuwara Eliya districts. The awareness sessions strengthened officers' capacity to uphold justice, accountability, and fairness, fostering a commitment to protecting human dignity and maintaining social harmony. The initiative contributed to building a more rights-respecting and ethically grounded law enforcement culture.

Another 274 government officials (77 men, 197 women) were made aware of human rights issues faced by plantation sector workers in the Nuwara Eliya and Rathnapura districts, contributing to more informed decision-making and identification of targeted interventions that uphold the rights and welfare of plantation workers.

With HRC a two-day mobile advice service programme with the aid of **77 government officials** in the Nuwara Eliya district – Bogawantalawa division for the plantation community. More than **1000 persons received services** and were supported to address issues ranging from birth certificates, national identity cards, Employee Provident Funds, death claims, maintenance cases, family disputes, land disputes, and financial matters of the plantation community.

Engaging with youth, the project with HRC enhanced understanding of **39 young offenders (35 men, 4 women)** of human rights and human values through two counseling programs conducted in April and May 2024 at Suneetha National School. **13 staff members (7 men, 6**

⁷ Eastern, North-Western, Central, Southern, and Sabaragamuwa provinces

⁸ Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kalmunai, Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Batticaloa, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Rathnapura, Kegalle, Kurunegala and Puttalam

women) from Suneetha National School strengthened their capacity to support the rehabilitation of young offenders through specialized training. The awareness program equipped staff with child-friendly teaching methods and strategies to create a nurturing, inclusive educational environment, fostering holistic development and successful reintegration of young offenders.

The project trained **29 HRC staff (15 men, 14 women)** on prevention and addressing torture issue through a comprehensive training on the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM). The training enhanced participants' understanding of constitutional guarantees, domestic anti-torture laws, and international obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture and its Optional Protocol (OPCAT). The training also equipped staff with the skills to identify, document, and address torture cases from both medical and legal perspectives, while providing practical knowledge on conducting monitoring visits and interviews in detention facilities to ensure human rights compliance.

A media briefing was held in March 2024 with over 30 media personnel to enhance cooperation between media personnel and the HRC, showing the Commission's efforts to promote and protect human rights. This initiative highlighted the vital role of media in amplifying HRC's mission and helped to foster a collaborative relationship to raise awareness of the institution and to promote accountability.

JURE provided human resource support to HRC to address the backlog of cases as a part of a crisis-driven strategy to restore efficiency in case management. This support was phased out in 2024, as agreed with the EUD and MOJ. To align the JURE project with the IMF GDA and to utilize the critical resources under JURE for more transformational and sustainable interventions. With the support of project, 92 pending cases were concluded.

Given HRC mandate to monitor all detention centers and their descriptive activities as empowered by section 28(2) of the HRC of Sri Lanka, Act, No. 21 of 1996, HRC conducted 106 visits on National Preventive Mechanism (NPM). Out of total, 30 visited were made to prisons, 24 to police department (TID and CID units), 32 to children's homes, 7 to drugs rehabilitation center, 5 to mental health hospitals/asylum, 3 to homes for disabled persons, 3 for elders' homes, and 2 to immigration detention centers. As a result of these visits consultations have been conducted with the DoP, DPCC, Department of Police, LAC, etc. to mitigate issues that were observed during the visits.

Sub-activity 2.3.1.2 Strengthen individual and organizational capacity of CIABOC - this includes training on upcoming amendments to the law, facilitating international and domestic expertise to develop the asset declaration online system.

The project in partnership with CIABOC trained **208 CIABOC staff (82 women and 126 men)**, representing both the legal and prevention divisions, to address complex legal and investigative challenges within CIABOC. The training equipped the staff with essential knowledge and strategies to address complex forms of corruption and financial misconduct, covering topics such as asset declaration procedures and the prosecution of high-grade

white-collar crimes. It also introduced emerging issues, such as sports bribery, highlighting the evolving nature of corruption and the need for adaptive legal frameworks to address these new challenges. Participants received advanced training in investigative techniques, including the use of technology to improve efficiency. Workshops on evidence presentation emphasized clarity, coherence, and credibility in both written and oral submissions, crucial for successful legal proceedings. These efforts aimed to strengthen CIABOC's capacity for effective anti-corruption enforcement and prevention across Sri Lanka.

The project in partnership with CIABOC strengthened the capacity of **476 Integrity Officers** capacity enhanced in identifying bribery and corruption risks within government institutions. Officers were equipped with necessary skills to assess corruption-related vulnerabilities, develop effective solutions, and implement technology-driven and procedural mechanisms to mitigate bribery and corruption. Participants were also introduced to anti-corruption frameworks ensuring a comprehensive understanding of both preventive and corrective measures in the fight against corruption.

The RMV and IRD have been consistently identified as institutions with corruption risks, accordingly. Capacity of over **280 officials (160 women, 121 men)** from these institutions strengthened on bribery related issues and anticorruption, enabling them to better combat these crimes in their daily operations following programmes held in Colombo, Kurunegala, and Matara. This initiative aimed to address identified corruption risks within these institutions and enhance their capacity to prevent and address corruption.

With CIABOC **1457 community police officers (362 Women, 1095 men)** made aware on combating unethical behaviors in their daily interactions with the public. The training empowered officers to actively contribute to eliminating bribery and corruption, aiming to foster a society that rejects bribes and corrupt practices, while promoting a culture of integrity and ethical behavior.

Capacity of over **200 government officers (85 women, 134 men)** strengthened on combating bribery and corruption while enhancing public service integrity and efficiency. Government officers increased their understanding of the National Action Plan to prevent corruption, covering legal provisions, institutional duties, and public servant responsibilities. Participants learned strategies to identify corruption risks, create action plans, and use tools like the Safety Manual and Gift Rule Manual to ensure integrity. The training also emphasized positive attitudes, behaviors, and confidence-building for effective presentations, with practical training sessions and feedback opportunities, equipping participants to promote accountability and transparency within their organizations.

The integrity and anti-corruption awareness campaigns engaged **597 school students (305 girls, 292 boys)**, laying the foundation for School Integrity Clubs that ensure a lasting impact on fostering integrity and combating corruption. The campaigns focused on aligning students' identities with core values of integrity and trust, emphasizing their importance in shaping a strong moral foundation. Through practical games and creative expression, students deepened their understanding and application of these principles, reinforcing the value of ethical behavior in both personal and societal contexts.

An experience sharing session was held engaging **69 (34 women, 35 men) statutory board members** from state-owned corporations and institutions, spanning sectors such as banking, telecommunications, media, minerals, pharmaceuticals, and employment etc., to promote sharing of best practices on combatting corruption in their respective institutions.

In addition to the above activities, Module on Anti-corruption and integrity for the public officers have been developed to serve not only as an educational tool but also as a key pillar in ongoing efforts to combat corruption and promote good governance.

Sub-activity 2.3.1.3 Conduct a capacity needs assessment of the NPC.

This activity, which is scheduled to be conducted by the NPC, was postponed based on PSC 2023 guidance.

Activity 2.3.2.a Strengthen the role of targeted independent institutions to monitor child rights and provide age-appropriate justice services (UNICEF)

Sub-activity 2.3.2.(a) 1. Strengthen HRC Children's Unit and regional sub offices' capacity to inquire and investigate issues related to violations of children's rights.

The Child Rights Unit at the HRC continued performing its child rights monitoring duties by conducting outreach missions and receiving and handling individual complaints on child rights violations.

During the year, HRC conducted two missions - in Jaffna and Monaragala – showing an increased outreach and monitoring effort as compared to 2023. The missions – gathering information from consultations with children, relevant government officials, Child Development Centres and CSOs and issuing recommendations to relevant stakeholders – represent a new modality of HRC's operation and a shift towards more proactive child rights monitoring supported by the Project. Building on this successful practice, UNICEF agreed with HRC to develop an annual action plan of a systematic proactive monitoring, with a strengthened methodology, and to establish a child-friendly complaints mechanism and Children's Advisory Council to improve child participation.

Further, HRC with the support of the Project, received and processed a total of **337 cases (129 girls, 208 boys)** in 2024, leading to ongoing investigations and inquiries on the violation of child rights related to school admissions, education rights, examination issues, harassment, torture/ corporal punishment, and abuse.

| Total Cases Reported in 2024 | 337 |
|---|------------|
| Concluded cases | |
| I. Resolved Cases/Relief Granted | 130 |
| II. Settled Cases | 5 |
| III. No Fundamental Rights Violations Established | 23 |
| IV. Parties not Interested | 12 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| V. Referred to Other Institutions | 18 |
| | 188 |
| Pending cases | 149 |

Types of Violations

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Harassment | 41 |
| Inaction | 72 |
| Corporal Punishment | 30 |
| Arbitrary Arrest/Torture in Custody | 7 |
| Psychological Abuse | 7 |
| School Admission | 128 |
| Child Trafficking | 1 |
| Education Rights | 39 |
| Sexual Violence | 5 |
| Guardianship of the Child | 2 |
| Physical Violence | 5 |

Sub-activity 2.3.2.(a) 2. *Strengthen NCPA to inquire and investigate issues related to violations of children's rights through field visits and 1929 child line.*

The Project focused on strengthening various functions of NCPA. To support the quality of video evidence collection and subsequent investigation of child abuse cases, NCPA was supported to organise a two-day training programme for 74 police officers and 12 NCPA Video Evidence Staff Officers. In line with the role of receiving child abuse complaints and performing independent child rights monitoring functions, NCPA also received support in managing child abuse cases reporting through the 1929 Child Line: a total of 7,362 calls were received and managed in 2024. Through the internship programme, NCPA engaged additional technical support to monitor trends in violence against children by analysing and following up on incoming calls.

