

ISSUES OF IMPROVING THE SYSTEM OF PROVIDING LEGAL AND OTHER SERVICES IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

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Abstract. *This thesis highlights the reforms being implemented in the justice system of the Republic of Uzbekistan to improve the quality of legal and other services provided, ensure their digitalization, transparency, and efficiency. Additionally, current challenges in the system, international experiences, legal foundations, and opportunities for citizens to access justice services have been analyzed. Practical and innovative proposals for enhancing state and legal services in the justice system have been developed. The thesis substantiates ideas for public-private partnerships, territorial equality, a rating system for legal services, and the implementation of unified platforms. Furthermore, based on the goals of the "Uzbekistan - 2030" strategy, methods to improve service quality are outlined.*

Keywords: *justice system, legal services, public services, digitalization, legal aid, notary services, advocacy, "my.gov.uz," "Uzbekistan - 2030" strategy, legal consulting center.*

According to Article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, everyone is guaranteed the right to receive qualified legal assistance. In cases stipulated by law, legal aid is provided at the expense of the state [1].

The justice system plays a key role in shaping the rule of law and civil society, ensuring citizens' rights and freedoms, and establishing the supremacy of law. Therefore, improving the quality of legal and other types of services provided to the population by justice bodies, ensuring their openness, transparency, and efficiency has become a priority of state policy.

Public service is a service provided by state bodies in fulfillment of their functions, carried out at the request of applicants.

Legal service is a type of professional legal activity that facilitates the realization, protection, and implementation of the rights and interests of individuals or legal entities through lawful means.

Regarding this, T. Khudoyberdiyev notes that "during the reform of the justice system, the integration of services with modern digital tools will help increase their transparency to the public" [2].

Currently, the relevance of the topic is evident through issues such as: uneven territorial and social distribution of services provided by justice bodies and institutions; varying levels of digitalization in public services; citizens encountering bureaucratic obstacles; low participation of the private sector in providing legal assistance; the need to accelerate reforms in the justice system to improve Uzbekistan's position in international rankings (for example, the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index); and other related matters.

Based on the foregoing, the improvement of legal and other public services in the justice system is currently an extremely important and urgent task in:

- ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens in practice;

- raising legal awareness and legal culture;
- establishing social justice and the rule of law;
- strengthening the state's reputation in the international arena.

In accordance with Resolution No. PP-3666 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated April 13, 2018, "On Organizational Measures for Further Improvement of the Activities of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan," the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan provides legal and other services to citizens and state bodies. These services include: lawmaking, impact assessment of regulatory legal acts, anti-corruption expertise, dissemination of legal information, protection of citizens' rights and freedoms, coordination of legal services, organization of notary and advocacy activities, implementation of a unified policy in the field of administrative procedures and public services, introduction of electronic cooperation and information systems, as well as oversight of these services[3].

Furthermore, to carry out its assigned tasks and functions, the Ministry has the following authority in state bodies and other organizations: to examine the status of legislative drafting activities, legal affairs, legal services operations, the publication of regulatory legal acts and their dissemination to interested parties; to inspect law enforcement practices, the implementation of legislation ensuring citizens' rights, and compliance with established procedures for providing public services, including through on-site visits.

In accordance with the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 70 "On Measures to Organize the Activities of the Public Services Agency under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan," the activities of the Public Services Agency under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan were organized. The Public Service Center was a new form of public service delivery that helped reduce the number of redundant and unnecessary steps in this process by changing the method of service delivery[4]. Looking at the experience of foreign countries in this regard, we can see that in Brazil, the "Public Service Center" (SAC), in the Russian Federation, the "Multiple Center" (MFS) - the principle of "Single Window," and in the Czech Republic, the "CZECH POINT" or Czech National Information Terminal provides public services to citizens[5].

According to Article 7 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Advocacy" dated December 27, 1996, a lawyer cannot hold public service. Therefore, a lawyer provides legal services freely, independently, subject only to the law, for a certain fee, solely to protect the violated rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of citizens[6].

Also, in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Provision of Legal Assistance at the Expense of the State," territorial justice bodies are now participating in the process of providing legal assistance at the expense of the state. It is in this regard that the participation of territorial justice bodies, along with expanding the opportunities for citizens to receive qualified legal services, also improves the mechanisms for providing such legal services to citizens with limited financial capabilities[7].

In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 17.03.2022 No. UP-89 "On Measures to Further Enhance the Effectiveness of the Activities of Justice Bodies and Institutions in Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Citizens and Providing

Legal Services," the implementation of the idea of "New Uzbekistan - a People's and Humane State" requires further deepening of administrative reforms in the system of justice bodies[8].

According to paragraph 12 of this Decree, a single Department for the Regulation of Legal Services has been created within the structure of the Ministry of Justice, based on the departments for the regulation of legal services and the provision of legal services.

According to goals 74 and 77 of the "Uzbekistan - 2030" Strategy, it is envisaged to provide more than 100 services in mahallas "in one step," complete digitalization of public services, elimination of bureaucratic barriers, and abolition of formal procedures for filing applications. The citizen will have the opportunity to immediately obtain the necessary documents from the electronic database[9].

In this regard, according to Sh.Rakhmonkulov, "The quality of legal services is an important criterion determining the effectiveness of public administration. To improve it, it is necessary to improve the quality of not only institutional, but also human resources"[10].

