

2023 International Forum on Legal Aid**National Report: Korea**

1. Please provide up-to-date information about your country and its legal aid organizations.

Information about your country (region or state)*				
Country	Population (by the end of 2022)	GDP (by the end of 2022)	Poverty line & population living in poverty	Total no. of practicing lawyers
Republic of Korea	51,558,034 (2023)	USD 1664.3 billion (13th)	USD 1,995 (a family of four) / 50% median income)	33,162 (Mar,2023)
* In addition to the country information given above, for countries with federal systems where the legal aid organization described below is not a national organization, please provide data for the state/province/area where the legal aid organization operates.				
Information about the legal aid organization				
Name of legal aid organization	Date of establishment	Total no. of applications received in 2022	Total no. of applications approved in 2022	Total no. of applications rejected in 2022
Korea Legal Aid Corporation	Sep. 1, 1987	108,727	101,887	452
Total no. of employees	Total no. of Legal Aid Lawyers	Government funding for the legal aid organization in 2022	Total legal aid expenses in 2022	Proportion of government funding to the total legal aid expenses
766	133	USD 44,908,591	USD 80,066,132	56.08%

2. What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on democracy, human rights, and the judicial system in your country? Please include, but do not limit your answers to, the following aspects:

(1) What were the COVID-19 restrictions (such as lockdowns, isolation, etc.) at different phases of the pandemic in your country? How did those restrictions affect individual rights and society?

After the first COVID-19 case was reported in South Korea on January 20, 2020, the country experienced four significant waves of infections until October 2021. The first wave, labeled ①, occurred in February 2020, the second wave (②) in August 2020, the third wave (③) in December 2020, and the fourth wave (④) began in July 2021.

[Figure 1] Daily New COVID-19 Cases Trend in South Korea



As a response to these waves, the government implemented various levels of "social distancing" measures in different regions, adjusting them as needed according to the COVID-19 situation. The Ministry of Health and Welfare established a 3-stage system in June 2020 and revised it to a 5-stage system in November 2020. Later, in June 2021, they simplified the stages and enhanced regional autonomy, introducing the so-called "New Distancing Level 4" criteria.

Since the number of cases increased significantly in the Greater Seoul area, the New Distancing Level 4 measures were applied starting from July 12, 2021. As of October 12, 2021, the Greater Seoul area continued to follow the New Distancing Level 4 guidelines, while non-Greater Seoul areas maintained the Level 3 measures.

After the first COVID-19 case in Korea on January 20, 2020, various social distancing measures have been implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Although Social Distancing has been lifted, the Distancing measures varied by time, region, and the types of businesses.

[Table1] Overview of Changes in Social Distancing Measures.

	Period	Term	Contents
1	Mar.20.20~Apr.19.20.	Enhanced Social Distancing	Religious facilities, indoor sports facilities, entertainment venues : suspended operations for a period of 15 days, If it is unavoidable to operate the facilities, strict adherence to the hygiene guidelines is mandatory. Failure to comply with the guidelines may result in the issuance of administrative orders prohibiting gatherings and assemblies, with fines of up to 3 million KRW imposed for violations. Apr.8.20 : The 1st Gathering Ban Order issued in Seoul(=Compulsory Business Closure)
2	~Ma.5.20.	Partial Relaxation of Restrictions	Religious facilities, indoor sports facilities, entertainment venues : Clousure -> Restraint, if violation, fine.
3	~June.27.20.	Daily Social Distancing	As a precursor to the Level 1 Social Distancing measures, detailed regulations were established for various sectors and settings, in

			addition to common guidelines. These include businesses, public transportation, restaurants and cafes, large retail facilities, traditional markets, family gatherings such as weddings, funeral homes, hotels, condos, bathhouses, public restrooms, outdoor activities, and more.
4	June.28.23~	Social Distancing	Varoious distancing being united into Social Distancing, and Social Distancing measures have been phased and tailored based on the timing of COVID-19 breaks as well as the operation of businesses and schools.