Additionally, to understand the scale and nature of reports on violence against children in the country, UNICEF, in partnership with the non-governmental organization ECPAT Sri Lanka, commenced monitoring of print and social media platforms in all three languages. The trends were analysed, prominent cases were followed up on, and the analysis of unethical reporting patterns informed the capacity building of journalists. A total of 62 journalists were trained as part of this initiative to enhance their reporting standards and ensure ethical practices when covering issues related to children and youth. This complements UNICEF-led trainings offered to 180 journalists in partnership with the Ministry of Mass media and Health.

OUTCOME 3: IMPROVED EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY OF JUSTICE

Outcome 3 focuses on enhancing efficiency and quality of justice services in Sri Lanka. This Outcome is linked with other two project outcomes on enhancing access to justice and transparency and accountability of the justice sector institutions. Outcome 3 focuses on improving justice services for children, strengthening capacity of the institutions and human

resource to improve their performance, promoting court-referred mediation in commercial cases to reduce case backlog and settle commercial disputes in cost-effective and speedy manner. The Outcome focuses on key institutions such as SLJI, DoP, JSC and SLLC.

Output 3.1. Efficient and age-appropriate child justice services available for every child in contact with the law

Output 3.1 focuses on the importance issue of justice for children including technical support to the institutions such as MOJ on promoting child friendly legislation, prohibition on corporal punishment, advocacy to improve implementation of key laws and policies on right of children, and capacity building of key institutions including AGD, Police, DPCCS, NCPA, and LAC to strengthen justice system for children.

Output 3.1 has eight key activities implemented under the broader framework of child justice services, with 11 Sub-activities under this.

Activity 3.1.1. Provide technical support to law reform, legal drafting and the development of training material related to J4C (UNICEF)

This activity aims to support the ongoing efforts of the key justice sector stakeholders, especially the MOJ in revamping, amending, or introducing laws that are connected to children. Outdated legislation and its lack of harmonization with international standards hinders full protection of children in contact with the law in Sri Lanka. Hence, new legislative initiatives or amendments are critical towards achievement of the objectives of JURE related to children.

Sub-activity 3.1.1.1. Support and participate in technical committees related to justice for children, including legal reforms (e.g., Amendments to the CYPO; Prohibition of corporal punishment) and the development of the new Child Protection and Justice Bill

The Project's continued advocacy with the MOJ and other stakeholders contributed to the operationalization of the amendments to the Children and Young Persons Ordinance, which came into effect in January 2024. Marking a transformative change for children in conflict with the law, this amendment extends certain protection measures previously available to only children under the age of 16 to all children under the age of 18, thus marking a crucial step towards improving the compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, children under 18 in conflict with the law will no longer be sent to prisons and will serve their sentences in certified schools managed by the DPCCS. UNICEF's contributions made to the amendments of the Mediations Boards Act resulted in expanding the eligibility for diversion of children who allegedly commit theft, by increasing the value (of stolen goods) from Sri Lankan Rupees 5,000 to 100,000.

The Project also supported legal changes related to addressing violence against children. Section 29 of the CYPO, which condoned corporal punishment on children, was repealed. The Project also contributed to the main legal reform on banning corporal punishment, which is connected to the Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure where the then Government granted its approval in April 2024. Although the passage of these laws was not completed owing to the government changes, the efforts already taken will expedite the next steps in 2025. In addition, UNICEF's advocacy and the GoSL's subsequent renewed commitment to banning corporal punishment in all settings was reflected among the pledges made at the

Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children held in Bogota in November 2024. This provides a strong opportunity for UNICEF to support completion of this important legislative milestone and support the government with the comprehensive implementation of the law.

Activity 3.1.2. Provide technical and financial support for case management within the penal chain, backlog clearance and Digital Case Management and Tracking (UNICEF)

Sub-activity 3.1.2.1. Provision of technical and financial support to design solutions, including procedural changes, to overcome the delays in managing cases related to children - namely backlog clearance at the AGD through implementing previously developed SOPs and standard ' methods

The Project interventions supported the AGD in improving the quality and efficiency of their work on cases involving children. AGD staff benefitted from various capacity-strengthening initiatives during the reporting period. UNICEF with AGD trained **94 State Prosecutors (45 men, 49 women)** to understand key challenges and best practices in prosecuting child abuse cases following a two-day professional development workshop. Participants engaged in interactive sessions on the credibility of child witnesses, the psychological impact on child victims, and effective charge drafting for child abuse cases. Additionally, 10 officials from the Children's Unit improved their skills in drafting and communication.

To foster the child-sensitive and expeditious approach during prosecution of cases of children, UNICEF supported the Attorney General's Department to convene a high-level discussion in November 2024, attended by Hon. Attorney General and Hon. Solicitor General, with its Senior Supervising Officials who oversee child abuse cases. In order to carry out their indictment drafting effectively and expeditiously, a total of 50 laptops were also handed over to the Criminal Division and Children's Unit (CH) of the AGD.

With project support, the AGD advanced efforts to clear pending child abuse cases and ensure child-sensitive handling. Following its usual practice, the AGD conducted four Shramadana Campaigns (case clearance workshops) in relation to child abuse cases during the reporting period which achieved the following results.

| Category | 2024 |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Total Number of files | 5793 |
| I. Number of files brought forward | 3455 |
| II. Number of new files opened | 2301 |
| III. Information Books Extracts of Police Investigations - (re-opened) | 37 |
| 2. Number of files concluded | 2489 |
| Number of files in which indictments have been served | 1686 |
| Number of files in which instructions have been provided | 207 |

| | |
|---|--|
| Number of files in which discharges have been recommended | 596 |
| | 3304 |
| 3. Number of files remaining | (Total Number of Files - (Number of Files Concluded+ Information Books Extracts of Police Investigations)) |

Recognizing that the overall efficiency of handling child abuse cases requires interagency solutions, UNICEF reached an agreement with AGD to develop and roll out a Model Continuum of Child-Friendly Services with all justice and protection stakeholders. The Model will be developed in 2025, and it is proposed to be piloted in the Kandy District.

Activity 3.1.3. Provide support to implement a diversion system for children in conflict with the law. (UNICEF)

During the reporting period, main emphasis was placed on broadening the application of existing alternatives to deprivation of liberty for children – notably, the CYPO legal changes allow more children to benefit from mediation. Strengthening the quality of the mediation process (to ensure sustainable outcomes for children and impact on reducing reoffending) and conducting an assessment on suitable diversion practices for Sri Lanka will be the focus of the project in 2025.

Sub-activity 3.1.3.1. Technical support for the inclusion of provisions related to diversion into the Children's Ordinance by the Ministry of Justice and support diversion interventions of the Mediation Boards.

See above and also sub-activity 3.1.1.

Activity 3.1.4. Conduct an analysis of Child Justice related Sector Plans and a Child Justice budget analysis. (UNICEF)

Sub-activity 3.1.4.1. Commission an in-depth analysis of the Child Justice budget at National and Provincial levels - with a focus on the DPCCS and the NCPA

The main focus of this activity is to support the implementation of the alternative care policy with budget analysis tools. Since alternative care implementation and financing is devolved partially, UNICEF initiated the analysis at the provincial level, and the first analysis was completed in the Uva Province. The presentation of the report with provincial and national level counterparts in the DPCCS is planned for the first quarter of 2025. Further roll-out of the budget analysis will be conducted in provinces that will be selected for the implementation of pilot foster care models, to ensure that policy and budgetary technical support provided by the Project are aligned for maximum effectiveness.

Activity 3.1.5. Provide support to strengthen child-friendly services for all children in contact with the law, including both the separation of children detained in prisons from adults and children alleged as perpetrators of crimes from children in need of care and protection. (UNICEF)

Sub-activity 3.1.5.1. *Provide support for provincial level interventions for the operationalization of the 2022 CYPO Amendment that provides that all children under 18 should be treated as children by the law.*

Building on the efforts in 2023 and following the entering into force of the 2022 CYPO Amendment in January 2024, the Project supported DPCCS to facilitate a discussion with all nine Provincial Commissioners of Probation and Childcare Services to prioritize actions for the implementation of legal changes. As a result, the decision was made to address the situation of children between the ages of 16 and 18 placed in adult prisons who could immediately benefit from legal changes. In January 2024, the Department of Prisons data indicated that there were 36 children placed in adult prisons across the country. Following the successful interventions, seven children currently remain in adult prisons. Others were released with conditional, non-custodial sentences.

Sub-activity 3.1.5.2. *Provide support to remove the +30 children aged 16-17 in conflict with the law from Prisons.*

See above.

Sub-activity 3.1.5.3. *Provide support for child-friendly justice services through the DPCCS in all 9 Provinces - to support all children who come into contact with the system*

UNICEF's technical support and advocacy led to the elaboration of more focused and strategic priorities by the government in relation to services for child victims of violence. UNICEF successfully advocated with the justice and protection sector stakeholders to develop a Model Continuum of Child-Centred Justice and Protection Services for child victims of crimes – moving towards more strategic and holistic solutions. This priority is reflected as one of the four high level pledges made by the GOSL at the Global Ministerial on Addressing Violence Against Children. Building on the previous year's investment in child-friendly court solutions, the pilot model will be implemented in the Kandy District and will focus on enhancing coordination, procedures, data, equipment, availability and quality of child-friendly services.

