EU and UNDP assist Georgia to improve access to justice and raise professionalism of lawyers

The improved access to legal aid for over 45,000 people every year, training for 2,400 representatives of legal profession, increased international cooperation in the field of justice – these are some of the key results achieved by the Legal Aid Service of Georgia and the Georgian Bar Association with the assistance from the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The achievements of the EU4Justice programme in 2016-2018 were presented to the public on 23 January 2019.
"I am confident that the EU played an instrumental role in developing both the State Legal Aid Service and the Bar Association in Georgia over last 10 years. We have done it through direct transfers of funds into the Georgian state budget, and through different projects" said Catalin German, Deputy Head of Cooperation Section at the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia. “Our project with UNDP brought many tangible results and thus improved importantly the access of people in Georgia to high quality legal aid and services.”

Meliton Benidze, Director of the Legal Aid Service of Georgia, and Giorgi Tshekhani, Executive Director of the Georgian Bar Association, presented the progress made by both agencies in recent years.

Since its establishment in 2007, the Legal Aid Service has assisted over 330,000 people, including court representation in more than 123,000 cases. With the complex support from the European Union and UNDP, the Legal Aid Service has improved its internal systems of administration and management, adopted an organizational development strategy, trained lawyers, consultants and staff, and introduced an electronic case management system – Case Bank. The Legal Aid Service has adapted some of its bureaus for people with disabilities, launched a multi-language website adapted for people with visual impairments and established a call centre which serves up to 50 people every day. The Legal Aid Service also leads a referral network of free legal aid providers which brings together the state, non-governmental and educational organizations.

In 2018, the Legal Aid Service hosted the Third International Legal Aid Conference, ILAC 2018, the largest global forum on legal aid in criminal justice.

The assistance to the Georgian Bar Association has focused on institutional and professional development of this largest professional association of the Georgian lawyers which represents over 4,000 members and is responsible for the regulation of the legal profession. Supported by the European Union and UNDP, the Association has adopted a four-year Strategy and Action Plan, reformed its human resources system, moved to electronic document management and organised the comprehensive training for lawyers in the framework of the continued legal education.

“Access to justice is fundamental to democratic transition and sustainable development,” said Munkhtuya Altangerel, Deputy Head of UNDP in Georgia. “UNDP is supporting the Legal Aid Service and Bar Association of Georgia as the key institutions to provide Georgian people with quality justice services.”

The assistance to the Legal Aid Service and Georgian Bar Association is part of a wider EU-funded programme EU4Justice which is based on the Financing Agreement on "Support to the Justice Sector Reform in Georgia" signed between Georgia and the European Union in May 2015.

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