[Table 2] Overview of New Social Distancing Level 4

Category		Stage1	Stage2	Stage3	Stage4
Standards	Population over 100,000	Less than 1 person per 100,000 people(weekly average)	1 person or more per 100,000 people(weekly average exceeding the standard for more than 3 days)	2 or more persons per 100,000 people(weekly average exceeding the standard for more than 3 days)	4 or more persons per 100,000 people (weekly average exceeding the standard for more than 3 days)
				More than 70% of ICU(Intensive Care Unit) beds in the region	More than 70% of ICU beds nationwide
	Population under 100,000	Weekly total number of patients: Fewer than 5	Weekly total number of patients: 5 or more	Weekly total number of patients: 10 or more	Weekly total number of patients: 20 or more
Specific Quarantine Rules	Gatherings	Adherence to meeting quarantine rules	Gatherings of up to 8 people allowed (private gatherings of 9 or more people prohibited)	Gatherings of up to 4 people allowed (private gatherings of 5 or more people prohibited)	Meetings limited to 2 people after 8 PM (private gatherings of 3 or more people prohibited)

	Events	Reporting to local authorities required for events with 500 or more participants	Prohibition of events with 100 or more participants	Prohibition of events with 50 or more participants	Not allowed
	Rallies	Prohibition of rallies with 500 or more participants	Prohibition of rallies with 100 or more participants	Prohibition of rallies with 50 or more participants	Prohibition of rallies, except for single-person demonstrations. aj

(2) Do you have any concerns that the COVID-19 measures (e.g., quarantine, isolation, digital contact tracing, etc.) taken in your country might have violated human rights?

In March 2020, following the emergence of the 31st confirmed COVID-19 case at a church facility in Daegu, South Korea, there was a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases in the region. In response, various measures were taken, including issuing gathering restrictions on religious gatherings and conducting administrative investigations into churches and private residences to trace the sources and transmission routes of the virus. Additionally, the city of Daegu filed a 100 billion KRW damage claim lawsuit against the mentioned religious facilities, citing interference with COVID-19 prevention efforts, resulting in healthcare expenses, and economic losses to the local area (the court issued a conciliation recommendation in August 2022, effectively ending the lawsuit). These actions raised concerns about infringements on religious freedom and the right to assemble.

Furthermore, in prisons and detention centers, the right to legal counsel for inmates also faced significant restrictions. Meeting rooms without partitions were closed, and legal counsel meetings were conducted in partitioned general visitation rooms. Despite making multiple advance appointment requests, some legal counsel meetings were

canceled due to space constraints. Additionally, after the COVID-19 pandemic, same-day appointment requests for legal counsel meetings became impossible, raising concerns about potential violations of constitutionally guaranteed rights to legal counsel and a fair trial.

(3) How were the judicial system (such as courts, prosecutors' offices, public defenders, etc.) and the correctional system (such as prisons, detention centers, etc.) in your country impacted at different phases of the COVID-19 pandemic? Were there short-term or long-term changes? How did they affect democracy, human rights, and access to justice in your country? How did you deal with the impacts?

The court organized the "COVID-19 Response Committee" (hereinafter referred to as the "COVID-19 Response Committee") with the Director of the Court Administration Department serving as the chairman. The COVID-19 Response Committee implemented strong measures, including "flexible operation of trial dates similar to vacation periods," to respond to the crises of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main contents of the measures taken by the COVID-19 Response Committee during each wave of the pandemic are as follows:

[Table3]: The table describing the key measures taken during each wave of the pandemic would follow here.

Period (Date)	External Measures	Internal Measures
1st Wave(February 24, 2020)	Flexibly reschedule and change trial dates for cases other than those requiring emergency handling. Allow mask-wearing for trial participants, including parties and court officials during proceedings.	Reduce or postpone court activities and shift to online video conferences.

2nd Wave(August 21, 2020)	Flexibly reschedule and change trial dates for cases other than those requiring emergency handling.	Reduce or postpone unnecessary meetings and utilize non-face-to-face methods, such as video conferencing. Weekly court closure (public holiday) in accordance with infection control guidelines. Temporary closure of the Court's Smart Work Center.
3rd Wave(December 7, 2020)	For courts in the Seoul metropolitan area: Flexibly reschedule and change trial dates for cases other than those requiring emergency handling.	Prohibit meetings and events with 20 or more participants. Implement telecommuting (flexible working hours system and related regulations) twice a week in the Seoul metropolitan area and once a week in non-metropolitan areas.
4th Wave(July 9, 2021)	In Level 4 (Seoul metropolitan area): Recommend rescheduling or changing trial dates as a rule (except for cases that can be conducted through video trials).	Non-face-to-face meetings and events are the rule in Level 4, with face-to-face meetings and events prohibited. In Levels 3 and 4, implement telecommuting once a week.