In parallel with policy reforms and advocacy, the Project continued delivering tangible results for children in conflict with the law and those in need of care and protection. The Project continued to provide technical support to the National and nine Provincial Departments of Probation and Childcare Services to implement alternative care action plans focused on prevention, gatekeeping, reunification, and family strengthening. As a result, **2,397 children (1,411 girls, 986 boys)** were prevented from institutionalization, and **1,152 children (473 boys, 679 girls)** were reunified with their families. Additionally, four children's homes were closed, and all children were reunified with their families. Notably, **36 children (21 boys, 15 girls)** serving their sentences in certified schools, had their cases reviewed, benefitted from early release and were reunified with their families. Furthermore, **561 children (218 boys, 343 girls)** were supported to remain in family-based care through the application of the fit person care modality.

Activity 3.1.6. Undertake an analysis of infrastructure needs and then provide support for the construction of Child-Friendly Spaces within the Justice Sector (UNICEF)

Child-Friendly Facilities – places for children to remain safely before a court hearing, or spaces for mothers to breastfeed will create a conducive environment for children. Given this is an essential element in improving efficient and quality justice services, the project is working closely with the MOJ and other relevant justice sector institutions.

In close consultation with the MOJ, the project initiated a pilot phase on child-friendly spaces within the justice sector, in the Kandy High Court. Consultative processes conducted with the MOJ, judicial officials, state counsel and judicial medical officials will be crucial in developing relevant procedures and processes.

Sub-activity 3.1.6.1.(a) Provide technical and financial support to operationalize a "Model Child-Friendly" court in Kandy with facility for remote evidence leading

Promoting child-friendly court spaces, the Project supported the establishment of a model digital intervention in the Kandy High Court. One of the courtrooms and a newly designated room for child interviewing were equipped with required IT technology (desktop computer, audio system, LED display, sound system and webcam) and in the first quarter of 2025 will be followed by the development of operational guidelines for the effective use of new digital solutions. During the inception operation phase since October 2024, this facility has already enabled 15 child victims to give evidence through contemporaneous audio-visual linkages - without being in the courtroom and having to encounter alleged perpetrator(s). The official launch is planned in the first quarter of 2025.

Activity 3.1.7. Undertake an innovative and case-based capacity building programme to ensure efficient and age-appropriate justice for children. (UNICEF)

Contributing to Outcome 3, the project works towards facilitating the development of a system-wide capacity building programme to increase the sensitivity, timeliness and responsiveness of key justice sector professionals including: judges, lawyers, judicial medical officers, police, probation officers, mediation officers and child rights workers to deliver child-friendly and age-appropriate services for all girls and boys in contact with the law.

To develop a comprehensive multi-faceted training plan for the Justice for Children sector, the project continued to work on the J4C workforce mapping exercise during the reporting period. Special judicial colloquia conducted for the Magistrates and High Court Judges helped reinforce “institutionalization should be the last resort for the shortest possible time”, when children come into contact with the law.

Sub-activity 3.1.7.1. Finalize the assessment of training needs in the J4C Sector

The Training Needs Assessment of the Justice for Children Sector was completed during the reporting period. Based on its recommendations and considering the existing capacity strengthening initiatives, the Project will support specialization of the justice system for children, including analysis of specialization options for workforce and institutions and establishment of child friendly spaces within the justice sector in 2025. This initiative, with a new emphasis on specialization and sustainable approach to the justice sector capacity building, was already agreed with the LAC, the AGD and SLJI.

Sub-activity 3.1.7.2. *Based on the assessment, conduct training programmes for J4C partners including police personnel and members of the judiciary.*

The Project strengthened capacities of key justice for children sector partners during 2024. Law enforcement officials, state prosecutors and judicial officers were the three main categories of officials who benefited from capacity building efforts on child protection and justice.

The project enhanced knowledge and skills of **266 police officials (220 women, 46 men)** and **94 state prosecutors (49 women, 45 men)** in handling cases related to child justice following training by the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women of the Sri Lankan Police (BPACW) and the AGD respectively. NCPA also strengthened the capacity of **74 police officials** and **12 NCPA officials** responsible for video evidence recording. Three judicial colloquia were held for **104 judicial officials (38 women, 66 men)** in collaboration with the SLJI and DPCCS with its unique feature of facilitated field visits of judges to childcare institutions. According to the judges' testimonies, this informs the decision making of judges and contributes to a more expeditious and child-centred justice service delivery. These programmes also resulted in securing the approval of the Board of Management of the SLJI to develop comprehensive child-friendly court procedures with the support of a panel of experts. The Project aims to assist this intervention in 2025.

Activity 3.1.8. Provide support to the set-up and functioning of a National Steering Committee for J4C/ Probation (UNICEF)

Effective functioning of the justice system for children requires coordination of all relevant stakeholders towards a common vision and objectives. Such a vision is not articulated for justice for children in a single document, hindering the measurement of progress and articulation of reform needs in a holistic manner. **J4C Coordination Committee** - created under the JURE project - has emerged as an important coordination platform and has a potential to play a more strategic role in formulating a vision for the justice for children sector.

Sub-activity 3.1.8.1. Support the functioning of the J4C Coordination Committee

The Coordination Committee on J4C, led by the MoJ, was established in 2023. During the reporting period, the MOJ shared for implementation with the Committee the recommendations of the 2023 national consultation on addressing delays in the justice for children sector. During the reporting period, the Committee has not held a meeting due to elections and subsequent transition. Moving forward, UNICEF aims to explore the possibility of engaging the J4C Coordination Committee and the MOJ in a strategic and technical dialogue on the development of a comprehensive justice for children vision or strategy in 2025.

Output 3.2. Strengthened policy and legal reforms in line with international standards, norms and best practices.

Output 3.2 has a single Activity under it, with two sub-activities. While sub-activity 3.2.1.1 is underway, 3.2.1.2 was postponed based on PSC 2023 guidance.

Activity 3.2.1 Assist the Ministry of Justice (especially the legal and reforms units and the thematic law reform committees), the Law Commission of Sri Lanka and other targeted justice sector institutions to initiate and update policies, legislations, and regulations. (UNDP)

The activity envisages stronger legal frameworks that can remove barriers that prevent citizens from accessing justice and enforcing their rights and facilitates access to justice for all. This endeavor results in enhanced public trust in the justice system, which inadvertently contributes to greater cooperation with law enforcement and a stronger sense of security. Incorporating aspects such as international best practices into these processes bring in further value contributing to enhancing public trust and confidence in the justice sector, thus enhancing institutional accountability, credibility, and transparency. Therefore, Outcome 2 is reinforced through this activity.

This activity is partially completed. Accordingly, support in drafting the proposed Proceeds of Crimes legislation and support to legislative drafting has been provided during the reporting period.

Sub-activity 3.2.1.1 *Technically assist the Ministry of Justice to initiate and update policies, legislations, and regulations (including guidelines on the operationalization of remote testimony, prison regulations, Disability Inclusion Bill, National Sentencing Policy, Proceeds of Crime Bill)*

This activity is partially completed with the **Rapid Digital Strategy (RDS)** being completed in early 2024 and subsequently presented to the MOJ and JSC. After several consultations with the MOJ and JSC, the strategy was improved by the MOJ and JSC. MOJ has also appointed a technical committee to guide the implementation of RDS strategy. UNDP has developed a proposal for the pilot phase of the RDS implementation, which has received approval of the JSC and MOJ. In 2025, the RDS strategy will be moving towards implementation, as in 2024 due to changes in the government the RDS committee could not meet. The RDS serves to address the identified digitization needs of the justice sector institutions specifically connected to the courts through a holistic and sustainable approach. The strategy attempts to visualize the sector as a community that feeds information to each other to ensure a smooth flow of court functions.

Digitalization of justice sector processes is a key requirement to achieve JURE Outcome 3, i.e., improve efficiency and quality of justice. The work undertaken aimed at the judges, lawyers, and the public to interact with each other seamlessly, enhancing the efficiency of court processes.

The implementation of the RDS will mark a significant shift in the delivery of justice sector services. The digital systems will be strategically designed to promote immediate improvements in efficiency by automating repetitive administrative tasks, thereby freeing up valuable time and resources of judicial and non-judicial officers. This shift aims to, *inter alia*, alleviate the administrative burden on the judicial officers, enabling them to prioritize adjudication and disposal of cases. Moreover, these systems will foster collaboration and integration with relevant government bodies and stakeholders, thereby enhancing information sharing and communication effectiveness.

Sub-activity 3.3.1.1 Support the development of the rapid digital strategy for the justice sector and implement selected interventions.

Digitalization of justice sector processes is a key requirement to achieve JURE Outcome 3, i.e., improve efficiency and quality of justice. The RDS strategy was completed, presented to the MOJ and JSC and endorsed by the JSC and MOJ. The system will provide a case management and filing system that incorporates agile development, user-centered design, integrated cybersecurity, and modern technology-led architecture with unified search functionality. It aims at keeping stakeholders informed of case progress and regulators to closely monitor progress on, such as age analysis of cases with real-time statistics that makes record search easier and user-friendly.