In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 24.05.2024 No. UP-80 "On Further Enhancing the Responsibility of Justice Bodies and Institutions and the Formation of a Compact Management System within the Framework of Administrative Reforms," the goal is to ensure unconditional observance of the rights and freedoms of citizens, further increasing the responsibility of justice bodies and institutions in expanding the range of state and legal services provided to them.

Also, starting from July 1, 2024, the following procedure for providing free primary legal aid to citizens has been introduced: the Ministry of Justice, together with the NGO "Madad," has gradually established legal advisory bureaus of the NGO "Madad" in public service centers in all districts and cities of the republic; legal advisory bureaus provide free legal advice to the population, as well as assist in the preparation of procedural documents necessary for pre-trial and judicial settlement of disputes[11].

In recent years, serious reforms have been carried out in the justice system of the Republic of Uzbekistan to introduce the principles of digitalization, openness, and the provision of convenient public services to citizens. At the same time, such factors as the existing legal and organizational infrastructure, imbalances between regions, insufficient coverage of the needs of socially vulnerable segments of the population affect the effectiveness of the system of legal and public services provided by justice bodies.

Although the number of electronic services in the justice system has increased, their coverage, integration, and technical reliability remain low. Citizens can use many services through the Single Portal of Interactive Public Services (my.gov.uz). However, technical malfunctions and internet outages are also observed when citizens use these services. In addition, the exchange of information between the notary, the bar, the judiciary, and the mediation service is not sufficiently organized. This creates bureaucratic obstacles, requiring citizens to go through several stages.

The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Electronic Government" defines the need to integrate all public services into a single system, but in practice, this task has not been fully implemented by the relevant state bodies. This law introduced the concept of an electronic public service in the field of providing services to citizens, which is currently widely used by state bodies and institutions providing justice and other legal services.

Also, while access to free legal aid is highly organized for urban residents, in rural areas and other remote areas, these services are only available for show. Citizens in need of social protection have limited access to the services of qualified lawyers or free legal advice. This is due to the shortage of lawyers in the regions, insufficient state funds for the organization of free legal services, weak monitoring of the system, and unwillingness of qualified specialists to work in remote areas.

There are barriers to access legal aid through the justice system for persons with disabilities, lonely elderly people, women, and migrants. There are no dedicated service formats or approaches for people with special needs.

However, according to Article 19 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, all citizens in the Republic of Uzbekistan have equal rights and freedoms and are equal before the law regardless of gender, race, nationality, language, religion, beliefs, social origin, or social status.

One of the existing problems is the lack of specialized specialists and service points for citizens with disabilities, the inadequacy of the infrastructure for citizens with disabilities.

In conclusion, the main directions in improving services in the justice system should be the acceleration of digitalization processes, strengthening the principles of social justice, ensuring territorial equality, and forming a system for providing quality services. This requires a review of the regulatory framework and the introduction of modern management approaches.

According to M.S.Tukhtaev, "Legal services should be considered as a means of realizing the constitutional rights of citizens. It is necessary to expand the volume of legal services based on public-private partnerships"[12].

The UN Development Programme presented a report on Uzbekistan, stating that "48% of Uzbek citizens face obstacles in obtaining legal aid when facing legal problems, and that expanding the scope of quality, open, and affordable legal services can increase social stability and trust between the state and citizens"[13].

Below are substantiated, practical, and legally sound proposals aimed at radically improving the quality of legal services in the justice system based on international best practices, existing problems, and the real state of Uzbekistan.

Achieving the resolution of legal problems of the population on the ground by opening a "Center for Legal Consultation" at each mahalla citizens' assembly, financed by the state and created jointly with justice bodies. Through these centers, citizens receive free legal advice, instructions on drafting legal documents, and assistance in writing applications, proposals, and complaints to government agencies. In the Netherlands, "Legal Aid Desks," and in Finland, the "Legal Aid Office" mechanism is organized at the level of the population's place of residence. In this case, citizens have the opportunity to receive primary legal aid in a nearby area.

Separate services are available on the My.gov.uz and adliya.uz portals, but there is no single integrated legal aid platform. Also, the statistics of appeals and effectiveness are not public. The registration of lawyers, notaries, mediators, and officials providing public services on a single centralized platform, and the open provision of information about them, will ensure the principle of openness in the provision of legal and other public services. Citizens can receive consultations through the portal free of charge or on a paid basis.

The special program, based on artificial intelligence, identifies the features of citizens' legal problems and directs them to the most suitable specialist. Citizens use online legal services through specially developed platforms in the USA (LawHelp Interactive) and Spain (Justicia Abierta).

The justice system lacks a centralized monitoring and rating system for service quality, efficiency, customer attitude, and complaint registration. As a result, the opinions of citizens dissatisfied with the service are not systematically analyzed. In Singapore, all public servants and services are evaluated on the basis of public opinion through a government initiative (Public Service for the 21st Century) [14]. In Brazil (Justiça Aberta) [15], the activities of all judges and officials in the judicial and justice system are publicly announced through the portal regarding complaints, applications, and service efficiency. In this regard, it is proposed to create a national platform "Rating of Justice Services." In this case, each notary, lawyer, mediator, and public service provider will have their own profile; clients who provide services there will have the opportunity to conduct an anonymous assessment.

The rating criteria should be determined based on:

- Service efficiency;
- Clarity of legal explanation;
- Politeness and communication;
- Existence of complaints and deadlines for resolution.

It is advisable to openly publish the results of this rating on the official website of the Ministry of Justice and the portal "my.gov.uz."

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