[Table 4] Overview of Court Measures in Response to Social Distancing Level 4 since July 9, 2021

Category	1st Level	2nd Level	3rd Level	4th Level
Trial and Execution Dates Principle	<p>All courtroom attendees must strictly adhere to mask-wearing and follow infection prevention measures.</p> <p>Generally, attendance is limited to 1/2 capacity of the viewing gallery, except for cases with multiple parties (excluding those parties).</p> <p>Strictly adheres to scheduling for time intervals (including the sentencing date)</p>	same as the left side	same as the left side	<p>Reschedule or change trial dates is recommended as a rule. However, for cases that can be conducted via video trials, such a method is recommended.</p>
Telecommuting	standard operation	Telecommuting every two week (excluding essential personnel, such as department heads).	Telecommuting every week (excluding essential personnel, such as department heads).	Telecommuting every week (excluding essential personnel, such as department heads).
Smart Work	standard	standard	Temporarily	Temporarily

Center Operations	operation	operation	closed	closed
Meeting and Event Methods	Normal face-to-face meetings and events are allowed.	Non-face-to-face meetings and events are the rule. However, each court takes into account regional conditions, based on strict compliance with government infection control guidelines, and can operate flexibly with the approval of the head of the institution for gatherings of fewer than 50 people.	Non-face-to-face meetings and events are the rule. However, each court takes into account regional conditions, based on strict compliance with government infection control guidelines, and can operate flexibly with the approval of the head of the institution for gatherings of fewer than 30 people.	Non-face-to-face meetings and events are the rule, with face-to-face meetings and events prohibited.

From around November 2020 to January 2021, Seoul Eastern Detention Center experienced two separate outbreaks of COVID-19. As a result, until January 2021, there were 1,203 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 2 deaths within the facility. The cumulative incidence rate was 4.9% among staff (27 out of 552 confirmed cases) and 42.9% among inmates (1,176 out of 2,738 confirmed cases).

The Central Disease Control Headquarters conducted an epidemiological investigation

into the COVID-19 outbreaks, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice. The investigation revealed that the first outbreak primarily occurred among detention center staff, followed by a second outbreak mainly involving asymptomatic new inmates.

Several measures were implemented in response to the outbreaks, including restrictions on external access to the on-site cafeteria, suspension of the vehicle rotation system, enhanced disinfection of the court premises, and limitations on external access.

Furthermore, it was reported that 42 individuals among the confirmed COVID-19 cases among inmates had recently attended court hearings at Seoul Eastern District Court, Seoul Northern District Court, Suwon District Court Seongnam Branch, and Daejeon District Court Seosan Branch. These respective courts immediately conducted disinfection of their facilities and instructed judges and staff to undergo COVID-19 testing, implementing necessary quarantine measures.

3. Beside the impact of the pandemic, have there been other crises endangering democracy and violating human rights in your country in the past five years (i.e., since the last Forum)? If yes, please describe the events, explain their causes, their impacts on society and legal aid services, and how the legal aid organization or legal aid attorneys in your country have dealt with them.

N/A

4. How has the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country changed or been affected since the COVID-19 outbreak? What has been adjusted accordingly? Please include, but do not limit your answers to, the following aspects:

(1) Daily operations and working methods of the legal aid organization or legal aid serviceproviders (such as suspension of external services, work from home, etc.)

Korea Legal Aid Corporation is a public institution providing legal services to economically disadvantaged people and those who are ignorant of laws in Korea.

The Corporation was established in 1987 under the LEGAL AID ACT, of which Article 1 says:

The purpose of this Act is to protect fundamental human rights and to further contribute to the promotion of legal welfare by providing legal aid to those in economic difficulty or those not adequately protected legally due to ignorance of the law.

■ Our services include



Moreover, the Corporation has opened the Law Culture Education Center in 2011, operating various legal education programs for multi-cultural families, North Korean defectors, and adolescents.

- In order to accomplish our mission, more than 1,000 staff(including about 120 lawyers) work hard on delivering legal services to those in need.
We deliver approximately 1.3 million instances of legal advice and 150 thousand legal representations every year.
- Our services not only reach Koreans but also foreigners residing in Korea.

■ Our Organization

The Corporation, headquartered in Gimcheon Gyeongsangbuk-do, has set up 134 local offices to make its services more easily available and accessible,

18 branches in metropolitan cities such as Seoul, Busan, Daejeon, etc.

41 sub-branches in smaller cities

75 sub-stations in much smaller counties

- Legal Advice/Consultations

After the COVID-19 outbreak, KLAC introduced a non-face-to-face counseling system in place of classical face-to-face(in-person) counseling.