To advance Outcome 3 that targets the enhancement of efficacy and quality of justice services, prioritizing the digitization of key justice sector institutions is crucial. The need for a digital transformation became evident after the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the project initiated an assessment leading to the development of the RDS, aimed at identifying and prioritizing the digitization needs of the justice sector institutions. The completed assessment underscores a dire need for a digital policy for the justice sector while using the current resources and digitization initiatives as a part of the overall strategy. The proposed system aims to achieve tangible results by implementing a modern case management and filing system that incorporates agile development, user-centric design, integrated cybersecurity, and modern technology-led architecture with unified search functionality. It aims at keeping stakeholders informed of case progress and regulators to closely monitor progression such as age analysis of cases with real-time statistics that makes record search easier and user-friendly. The solution architecture of the proposed system is simple but effective to cover the digital functional requirements, leaving scope for continuous improvements aimed at a total 'paperless transformation' of the justice sector functions in the long run.

The project supports the pilot implementation of a RDS also called the "Court Community Platform (CCP)."⁹ a phased digital system designed to enhance coordination across justice institutions. Phase 1 focuses on foundational infrastructure, delivering immediate benefits. Phase 2 introduces workflow automation through a case management system, and Phase 3 enables a paperless transformation with E-Record Management. Subsequent phases will be transitioned to the MOJ for sustained implementation and expansion, supported by other donor partners.

Sub-activity 3.3.1.2 Support the development of an online portal for judgements and notices including backend access to judges and a public interface with information on on-going cases (intranet/ internet)

The development of an online portal is the final phase of the RDS and therefore will be launched once the early steps of CCP are in place. It will be carried out by MOJ and JSC.

Sub-activity 3.3.1.3 Support and roll out remote court hearings.

⁹ The outcome of the RDS is Court Community Platform.

Guidelines on remote court hearings (digital virtual hearings) are being developed with the MOJ and coordinated closely, moving beyond the temporary measures taken during COVID 19. The remote hearing mechanisms will be implemented in line with the RDS.

Activity 3.3.2 Roll out capacity building support for justice sector personnel and targeted institutions on selected thematic subjects (in line with international best practices) and on overall administration, transparency and accountability, sensitivity and responsiveness. (UNDP)

This activity targets institutional and personnel capacity building with the expectation of bringing in transformational change in the sector thus enhancing the credibility, transparency, and the accountability of justice sector institutions (Outcome 2). Currently, capacity lacuna affects the continuous justice dispensation be it human resource, system oriented or due to resource allocation deficiencies. Therefore, considering that a well-equipped and efficient justice system strengthens the rule of law, reduces opportunities for corruption and impunity and ensures better protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all Sri Lankans, this activity is crucial for sector transformation. This activity is strategically linked to the achievement of Outcome 3, namely enhancing efficiency and quality of the sector.

This activity is partially implemented. The key institutions supported through this activity are the LDO, GAD, VWPA, and DoP. Accordingly, the needs assessment for LDD was concluded, support has been extended to GAD, VWPA (particularly relevant to the new law) to execute their mandates, and capacity building for Police.

Sub-activity 3.3.2.1 Provide targeted capacity building support to Legal Draftsman's Department based on a capacity GAP assessment.

The LDD is responsible for timely and effective drafting and development of legislation. A needs assessment was completed in December 2023, and accordingly initiatives to be prioritized and supported will be identified in consultation with LDD and MOJ. MOJ and LDD can leverage the findings of the assessment to seek donor support and effectively lobby with the relevant state authorities for funding requirements using the evidence. LDD also can utilize the assessment findings to strategize internal resource allocation for better efficiency and productivity.

The activity has been discontinued due to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 3.3.2.2 Provide targeted capacity building support to Government Analyst Department - this includes support to enhance capacities in forensic sciences, explosives and ICT skill, support to obtain accreditation on efficiency, development of ICT policy and case backlog clearance.

GAD is a key stakeholder in the penal justice sector chain, leading on the forensics analysis. GAD receives a heavy number of cases each year. In January 2024, GAD has **17,828 cases** backlog, brought from 2023, that has impacted on efficiency of the justice sector. This activity is providing the essential support to GAD to be able to keep up with the demand and clear its growing backlog of cases.

In response to align the project interventions with the IMF GDA, during first quarter of 2024, UNDP communicated to GAD, the phasing out of support in October 2024 to clear the case backlog. With the JURE support by September 2024, GAD was able to clear a backlog of **6,888 cases**, (including 6,070 cases in the Narcotics Section, 627 in the DNA Section, 87 cases in the Toxicology Section, and 82 cases in the Digital Section).

Apart from this, UNDP equipped GAD Forensic Lab by providing critical equipment including Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) for the Narcotic laboratory and a Gas Chromatography-mass Spectrometry (GC-MS) equipment for the Forensic Question and Document Laboratory.

GAD requires to maintain accreditation standard ISO 17025 on efficiency; therefore, UNDP supported this measure to ensure the trust kept upon its services. This also contributes to the international recognition of the institution. However, this support was also phased out, being not sustainable.

The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 3.3.2.3 Provide targeted capacity building support to Victims Witnesses Protection Authority to implement the VWP Act, training programmes for the officers of the Authority and Police Protection Division (technical), Judiciary etc./ redesigning the witness box

The VWPA is a critical stakeholder in the justice sector, and strengthening its capacity directly enhances the sector's effectiveness, as it holds the mandate to protect victims, witnesses of crime, and their families

During 2024, **35 judges (15 women, 20 men)** participated in the Judges' Colloquium aimed to enhance the understanding of judges on the legal frameworks for the victims and witnesses' protection. The event highlighted key features of recent amendments in law and distinctions between the 2015 and 2023 Acts, equipping participants with up-to-date legal interpretations to strengthen judicial decision-making in this area.

Understanding of **140 school students (82 girls, 58 boys)** increased on child abuse prevention and protective measures following an awareness program in Mahawilachchiya, fostering early understanding of child safety laws to empower youth and reduce abuse in communities. Additionally, a public awareness session reached **140 participants (62 women, 78 men)**, emphasizing child protection, and safeguarding vulnerable populations in the region, contributing to strengthened community awareness and prevention efforts.

Island-wide training workshops strengthened the capacity of **529 police officers (79 women, 450 men)** to enhance the protection of victims and witnesses of crime. The training workshops improved participants' understanding of the Victims of Crime and Witnesses Protection Act No. 10 of 2023, their roles under the Police Protection Division, and the collaborative mechanisms for ensuring safety and security in criminal cases. Officers gained

knowledge of international best practices in police-led protection and the integration of forensic and medical support from Judicial Medical Officers. Additionally, training on the psychological impact of trauma equipped officers to respond sensitively and effectively, contributing to a more comprehensive and victim-centered approach in law enforcement. These outcomes are expected to strengthen the operational effectiveness and accountability of police in safeguarding victims and witnesses.

An awareness session improved understanding of **50 State Counsels (28 women, 22 men)** from the AGD to implement the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act No. 10 of 2023 effectively. Participants gained foundational knowledge of witness protection within the law of evidence and an understanding of the legal framework and responsibilities of the Authority. The awareness included insights into best practices for handling vulnerable witnesses, presented by Hon. Justice Gita Mittal, and emphasized the roles of Judicial Medical Officers through case studies. The initiative enhanced the ability of State Counsels to apply the Act in their work, fostering a victim-centered approach.

For the refurbishment of the **safehouse for the victims**, a range of essential furniture, appliances, and security equipment has been provided to create a comfortable, functional, and secure environment for residents. To ensure the safety of all occupants, a CCTV camera and alarm system have been installed. The center will be inaugurated in February 2025.

In 2024, a comprehensive data processing, coding, and analytics were conducted as part of the Crime Victimization Survey, ensuring accurate and detailed insights to aid the final report compilation.

Sub-activity 3.3.2.4 Provide targeted capacity building support to Police

As a first point of contact in the justice sector, the Department of Police is of particular importance. Their capacity to handle the victims and witnesses who seek their assistance must be at optimal levels to ensure efficiency and quality of justice, which is key in Outcome 3.

Police Department was supported in awareness and capacity building based on international best practices on criminal victimization, protection mandate, data analysis, innovative investigation techniques and threat assessment. UNDP did not conduct any activities with the Department of Police during the reporting period, due to the project aligning exercise with the IMF GDA.

Sub-activity 3.3.2.5 Provide training for court administrators to minimize the administrative burden on judges.

It was agreed that work related to court administrators would require a policy level decision to proceed, with the MOJ taking the lead on this. JURE PSC has directed to not to prioritize this activity until a policy decision is made.

Sub-activity 3.3.2.6 Provide training for non-judicial staff including on Small Claims Court processes.

In the Justice sector, Non-Judicial Officers (NJOs) play a key role as a connecting point to the Judges, litigants, and lawyers. They manage the cases as per the orders/ directives given by Judges following legal procedures. Their skills and knowledge in handling cases in an efficient and effective manner has a direct influence on better case management, in reducing delays and bringing justice to the people. Therefore, it is important to keep their knowledge and skills updated through continuous training opportunities.

The activity has been phased out to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Activity 3.3.3 Set up peer to peer contacts, on a pilot level, with courts and professionals in other jurisdictions to assist Sri Lankan judges and sector professionals in enhancing competency and efficiency across the sector. (UNDP)

This activity envisages direct interaction with experienced judges and professionals from other countries enabling the exchange of knowledge and successful practices on specific legal issues and judicial procedures. This networking fosters collaboration on tackling common challenges and developing innovative solutions relevant to the Sri Lankan context and is paramount for advancing a forward-thinking mindset in the justice sector. The exchange of knowledge and continuous learning is crucial for improved efficiency and quality of justice and thus upholds Outcome 3.

This is partially completed. As the dispensation of justice happens directly through judges, it is crucial that their capacity is enhanced on most recent developments of the law and legal processes, contributing to developing an efficient system with high quality standards. The following sub-activities, including the judicial symposium, contribute to the strategic value of Outcome 3.

Sub-activity 3.3.3.1 Conduct judicial symposiums for knowledge exchange on selected topics

Project supported sending experts from Sri Lanka to participate in the Regional Conference on “Achieving Just Societies: Inclusive Justice Pathways for People and Planet in Asia and the Pacific,” held in Bangkok from November 11–12, 2024. The conference aimed to identify barriers to justice, promote people-centered justice models, leverage technology and innovation, and strengthen regional partnerships to enhance access to justice, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable communities. It served as a platform to foster collaboration and drive inclusive, equitable justice systems across the Asia-Pacific region. Among those in attendance were Justice Arjuna Obeyesekere, Honorable Justice of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, and an officer from LAC Commission alongside UNDP representatives.

Activity 3.3.4 Provide assistance for the development and delivery of a formal continuous professional development programme targeting judges and lawyers. (UNDP)

The activity has been discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for both the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.3.4.1 Training for judges and lawyers including on Small Claims Court and community-based correction processes

In February 2024, JURE in partnership with the SLJI, conducted a training session to strengthen the implementation of the Small Claims Court Procedure (Act No. 33 of 2022). The session brought together **30 judicial officers and legal professionals (8 women, 22 men)** to refine strategies for expediting case resolution and increasing public trust in the system.

Discussions focused on judicial responsibility in fostering settlements, the integration of electronic evidence, and procedural amendments to streamline court processes. Challenges such as delays in summons service, document management constraints, and hesitancy among legal practitioners were identified. Proposed solutions emphasized judicial leadership, structured settlement mechanisms, improved documentation protocols, and the adoption of technology to facilitate efficiency.

The session underscored the broader impact of a well-functioning Small Claims Court, reducing case backlogs, enhancing public access to justice, and promoting quicker dispute resolution. Strengthening these mechanisms is expected to increase efficiency and fairness within the justice system, improving legal outcomes for individuals and businesses alike.

Activity 3.3.5 Review and improve existing work processes within the justice sector through the implementation of the reforms agenda. (UNDP)

This activity prioritizes improving work processes within the justice sector through close collaboration with Ministerial Thematic Law Reform Committees and JSC.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment project with the IMF GDA, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.3.5.1 Implementation of key recommendations identified in the pioneering assessment on bottlenecks to Case Flow Management within the Criminal Justice Sector with close collaboration with justice sector stakeholders.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.3.5.2 Support to develop and operationalize guidelines on court administrators.

This activity was put on hold on the directions of JURE Project Steering Committee held in 2024. The activity has been discontinued to align JURE with the IMF GDA, MOJ/GoSL and donor's priorities and recommendations of ROM report.

Sub-activity 3.3.5.3 Conduct assessment of the work-flow processes of court registries and develop a streamlining mechanism and pilot implementation of the findings in DC registries

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.3.5.4 Develop SOP / Guidelines for non-judicial court staff.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Activity 3.3.6. Support Court Administration as a stand-alone discipline and pilot the introduction of “court administrators” to assist judges in the management of the Courts. (UNDP)

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.3.6.1 Conduct a feasibility assessment on the introduction of a robust court administrative mechanism under a Court Manager/ Administrator.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Activity 3.3.7. Strengthen prison reforms and the existing Community Based Correction mechanism as a viable response to reduce prison overcrowding. (UNDP)

The services offered by the Department of Community-based Corrections (DCBC) directly impacts the efficient dispensation of cases and the reintegration of the convict into the community. Recognizing the critical role of a strong community-based corrections system in reducing recidivism, prison overcrowding, and successful reintegration, MOJ, the State Ministry of Prison Reform, and the Parliamentary Ministerial Consultative Committee on Justice are committed to strengthening this approach through legal and procedural reforms.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.3.7.1 Support capacity development of Department of Community Based Correction through interventions including training of trainers programmes, training of officers of best practices on community-based corrections, selected intervention of the prison study, and facilitating links with companies to encourage companies to hire rehabilitated persons.

After several discussions with the DCBC, assessment of service delivery, regulations to implement, and capacity development were identified as potential areas of support for the future. There are other donors who have come forward to support the DCBC.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.3.7.2 Support the development of the Prison Information Management System.

The existing (manual process) prison information collection mechanism was reviewed to ascertain the data gaps and method gaps. Technical discussions were conducted (including with the expertise of an international justice sector data expert) on the types of information that could/should be collated to also enable reporting on SDG16 indicators. The intrinsic linkages between the prison data and the overall comprehensive justice sector Data Snapshot were also identified and will be fed into the design of the Snapshot. Upon reviewing

the existing data, types of qualitative research and analysis to be conducted were also identified to feed into the 'criminal victimization survey' and the crime prevention strategy to be formulated. The Prison Information Management System (PIMS) will be improved from a holistic lens to enable better institutional management and criminal justice sector wide data repositories that would inform (provide an empirical base) policy and legislative reform.

In 2024, the project facilitated multiple rounds of discussions with the DOP to support the implementation of the PIMS. A key requirement identified for PIMS was the integration of a biometric system to enhance the efficiency of inmate management. This support is scheduled for implementation in 2025. Additionally, the project will provide capacity development assistance to the DOP to strengthen their institutional capabilities.

Activity 3.3.8. Carry out court infrastructure needs assessment and develop infrastructure planning tools with special focus on victim-sensitive infrastructure (including safe rooms for victim/ witness statements, court testimony (including remote testimony), victim shelters/ safe houses). (UNDP)

Infrastructure needs assessment is critical for the justice sector institutions to determine the current state, deficiencies, and future requirements and to plan for the future and allocate resources effectively. Therefore, such assessment assists to ensure the infrastructure investments address the most pressing issues and contribute to building a modern, efficient, and inclusive justice sector focused on accountability, transparency, efficiency, and quality, and contributes to Outcome 3 which focuses on quality of justice.

The infrastructure needs assessment for **105 magistrate courts** was successfully completed in 2024. The final report was presented to the Secretary of the MOJ in May 2024, and after incorporating MOJ feedback, the report was officially handed over. UNDP is now collaborating with the MOJ to implement selected recommendations from the assessment.

Sub-activity 3.3.8.1 Complete the court infrastructure needs assessment and provide support for selected victim-centric infrastructure development.

The infrastructure needs assessment for **105 magistrate courts** was successfully completed in 2024 and UNDP is now collaborating with the MOJ to implement selected recommendations from the assessment.

Sub-activity 3.3.8.2 Establish/ strengthen PWD Access for Courts

This activity will be undertaken in 2025 when the infrastructure needs assessment conducted under 3.3.8.1 is completed. The court infrastructure assessment was completed in 2024, and the report was presented to MOJ in 2024. Consultations have commenced with the experts on how best to proceed with implementation, considering international best practices and regional learnings. This activity has been included in MOJ activities for 2025 to implement select recommendations of the report.

Output 3.4. Strengthened commercial and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to provide expeditious remedies and create an investor-friendly environment.

Output 3.4 has four key activities under its purview, with 19 sub-activities in total. Given the country's economic context, the commercial sector reform priorities of the GOSL were shifting towards law reforms. The project carried out a series of consultations and focus group discussions, with sector specialists to first identify the areas in which strategic interventions are needed. As such, the commercial law sector reforms were broadly designed as a three-pronged approach; they are i) facilitating expeditious commercial litigation in courts; ii) capacity development of institutions facilitating commercial transactions; and iii) ADR mechanisms.

During the consultations, the project learnt that law reforms alone will not be sufficient to build a conducive environment for business transactions to prosper. Hence, consultations were carried out for identification of existing problems. It was revealed that the capacity building of sector professionals is a much-needed requirement whilst improving the procedural needs of the sector. Accordingly, the project largely focused on moving beyond the traditional focal point of "law reform," with the aim of addressing the capacity gaps in the sector to produce better short-term as well as long-term benefits. As such, in addition to consultations, the project carried out assessments to identify the needs and possible solutions for implementation issues.

As such changes in the processes, implementation of the law in identified target areas and enhancing access to justice were given more priority.

Some of the key issues and solutions identified were, as follows:

- Inadequacy of legal provisions that help aggrieved parties of disputes arising out of commercial transactions.
- A common bottleneck in the administration of justice of commercial disputes is the length of time taken in the adjudication of appeals. As such, time management during the pendency of the case was a recognized priority.
- Filing cases through electronic means, e-filing of documents, and digitization of Court proceedings will largely help expediting the existing processes of the justice system.
- Development of dispute resolution methods set out in the Companies Act No. 07 of 2007. This Act provides the framework for an ADR mechanism of its own, the development of which will assist in easing the workload of the Courts.
- Lack of interest, capacity and knowledge on improvement of ADR mechanisms such as Commercial Mediation and Arbitration in Sri Lanka. Commercial Mediation has gathered interests of corporates in other countries as a less costly and efficient process than litigating in courts.

As such, each output activity as defined below was strategically designed to incorporate the solutions identified above.

Activity 3.4.1 Review and improve existing commercial laws and work processes pertaining to commercial cases (UNDP)

The overall strategic vision for commercial courts in terms of improving laws and procedures were to expedite the enforcement of contractual arrangements in Sri Lanka through litigation. As described above, the project focused beyond law reforms to adopt an integrated approach

that looks at barriers to increase efficiency in commercial litigation proceedings as envisioned by Outcome 3.

As mentioned above, this activity was introduced to bring in legal provisions that will help fill in the gaps in the current legislative provisions.