To prevent infections caused by on-site waiting, the principle was to use reservation-based in-person counseling. In addition to traditional methods like phone counseling, written correspondence counseling, and online counseling, video counseling was also introduced. Recently, chatbot-based counseling using KakaoTalk has become available. In particular, due to the closure of some offices for up to 5 business days when COVID-19 patients visit, the emphasis has been on reservation-based counseling via phone or the internet to minimize the waiting time for clients.

-Litigation Representation Support

The cases applied to KLAC legal advice level go through a process where assigned attorneys for fact-finding review them and submit the cases for approval to the department head and regional head. The final decision on the acceptance of the

case is made by the regional head (department head), and the case is then assigned to the representing attorney. This process applies to all types of lawsuits, including civil, criminal, family, administrative, and more. Lawsuits are conducted in the same manner as cases handled by external law firms or private attorneys.

Cases that are not approved at first or are suspended due to reasons such as a lack of communication with the client during ongoing litigation are no longer pursued, and a notice of termination is submitted.

-Crime Victim Protection and Support Program

In addition to classical legal consultation and litigation services, KLAC has expanded its scope of activities. Since July 2013, we have assigned specialized attorneys called "Crime Victim Public Defender" to each regional office. These attorneys handle cases related to sexual violence and child abuse, providing legal assistance for crime victims, including acting as their legal representatives for criminal procedures and preventing secondary victimization during the investigation and legal proceedings(Article 21-2 of the Legal Aid Act, Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment, etc. of Sexual Crimes, Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment of Child Abuse Crimes).

- Housing/Commercial Building Lease Dispute Conciliation Committee

The Housing and Commercial Building Lease Dispute Mediation Committees were established to mediate disputes between parties related to leases governed by the Housing/Commercial building Lease Protection Act. The committees were initially set up on May 30, 2017, starting with KLAC's Seoul Central Branch, and expanded to a total of six branches nationwide, including Suwon, Daejeon, Daegu, Busan, and Gwangju, by July 3, 2017. Additionally, since April 2019, these committees have been responsible for mediating disputes related to commercial building lease agreements,

addressing a wide range of lease-related conflicts, such as building names, security deposit returns, and repair costs, etc.

- Individual Bankruptcy Comprehensive Support Center

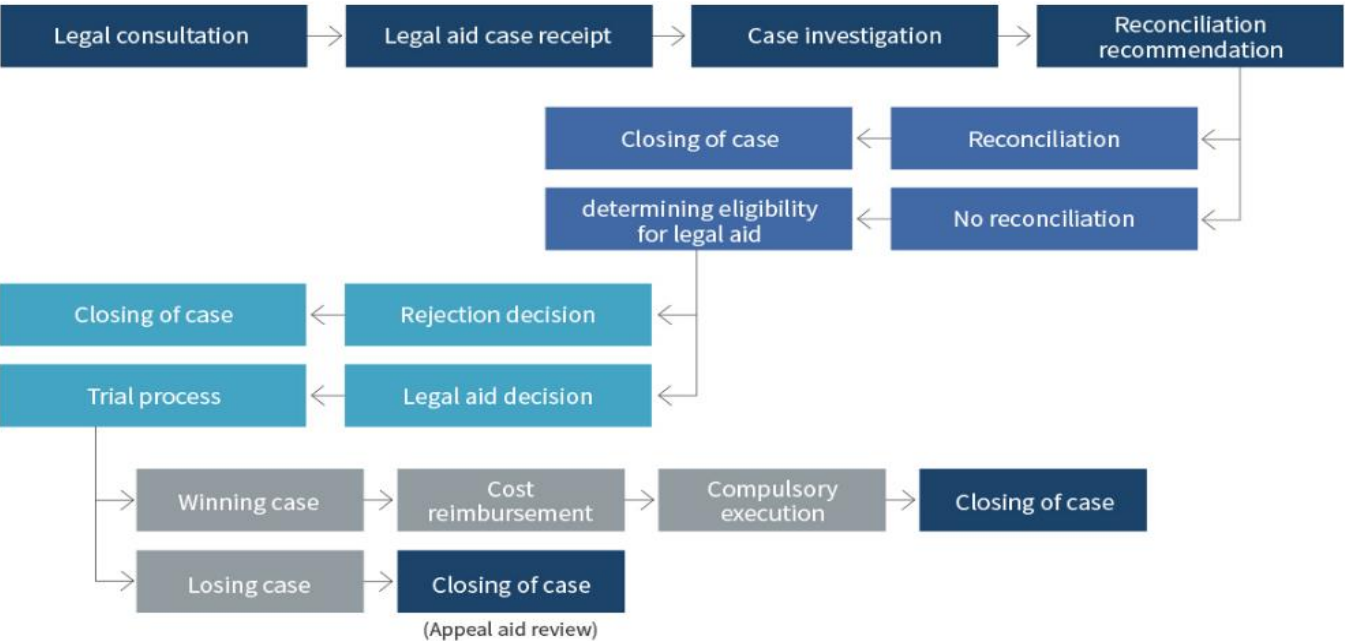
The Individual Bankruptcy Comprehensive Support Centers located in six branches handle bankruptcy and discharge permits as well as rehabilitation applications. In addition to direct filings, they also receive cases from related offices and the Credit Recovery Committee, and apply for discharge permits and the like in court. They also provide relevant lectures to clients.