Sub-activity 3.4.1.1 Support the MOJ to effect legislative reforms relating to Commercial laws.

On January 10, 2024, the Sri Lankan Parliament passed the Recognition and Enforcement of international Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation Bill. This was done in partnership with the Asia Foundation. Secondly a Bill for Civil and Commercial Dispute Resolution using Mediation. (Mediation Bill), supported by The Asia Foundation, is pending approval from the Parliament. The Bill was sent in for Cabinet approval in October 2024, but approval has since been delayed due to the Parliamentary Elections in November 2024 and the subsequent changes in the MOJ.

A number of key pieces of legislation are ready or being processed for enforcement, as of 2023, such as:

- Mediation of Civil and Commercial Disputes Act.
- Maintaining Records and Conducting Proceedings in English in commercial courts- intended for recording proceedings in the Commercial High Court, with jurisdiction in Arbitration proceedings and Admiralty cases, in English.
- Small Claims Court Procedure Act, including the subsequent amendment to increase the financial threshold of the claims.
- Mediation Boards (Amendment) Act and the Mediation (Special Categories of Disputes) Act.
- Reciprocal enforcement of Foreign Judgments procedure Act.
- Amendments to the Debt Conciliation Ordinance.
- New Arbitration Bill giving effect to the Convention on the Recognition & Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Proceedings.
- Singapore Convention Bill giving effect to the Singapore Convention on Mediation.

On the direction of donor, UNDP has stopped focusing on Arbitration and Community Mediation. UNDP focus will remain on Commercial Mediation under JURE.

Sub-activity 3.4.1.2 Support the activities in the Enforcement of Contract Task Force such as setting up the e-payment gateway system and Commercial High Court Website.

The project in collaboration with the Enforcing Contract Task Force developed an Action Plan aimed at improving the business enabling environment. Spearheaded by the Presidential Secretariat, the Task Force focuses on enhancing contract enforcement, which includes overseeing the implementation of the MOJ roadmap. Additionally, a dedicated parliamentary committee is tasked with complementary efforts to support these objectives. However, given that the Task Force has approached multiple donor agencies, a coalition between donor agencies was needed to delineate the areas of support by each agency and preempt duplication of resources.

The following activities identified by the Task Force are underway:

- Establish an additional Commercial High Court (CHC). The project completed the required tasks to support the operationalization, by providing IT infrastructure, equipment, and furniture. The new CHC courthouse will be operational as soon as the new judicial appointments are made by the JSC. The project is in discussions with the MOJ and JSC to convince them to allocate these facilities for special hearings in this new courthouse as a measure of expediting the matters that have been delayed. This comes as an initial measure to address the time management issues in the existing system. The redirection of matters that consume a significant of time and scrutiny to a special hearing process will prevent clogging up of the entire case load in a courthouse. This court is expected to operate in January 2025 after necessary appointments are made by the JSC.
- Four new witness boxes on par with international standards were installed in four CHCs. The new design accommodates the special needs of persons with a disability and is in line with the new law on victims and witnesses' protection. The impact of the new witnesses' boxes is transformational addressing a gap where victims and witnesses were reluctant to come before courts since the environment does not accommodate their disabilities and vulnerabilities. This support will have an impact on reducing case delays as now victims/witnesses could come before courts in spite of their physical disabilities as the court accommodates the same.
- Establishment of model Small Claims Courts – after consulting MOJ, the first phase of setting up model courts commenced in Kandy district. The required infrastructure was in place, therefore the project provided equipment for these facilities. The court is functioning as a separate courthouse and the small claims matters will be taken up in this model courthouse. This is the first of its kind. As a measure of strengthening the smooth functioning of this newly introduced law, the project supported training programmes for judicial and non-judicial staff by coordinating with SLJI and NJTI units.
- Development of website for CHCs – the sitemap and the initial design of the website was completed in close consultation with the CHC judges and IT Registrars. The website is designed to give quick access to orders, judgments, and daily court lists of the CHC like websites of the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. The website was launched in the third quarter of 2024. Discussions continued to incorporate the RDS suggestions into the website for the CHCs. The website will, in its next phase, expand to include enhancements recommended by the RDS, aligning with broader digital transformation goals.

Sub-activity 3.4.1.3 *Study the procedures of Commercial HC and support automation of processes.*

After several consultations with the CHC and senior officials of the Judiciary, support will be provided towards the automation of the CHC processes, as Phase 2 of the CHC website development.

Sub-activity 3.4.1.4 Conduct specific training for in-house corporate legal professionals

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.4.2.2 Enhance commercial high court registries by facilitating transcription procedures, capacity building of non-judicial officers.

This activity was identified as part of the overall strategy to enhance the administrative tasks and court related activities performed by non-judicial officers, such as stenographers. It was identified that the transcription and translation of court proceedings consume a significant amount of time. As such, consultations were held with the MOJ to identify how this can be implemented as part of the RDS. Accordingly, facilitation of transcription facilities is aimed to be captured in phase 2 of the RDS.

Sub-activity 3.4.2.3 Develop a Bench Book for Commercial High Court Judges.

As per Outcome 1, it was advised that one of the key components of strategically enhancing the subject knowledge of judges and expeditious disposal of commercial disputes, is to have a standardized reference material for judges. The project secured the opportunity to partner with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) for this intervention in 2024. WIPO provided technical support to the selected judge to align the bench book with the international standards. To capitalize this strategic partnership with WIPO, the project decided to review the scope to conceptualize a dedicated intellectual property bench book. This bench book will feature more detailed and structured chapters, covering the following topics; i) Types of Intellectual Property - Sources/Introduction, ii) Copyright, iii) Patents, iv) Trademarks, v) Industrial Designs, vi) Unfair Competition & Passing Off, vii) Geographical Indications, viii) Remedies, and ix) Procedure.

These chapters will also include references to domestic and international case law, helping judges achieve a holistic understanding of the concepts. The timeline for completion of the bench book is set for the first quarter of 2025. The dissemination is planned to be in both print form and electronic.

Sub-activity 3.4.2.4 Strengthen regulatory proceedings of sector institutions such as Registrar of Companies (ROC) and Board of Investment (BOI) to reduce any opportunity for litigation between transacting parties.

The project provided technical support to develop regulations for the Companies Dispute Board (BOI). In the first quarter of 2024, a feasibility study was conducted, drawing on comparative analysis of legislation from Singapore, Malaysia, and international best practices, a formal set of rules was drafted in April 2024. The draft regulations were revised with feedback from the ROC and shared accordingly, with expectations for their approval and publication in the Gazette. Operationalization facilities are planned for 2025.

BOI and regulations to support foreign investments:

The current terms and conditions stipulated in the templates used by the BOI are ineffective at attracting potential investors. Furthermore, the existing provisions impede the smooth establishment of investments in Sri Lanka, as the terms in the existing templates prove to be unfavourable in resolving disputes between the BOI and foreign investors. The project engaged an international expert to assist the BOI reform the current templates, to ease contractual arrangements and pre-empt disputes between parties. The expert commenced work on the templates in 2023 and was able to share initial drafts for review. The new templates will be compiled into a manual by second quarter of 2025 after approval from the BOI.

In July 2024, the parliament passed the Economic Transformation Bill, which aims to establish six institutions: i) the Economic Commission, ii) Invest Sri Lanka, iii) Investment Zones Sri Lanka, iv) the Office for International Trade, v) the National Productivity Commission, and vi) the Sri Lanka Institute of Economics and International Trade. Among these, the Economic Commission is tasked with evaluating and managing investment zones, enhancing the ease of doing business and identifying strategic investments which bring significant foreign exchange, export growth and large-scale employment. The new Bill will also repeal and replace the BOI with the Economic Commission of Sri Lanka.

As a result of these legislative changes, the BOI had to shift its focus on the new Act, which caused significant delays in the consultative revision process. Nevertheless, the project facilitated a two- day workshop with the international consultant to expediate the process. The revisions to the template agreements are expected to be finalized in the first quarter of 2025.

Activity 3.4.3. Support the establishment of an Investor's Court, Pre-Trial Court and Small Claims/ Standard Form Court (UNDP)

This Output was specifically introduced to ease the caseload of CMC. The Small Claims procedure and pre-trial conferencing was designed to shorten the time consumed in the court by encouraging the parties to settle the matter by using mediation and conciliation techniques.

Sub-activity 3.4.3.1 Strengthen the operationalization of the newly established Small Claims court, through the model courts set up in Colombo and Kandy. Training on Small claim courts for the Judicial Practitioners, lawyers, and Non-Judicial Staff.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.4.3.2 Support establishment of Pre-Trial Commercial Court / conferencing and operationalization pre-trial process

As per JURE PSC guidance held in August 2023, this activity was postponed until the passage of laws. The amendment to the Civil Procedure Code on pre-trial conferencing was passed in December 2023.

Sub-activity 3.4.3.3 Support to develop a time-management system for trial process for expeditious resolution of cases.

Implementation of this activity was stopped as USAID to avoid duplication with the USAID supported Case Management System. After several discussions, a decision was taken to allow the continuation of already initiated work by USAID. Therefore, further action to implement this activity ceased in quarter 3 of 2023. Accordingly, this activity was taken out of JURE workplan. However, case management system will be covered within the RDS.

Sub-activity 3.4.3.4 Prepare a Judges manual on pre-trial conferencing and small claims courts.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.4.3.5 Develop lawyers' manual on pretrial conferencing (commercial) and small claims courts.

The law on Small Claims was introduced in January 2023.