(2) Procedures, review criteria, or requirements for application documents for the public to apply for legal aid

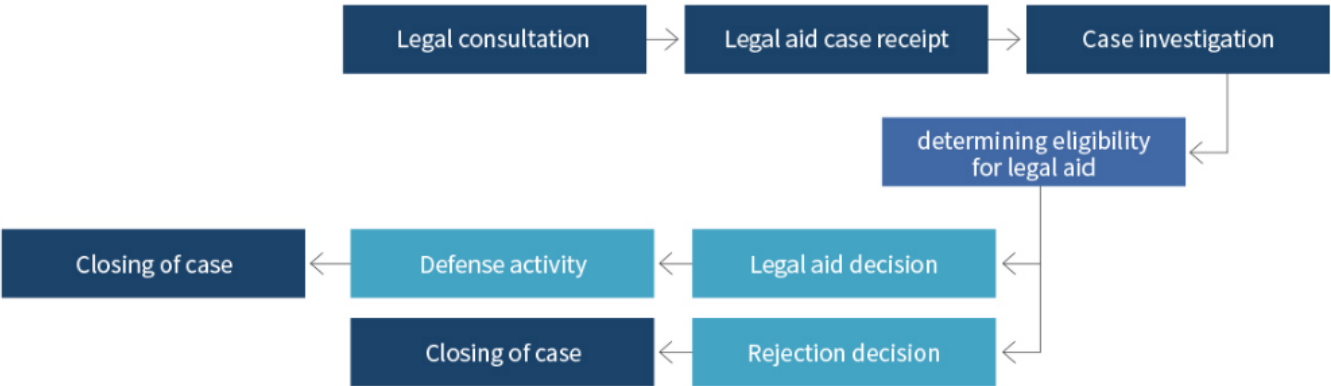
procedure

The Legal Aid Corporation provides support for legal and criminal defense proceedings to people (including foreigners) who are facing financial difficulty or who are unaware of the law and cannot receive sufficient legal protection.

■ Litigation support procedures for civil and domestic cases



■ Litigation support procedures for criminal cases



- * The Corporation will conduct an in-person consultation and fact-finding investigation as soon as an application for legal aid is received. It will subsequently decide whether or not to support the lawsuit after examining the eligibility, viability, enforceability, and feasibility of support.
- * An applicant can file an objection if he/she is dissatisfied with the decision of the corporation not to provide support. Appealed cases will be reviewed and the application will be decided upon again. However, an objection cannot be made if the decision not to support was reached because the applicant or case is not eligible for support.

(3) Ways to provide legal advice to the public

The legal advice provided by KLAC include both in-person consultations(reservation/walk-in) and non-face-to-face consultations, which encompass phone consultation, chat consultation, video consultation, and online consultation. Clients have the option to choose from these various methods to seek legal advice and guidance.

Category	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
In-person	698,627	665,659	678,070	735,412	572,631	512,584	408,411

Phone	730,475	651,908	593,073	626,117	673,991	639,928	672,192
Correspondence							
	4,874	7,674	8,949	8,447	8,416	8,670	8,954
Online	47,210	47,954	40,384	29,127	22,415	23,510	18,323
Sum	1,481,186	1,373,195	1,320,476	1,399,103	1,277,453	1,184,692	1,107,880

(4) Development in the rule of law through education and outreach services

The Legal Culture Education Center not only invites affiliated lawyers and staff but also reaches out to multicultural families, organizing lectures on various topics. Additionally, they provide support for reading education and self-development expenses, aiming to encourage a sense of belonging and self-improvement.

Furthermore, KLAC responds promptly to legal welfare needs, offering emergency legal counseling in the event of disasters such as the Pohang Earthquake, the Itaewon Tragedy, or incidents like rental fraud. This demonstrates their agility in addressing legal issues arising from emergencies or accidents.