The activity was discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for the donor and the GOSL.

Sub-activity 3.4.3.6 Support the establishment of an Investor's Court to facilitate expeditious resolution of disputes relating to foreign investments.

Activity postponed as instructed by the PSC in August 2023 as the law is yet to be passed to giving effect to the creation of an investment related special court. Once the law is passed, and upon consultation with relevant stakeholders, the action plan will be formulated.

Activity 3.4.5. Carry out legislative and institutional review/ assessment of ADR mechanisms (including commercial mediation and international arbitration mechanism), support the development of specialized ADR mechanisms and processes, and provide capacity and awareness raising support on ADR mechanisms to sector institutions/ professionals and the business community. (UNDP)

ADR mechanisms in Sri Lanka have been in practice for decades. However, due to various short comings, especially reasons such as knowledge gaps, adversarial system shaped by courts, and resource gaps, ADR mechanisms have not yielded convincing results as an effective alternative to courts.

The current practice of Arbitration is still considered important and relevant in Sri Lanka due to two main reasons. One is that Sri Lanka being a party to the New York Convention on Arbitration, Arbitral awards issued in foreign jurisdictions are enforceable in local courts. The other reason is that foreign counterparts to most international transactions still prefer arbitration as a neutral method than the local courts. Hence, despite the negative impression in the sector on Arbitration, it has managed to stay relevant and essential specifically for two stakeholders, i.e., the Judges and the AGD, which represent the State in most Investor- State disputes. As such, during the year, the project extended support to various initiatives, specially to Judges and AGD, to develop arbitration practice in Sri Lanka through a capacity development lens.

However, during discussions on the JURE alignment with the IMF GDA and an overall with other donor funded projects, it was decided not to work on the arbitration, therefore going ahead JURE will work on commercial mediation only.

Sub-activity 3.4.5.1 Conduct a comprehensive assessment of commercial mediation from a micro as well as macro perspective.

The study on micro commercial mediation endeavors was completed in 2023 and captures contextual, operational, and other issues affecting commercial mediation in Sri Lanka and the current status of commercial dispute settlement and the opportunities and challenges for operationalizing commercial mediation in Sri Lanka.

The assessment covers different aspects of commercial mediation landscape in Sri Lanka, which includes the following:

- Sri Lanka's international commitments to enable commercial mediation.
- A comprehensive analysis of the legislative and policy frameworks for commercial mediation.
- An analysis of national institutional frameworks for commercial mediation.
- A critical analysis and reflection of the success and failure of commercial mediation initiatives in Sri Lanka.
- The scope of mediation in the broader justice system and specifically the ADR landscape of Sri Lanka.
- A road map for the effective introduction of commercial mediation as a viable solution for commercial dispute resolution in Sri Lanka.

The study is purposefully crafted as a landmark publication on commercial mediation in Sri Lanka, and, as such, the publication of the study will be more effective once the legislation is passed.

Sub-activity 3.4.5.2 Develop a National Policy and Strategic Action Plan on mediation.

Although mediation has been successful in resolving community level disputes for over 30 years in Sri Lanka, there is no overarching policy on how it should be used as a successful measure for ADR. Additionally, though mediation has diversified over the years to branch out into special categories of mediation, it needs to be anchored within a unified national policy that provides a consolidated, vision, structure and strategy for monitoring and improving the journey of ADR in Sri Lanka.

Such a policy will help mitigate some of the existing incongruities within the mediation framework for Sri Lanka. Further, the Policy aims at establishing a system of principles and guidelines to strengthen the structure that exists and position the diverse categories of mediation in Sri Lanka. Further to the above, development of a national policy for mediation will strengthen the capacity and uniformity of Mediation Boards and certainly contribute towards achieving SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

However, given the political developments in the country and the recommendations of ROM report, until a firm commitment is secured from the government to develop mediation as a strong alternative to litigation, project work on the policy is halted.

Sub activity 3.4.5.2. *Engage an expert to conduct a study on the effectiveness of court - referred mediation and identify laws and procedures for amending and developing new laws and procedures from the perspective of commercial mediation.*

This activity is implemented with the Asia Foundation. The project has engaged a law firm in 2024 to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the Court- referred Mediation. The primary objective of this initiative is to understand the feasibility of implementing the Court- referred Mediation in Sri Lanka. This study will assist the government and relevant entities to understand the resource restrictions and implementation issues in giving effect to court referred mediation.

The recommendations from this study are expected to inform the development of a system to address challenges within the court system and support the implementation of court-referred mediation. Asia Foundation has completed this study and will ready for review during first quarter of 2025.

Sub-activity 3.4.5.3 *Strengthen the International ADR Centre.*

During the inception study, the need for an institution to provide commercial mediation services was strongly felt by many stakeholders. Although the IADRC was set up in partnership with the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and the Institute for Commercial Law and Practice in 2018, there was no dedicated space to carry out mediations. In consideration of the strategic need, the IADRC moved into the recently vacated premises of the IADRC at the World Trade Centre since these premises were custom built to facilitate international mediation and arbitration.

The project believes the institutional support to IADRC through the project will create a conducive environment to increase the use of commercial mediation as a viable option for the resolution of commercial disputes and capitalize on the momentum built by the proposed new commercial mediation legislation.

In 2024, the JURE project underwent a strategic shift, narrowing its focus exclusively to commercial mediation while discontinuing activities related to arbitration and community mediation to avoid duplication of efforts with other development partners and align with emerging priorities.

Asia Foundation through its partner the IADRC has provided support to conduct four mediations and hosted four arbitrations in 2024

UNDP is in discussion with the Asia Foundation and relevant institutions to come up with key strategic level interventions to be implemented under the JURE in 2025 and 2026. Part of the discussion with Asia Foundation, under JURE rental support was discontinued to IADRC.

Sub activity 3.4.5.3. Engage experts to develop 01 three-month certificate course on mediation, 01 one- year diploma on mediation, and 01 one- year master's course on commercial mediation.

This activity is implemented with the Asia Foundation, in collaboration with the UOC Faculty of Law and the CSHR to strengthen mediation education and awareness in Sri Lanka. Through this initiative, the project has supported the establishment of a **Certificate Course, Diploma, and Master's Program on Mediation**. In addition, the project has enabled the Faculty of Law to deliver a dedicated module on commercial mediation within its master's program in Commercial Law.

As a result of these efforts, the intervention is equipping future legal practitioners with a strong understanding of ADR methods and promoting the adoption of commercial mediation in Sri Lanka. By incorporating mediation into academic programs, the project is contributing to the development of a new generation of legal professionals with specialized knowledge in ADR and supporting the growth of mediation as a practical and effective tool for resolving disputes.

A training workshop was conducted in January 2024 for faculty members of the Commercial Law Department, Faculty of Law, UOC. The workshop was designed to strengthen the delivery of the newly developed module on commercial mediation for the LLM Program in Commercial Law, which is offered by the university under the project. A key outcome of this workshop includes the creation of a comprehensive resource book, now available as a reference tool for lecturers delivering the Commercial Mediation module. The LLM Course has successfully enrolled **48 students (27 women, 21 of men)**, and the module on Commercial Mediation officially commenced in February 2024. This initiative introduces a critical and emerging topic to Sri Lanka's legal academia, contributing to the capacity-building of legal professionals in the field of alternative dispute resolution.

UOC- CSHR is planning to launch the course during the session starting from second quarter of 2025. Part of the consensus with Asia Foundation, JURE will utilize to the best the already developed courses and will not develop additional courses on the subject.

Sub-activity 3.4.5.4 Development of commercial mediation related laws

The project provided technical support in partnership with Asia Foundation for two legislative enactments.

1. Act to give effect to the obligations under the Singapore Convention.
2. Act for Civil and Commercial Dispute Resolution using Mediation.

The parliament passed the Act to enact obligations under the **Singapore Convention in January 2024**. Instrument of ratification was deposited at the UN Headquarters in New York, and the ratification by Sri Lanka was affected on 28 February 2024, and the Convention entered into force for Sri Lanka on 28 August 2024. **Sri Lanka became the fourteenth State Party** to the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation, also known as the "Singapore Convention on Mediation. The importance of this initiative lies in its alignment with the UN Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation (Singapore 2018). This convention enables the enforcement of mediated settlement agreements across borders, particularly those with international implications. Its adoption, guided by the recommendation of the UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), signifies not only the increasing global use of

mediation but also its proven efficacy as a dispute resolution mechanism. By facilitating international trade and business transactions, this initiative contributes to tangible results in fostering smoother, more efficient commercial relations.

Several rounds of discussions were held in 2024 with the MOJ to finalize the Bill on Mediation of Civil and Commercial Disputes. With support from the project, Asia Foundation with IADRC played a pivotal role in the drafting and review process. In April 2024, the center facilitated a closed-door discussion with lawyers—many of whom had undergone Mediation Advocacy training through JURE-funded initiatives. Their expertise directly contributed to refining the Bill. Subsequently, the AGD engaged with IADRC to further review and revise the draft. Building on this momentum, the IADRC engaged with the MOJ in July 2024 to advance the Bill's submission. A **Cabinet Memorandum** is now being prepared to secure approval for gazette publication, a crucial step before its presentation in Parliament.

Sub-activity 3.4.5.5 Provide capacity and awareness raising support on ADR mechanisms to sector institutions/ corporate professionals and the business community.

The project, in partnership with the Asia Foundation and Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC), successfully conducted a **two-day Mediation Advocacy Training** in March 2024. The workshop, focused on the role of lawyers in mediation, trained **24 lawyers and practitioners (16 women, 8 men)** from leading law firms, chambers, and the AGD. The training covered mediation principles, the dispute mediation process, and essential techniques for lawyers to secure optimal resolutions.

As a result, participants gained a deeper understanding of commercial mediation's role in Sri Lanka's dispute resolution framework. One participant committed to incorporating mediation clauses into future contracts, while several expressed interest in pursuing accreditation as mediation advocates. Additionally, 75% of participants reported that the skills gained would significantly benefit their careers. These outcomes highlight the program's success in promoting mediation within the legal and corporate sectors.

Additionally, to increase awareness on commercial mediation among law students, the Project, in partnership with the Asia Foundation, organized a workshop on commercial mediation for law students at UOC in February 2024. In September 2024, a Pre-Pledge activity was held at the IADRC premises, raising awareness among **30 corporate entities** about incorporating mediation into dispute resolution clauses in their corporate agreements. The event successfully challenged traditional beliefs about dispute resolution and highlighted commercial mediation as a viable and effective alternative. This initiative engaged both students and the corporate community, fostering greater acceptance of mediation in the dispute resolution process.

The project raised awareness about commercial mediation at the district level through a session held in March 2024, in Jaffna. Led by five esteemed speakers from the IADRC, the workshop engaged **41 participants**, including lawyers, chamber members, academics, and engineers. The session introduced the concept of commercial mediation and its importance across various sectors. As a result, the Yarlpanam Chamber expressed interest in referring cases to mediation, and **96% of participants agreed** to recommend commercial mediation for resolving commercial disputes.

Output 3.5. Established mechanisms/ platforms for improving cooperation and coordination between justice actors.

Output 3.5 has two key activities conducted with four sub-activities under them. Out of these, all sub-activities have been initiated.

Activity 3.5.1. Review and revise coordination protocols across the different actors within the sector and establish new protocols (where necessary) including IT-based protocols. (UNDP)

The impact of this activity is multifold. Protocols establish clear roles and responsibilities for each actor in the justice system, preventing confusion and duplication of efforts. This ensures a smooth flow of cases and efficient delivery of justice. Protocols also outline communication channels and procedures for sharing information between different actors, such as police, prosecutors, courts, and judicial medical officers. This fosters transparency and collaboration, leading to better case outcomes. Against this backdrop consistent procedures and best practices thus can be adopted across the justice sector. This ensures fairness, reduces delays, and improves the overall quality of justice delivery. Overall, these aspects contribute to the Outcome 3 in promoting improved efficiency and quality of justice.

This activity has been partially completed due to the reasons given in detail below. Overall, consultations have taken place to lay the groundwork for the coordination mechanism.

The activity has been discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for both the donor and the GoSL.

Sub-activity 3.5.1.1 Conduct a mapping of the intra-sector coordination needs within the criminal justice sector.

The activity has been discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for both the donor and the GoSL.

Sub-activity 3.5.1.2 Conduct a medico-legal coordination needs assessment.

Similar to the intra-sector coordination, an inter-sector coordination between the medical and legal sectors contributes to efficiency of the justice process, by expediting case-flow management within the criminal justice sector.

In collaboration with the MOJ and JURE and UNDP's **Enabling Access to Justice for Victim Survivors of SGBV (funded by the Government of Canada)** projects, a consultation was convened in August 2024 to address substantive and procedural issues causing delays in the delivery of criminal justice. This initiative brought together key stakeholders, including representatives from the MOJ, Judicial Medical Service (led by the Chief Judicial Medical Officer of Colombo), Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment (MWCASE), SLJI, DOP, AGD, NAPVCW, NCPA, GAD, and Sri Lanka Police (SLP). The consultation helped identify key legal, procedural, and regulatory challenges hindering coordination among criminal justice stakeholders and proposed substantive and procedural interventions to strengthen medico-legal coordination. The consultation resulted in the development of a policy report which will be handed over to the MOJ for follow up in 2025. The policy report outlines time-bound action points for decision-makers and formulates a framework to institutionalize periodic medico-legal coordination meetings under the guidance of the MOJ.

Sub-activity 3.5.1.3 Support the establishment and management of a DP coordination platform.

Coordination and information exchanges between development partners working in the justice sector is crucial to enhance justice, efficiency and prudent use of limited resources. UNDP convened a justice sector coordination meeting in November 2024 with development partners and relevant government stakeholders in the justice sector along with the Treasury Department to coordinate development projects and activities related to the Justice Sector.

Activity 3.5.2. Support sector coordination on evidence-based assessments such as sector strategy, investment plan strategic budgeting and disbursement and sectoral strategy evaluation, expenditure reviews and other related assessments and sector engagement with the parliamentary committee on Justice. (UNDP)

This activity focuses on a central coordination mechanism to foster communication and collaboration among different justice sector actors. This ensures working towards a shared vision. By coordinating stakeholder needs and plans, the mechanism also facilitates strategic budgeting and disbursement of resources. The mechanism promotes information exchange between stakeholders, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of justice sector needs and challenges.

This activity is partially completed. Accordingly, consultations have been conducted with the objective of concretizing the coordination efforts.

The activity has been discontinued to prioritize alignment with the IMF GDA Report, which remains a key priority for both the donor and the GoSL.

Sub-activity 3.5.2.1 Support the Ministry of Justice to establish a sectoral mechanism to coordinate sector strategies, investment plans, strategic budgeting and disbursement with relevant sector stakeholders.

Preliminary discussions were held with the MOJ on the need for comprehensive strategic planning ahead of submitting the request for budgetary allocation for the sector. The need for a sector-specific strategic visioning exercise was highlighted to guide the sector institutions' plans and budget towards a common vision with annualized targets. A strategic planning session will be held in 2025 ahead of the preparation of the next budget plan for the sector. The project developed two types of terms of reference for two strategic committees led by the MOJ to improve coordination within the government agencies and government and development partners.

3.6. Conduct JURE Independent Mid Term Evaluation Study.

During the month of October 2024, the project Mid Term Evaluation (MTE) exercise commenced. UNDP engaged an international expert and a national evaluation firm through competitive process. Despite factors like the elections for the new President and Parliament of Sri Lanka, the evaluation team successfully completed data collections. The team shared draft report for review. The evaluation report will be finalized in 2025. The evaluation report identifies areas for improvement including the project logframe with clear, gender responsive and measurable indicators, building synergies with other donors' funded projects to avoid duplication, improving coordination with the development partners, and improving financial management amongst other. UNDP and UNCICEF will make their joint plan to implement the recommendations of the MTE report.

LESSONS LEARNT

- **Enhancing Coordination Through Structured Committees**

Since the project's inception, significant milestones and deliverables have been achieved. However, challenges persist in aligning efforts with other entities to collaboratively achieve key objectives. Institutions and commissions have been operating in silos, making coordination particularly difficult. To address this, the project is formalizing technical working groups and committees to drive critical milestones, including:

- *Technical Working Committee for RDS: The Committee aims to ensure smooth implementation of the RDS project activity.*
- *Technical Committee on Justice Sector Snapshot Steering: The Committees aims to ensure smooth implementation of the DSS project activity.*
- *High-Level Working Committee – Established by the Ministry for heads of organizations to provide strategic oversight*
- *DCB Technical Working Group: The committee has been appointed by the Minister and restructured to enhance efficiency in addressing technical aspects*

Having these technical and high-level committees, smooth implementation, involvement, and ownership of the government can be improved.

- **Gaps in the Result matrix**

Although the project has achieved significant progress on most indicators, the mid-term evaluation and subsequent project reflections highlighted a lack of alignments between the Results Matrix and some of the project's objectives and outcomes. These misalignments limited the effectiveness of progress tracking. For instance, key performance indicators lacked specificity and relevance to project outcomes, making it challenging to measure impact accurately. Additionally, the absence of robust gender and inclusion metrics hindered the ability to assess the project's impact on vulnerable groups. Furthermore, underutilized stakeholder feedback mechanisms restricted opportunities for adaptive learning and mid-course corrections.

To address these gaps, the project has taken important steps to streamline the Results Matrix by integrating SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) indicators, enhancing the ability to track progress effectively. Strengthening Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems to incorporate real-time tracking and adaptive learning mechanisms will improve responsiveness to emerging challenges. Additionally, incorporating stakeholder feedback loops and prioritizing gender-disaggregated data will ensure future projects are more inclusive, data-driven, and accountable.

- **Gender and Social Inclusion Barriers to Justice Sector Reforms**

The project recognized and implemented measures to promote gender and social inclusion in justice sector reforms. However, significant challenges remain due to cultural restrictions and political influences that continue to shape the justice system. These barriers have directly limited the participation and access to justice for vulnerable groups, including women, children, and marginalized communities.

While the project made efforts to address these issues, achieving lasting impact requires systemic change beyond project level interventions. Government institutions, justice sector actors, and policymakers must actively support and enable reforms by adopting policies that promote inclusivity and removing structural barriers that prevent equitable access to justice. Without strong external support, efforts to improve gender and social inclusion within the justice sector will remain challenging and ineffective.

- **Digitation of Justice Services:**

Digitization in the justice sector offers significant benefits, including improved efficiency, transparency, and access to justice, but its success depends on addressing key challenges. **Government and end users' commitment is vital, as it provides the necessary funding, policy support, and leadership to drive digitization initiatives forward.** By addressing these factors, the justice sector can leverage digitization to deliver better services, uphold the rule of law, and ensure inclusivity for all citizens.