(5) Caseload and case types for each type of service

Category	Legal Aid Litigation				Total Amount
	Civil/Family	Administrative/Constitutional	Criminal	Sum	100million Won(KOR)
2016	149,953	135	21,468	171,556	38,328

2017	149,251	195	17,791	167,237	37,266
2018	154,253	332	16,770	171,355	40,638
2019	167,808	231	15,480	183,519	49,484
2020	138,876	122	11,046	150,044	54,414
2021	131,476	126	11,253	142,855	66,861
2022	101,780	107	13,095	114,982	57,241
합계	993,397	1,248	106,903	1,101,548	344,232

(6) Were the above short-term changes during the severe pandemic phase, or did they persist despite the pandemic subsiding?

Due to the reservation counseling starting from COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the government's Payment of Overdue Wages System for wage-related cases starting on October 14, 2021, there has been a significant decrease in the number of cases filed with KLAC for reservation consultations. Although the total number of lawyers in Korea has been increasing by approximately 1,700 each year, the implementation of chatbots, electronic filing systems starting from the second half of 2023 and video counseling from 2022 calls for an evaluation of whether there will be an increase in the number of cases filed.

(7) What positive or negative impacts do you think the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the operations of the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country, and on the organization's aim to safeguard democracy, human rights, and access to justice?

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the expansion of various counseling

technologies, but there are also unintended consequences of a decrease in the number of cases due to the implementation of appointment-based consultations. Some anticipate that reverting to traditional in-person consultations, which were prevalent before the COVID-19 outbreak, could lead to an increase in the number of cases, thereby ensuring a smoother allocation of budget.

3. Beside the impacts of the pandemic, has the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country undergone other major changes in the following areas in the past five years (i.e., since the last Forum)? If yes, please describe what the changes are and explain why they occurred and what the impacts are.

(1) Form of organization (including organizational framework, supervisory authority, and organizational structure)

The existing operational methods remain unchanged. Some local areas are experiencing a decrease in population and the number of cases, coupled with budget shortages and management issues. As a result, small local offices are being merged due to consolidation, and central offices are now in operation.

(2) Development strategies and primary focus of the organization

Vision : "Enhancing Quality of Life Through Legal Service Equity"

Aim : "Creating Future Value for Public Corporations through Collaborative Sharing Management"

Since 1987, KLAC is offering and covering all kinds of legal service, including administrative, civil, family, constitutional and criminal litigation especially to the vulnerable.

(3) Budget, financial sources, and expenses for legal aid

Per Year			'18	'19	'20	'21	'22
SUBSIDIES			51,642	52,736	40,433	51,560	60,429
FUND			32,491	35,834	35,888	33,491	22,324
P R O C E E D S	Busines	reim. fr. costs of lawsuits, attorney fees+ public defenders' fees	9,505	9,486	8,356	7,484	8,094
		special account deposits	6,141	4,434	5,283	4,468	5,112
	Non- Business	deposit interest, etc	56,105	52,737	50,820	50,054	43,354
	Sum		71,751	66,657	64,459	62,006	56,560
Total Sum			155,884	155,227	140,780	147,057	139,313

(4) Procedures or financial eligibility requirements for legal aid application

The services provided by staff lawyers are restricted to individuals who qualify as legal aid recipients. These services generally encompass legal representation for civil, family, and criminal cases. In principle, individuals as well as foreign residents in the country with an income at or below 125% of the median income are eligible for legal aid, which is responsible for expenses such as litigation costs, delivery fees, and attorney fees. In fact, over 90% of cases in KLAC are free of charge.

■ Paid legal aid recipients

- Citizens with income level below than the Median income
- * must bear actual litigation costs including stamp fees, service fees, and attorney's fees (about 30% of the attorney's fees set by the Supreme Court Rules).

■ Beneficiaries

Among those whose income is under 125% of the median income.

- Foreigners residing in Korea
- North Korean defectors
- Single-parent families
- Those with unregistered family relationship
- Those who sacrificed for patriotic causes and their families
- Small business owners
- Child head of household
- Tenants of small sums under the Housing Lease Protection Act
- Persons eligible for individual rehabilitation and bankruptcy/immunity application
- National veterans
- Student victims of school violence
- Artist
- Disabled persons(whose disability is severe.)
- Low-income workers and their families suffering from industrial accidents
- Low-income traffic accident victims
- Victims of illegal private finance
- Humidifier disinfectant victims
- Marriage immigrants, naturalized citizens
- Victims of domestic and sexual violence
- Single mothers/fathers
- Social Security recipients
- Small tobacco retailers
- Seafarers under the Seafarers Act
- Crime victims
- Children subject to protection
- Mid- to long-term service veterans
- Police and fire service officials
- Unemployed young people, college students
- Secondary poor
- Medical accident victims

* Income standard exceptions

- 1) Farmers and fishermen among those with less than 150% of the standard median income
- 2) The beneficiaries regardless of their income level.
 - Workers suffering from arrears in wages, etc. (those whose average monthly wage for the last three months at the time of arrears in wages and severance pay is less than 4 million won)
 - Seamen suffering from damage
 - Victims of illegal private finance(Limited to the case of the debtor's representative.)
 - Court litigation aid recipientse

* Note

- Cases with a winning amount exceeding 300 million won are excluded from free legal aid.
- Even if you are eligible for free legal aid, if you lose the lawsuit, you may have to bear the costs of litigation, such as the other party's attorney's fees.

(5) Service delivery model (such as services provided by staff attorneys or external lawyers; if both, please indicate the ratio between them)

KLAC adopts a service model of staff attorneys nationwide and supplements external lawyers in case of conflicts of interest, etc.

(6) Salary of legal aid staff attorneys or remuneration of external legal aid lawyers

The salary of attorneys was settled to that of the prosecutors, who belong to the Ministry of Justice as well. The number of new lawyers is increasing by approximately 1,700 each year, and the salary system for new staff lawyers has transitioned from a seniority-based system to an annual salary system.

(7) Management of quality assurance for legal aid services

The Audit Office in KLAC conducts regular audits by visiting branches and field offices across the nation. In the past, the Ministry of Justice also audited the various branches and field offices of the public corporation, but later reduced it to headquarters' audits. However, KLAC undergoes annual government audits as a public institution every fall.

(8) Rule of law through education and outreach services

The Legal Culture Education Center not only conducts lectures for staff lawyers and staffs but also organizes lectures for multicultural families and adolescents. Additionally, it provides legal counseling services to citizens who may find it challenging to make reservations through mobile legal counseling centers and other channels.

(9) New services and businesses (technology-related services or businesses can be detailed in the following two questions).

Please refer to the descriptions below.

4. Does the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country employ modern information and communications technology (ICT) in providing legal aid services to the general public, or provide modern ICT to the users of legal aid services? If yes, please share your experiences, including, but not limited to, the following:

(1) Technology tools, or the systems and functions (such as online application, chatbots, onlinemediation, etc.); and how the technology-based services work

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a video consultation system has been introduced and implemented. Additionally, counseling through the use of the latest South Korean messenger chatbot and an electronic reception system are in place. These measures aim to expand counseling methods by integrating them with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools.

(2) When and why the technology-based services were launched

It is anticipated that the COVID-19 pandemic will persist for an extended period, and with the phased implementation of social distancing measures, non-face-to-face video consultations have been piloted since October 2020 for a duration of two months. This initiative is currently ongoing to ensure the safety of external clients and employees.

(3) Pros and cons of using technology tools to provide legal aid services

As expected, time is saved, and the service is not constrained by location, allowing

for more convenience. However, there are limitations to communication when relying on materials or documents during the interaction.

In addition, recording or disclosing the content of video consultations without the consent of the counseling staff can lead to civil liability for damages due to infringement of constitutional rights such as the right to privacy and the right to one's voice, protected under Article 10 of the Constitution. We are providing this information as a reference only and advise against unauthorized recording or disclosure.

(4) Challenges of using technology tools to provide legal aid services, and the ways to overcome the challenges

As video consultations are in their early stages, actual case submissions are not yet numerous. In the initial phase of implementing electronic submissions through chatbots, we anticipate increased activation and usage.

(5) How to bridge the gaps in users' technological capabilities to tackle digital exclusion

The predominant counseling method is traditional, and electronic submissions through chatbots have been initiated since this summer. We need to monitor the future trends closely.

(6) Have you observed any changes in people's technological capabilities or any behavioral changes in using technology tools following the COVID-19 pandemic?

Due to COVID-19, there is an expansion of virtual consultations and lectures, such as Zoom meetings, and an increased utilization of online litigation and video trials. These developments contribute to the expansion of judicial accessibility.

- 5. Is modern ICT used in the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country, or used by this organization to communicate with its legal aid providers (i.e., in the broad sense, legal aid professionals including external lawyers)? In doing so, have information exchange and administrative processing been speeded up? What is the effectiveness and efficiency of daily operations? Has the quality of management been improved? Please share your experience, including, but not limited to, the following:**

(1) Technology tools or systems and functions, and how they work

People can reserve legal aid through internet, KakaoTalk messengers as well as calls. From 2021, video consultation system is also introduced and electronic application through KakaoTalk messenger is being implemented in 2023. AI chatbot consultation is being under service through KakaoTalk as well.

(2) How much annual budget is allocated to ICT utilization and development?
How is the ICT workforce allocation in this organization each year?

One line for KakaoTalk cost \$15,000 and we are providing 5 lines, expecting more lines to be offered. Under headquarters, 'Information Strategy Branch' is hiring more staffs, and is outsourcing AI operation.

(3) Pros and cons of promoting digital transformation for legal aid organizations and professionals

There are concerns about an increase in costs associated with the introduction of new technologies, coupled with the reluctance to actively hire new staff due to the expansion of case filings. However, there is an expectation of cost savings in personnel expenses with the introduction of chatbot consultations and electronic submissions replacing traditional methods. Challenges in promoting digital transformation and how to overcome them

(4) Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the promotion of digital transformation for legal aid organizations and professionals.

Given the familiarity with non-face-to-face interactions due to COVID-19, the expansion of AI chatbots and electronic submissions is inevitable. Instead, there is a need to redirect the saved personnel expenses and time towards expanding other services.

6. Does the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country provide legal aid for specific vulnerable groups, or provide services concerning specific legal issues? Target clients may include women, children and juveniles, indigenous peoples, laborers, migrants, migrant workers, refugees and stateless persons, social welfare dependents, people with disabilities, people in debt, victims of crime, victims of disasters and environmental hazards. Please present **not more than three** targeted legal services for specific vulnerable groups, with attention to the following:

(1) Background: the reason why this group/issue is selected, and why the service was launched.

With the replacement of the wage claim lawsuits that were previously the main focus of the KLAC by the government's payment of back wages system, the newly

established Public Interest Litigation Team in 2021 has been actively collaborating with other organizations to identify public interest litigation projects. They are involved in promoting KLAC's activities and engaging in public interest activities.

(2) Scope of services: promotion of rule of law through education, legal information, **legal representation**, strategic litigation or class actions, advocacy and reform.

Under the leadership of the Secretary-General, the public interest litigation team within the Legal Support Unit is currently handling **compensation lawsuits on behalf of victims of humidifier disinfectant**. These cases are initiated based on reports received by the Ministry of Environment, which are subsequently referred to the organization for further proceedings. As of now, no final criminal judgments have been reached against the manufacturers and distributors of these products(only one of the sales companies sentenced a guilty verdict, the remaining companies have been acquitted, and the prosecution has appealed, leading to ongoing proceedings in the second trial.), and the civil judgments are pending due to the necessity of proving causation. cases are currently under appeal at the second-instance court.

Additionally, the organization is also handling nationwide cases related to **past unlawful acts and harsh treatment by the government**, specifically in the so-called "Samcheong Education Center Unlawful Acts Compensation Lawsuit." Some of these cases have led to successful litigation against the Ministry of Justice.

Furthermore, various regional branches of the organization have obtained approval for public interest litigation. They are currently handling lawsuits related to **cases of lease scams**, including claims for the return of deposits from landlords,

claims for compensation against brokers, and claims for insurance payouts from insurance companies. These lawsuits typically involve claims exceeding 100 million KRW. When victims of fraud have difficulty retaining external legal counsel, KLAC offers legal representation for free if the individuals meet the eligibility criteria with an income at or below 125% of the median income.

(3) Are the financial eligibility requirements that these aid recipients need to meet the same as the requirements for general legal aid?

To be eligible for legal aid services from the Legal Aid Corporation in cases like the humidifier disinfectant damage claims and fraud in housing leases, the individuals involved need to meet the requirement of having an income at or below 125% of the median income.

(4) Do you collaborate with other legal/non-legal aid organizations? How do you work together?

The claims for damages from humidifier disinfectant victims are received by the Korea Environmental Industry & Technology Institute and then referred to the Legal Aid Corporation for processing. The Legal Aid Corporation and the Institute hold regular meetings to coordinate the pace of case referrals and other related matters.

Regarding cases related to fraud in housing leases, Legal Aid Corporation lawyers and staff members visit locations such as "HUG" or local government offices to provide legal consultations. In severe cases, they even visit local government offices to initiate the case intake process.

(5) How to achieve service optimization within a limited budget.

With a limited budget, we are currently addressing the constraints by reducing new hires, implementing a freeze on personnel expenses, and making partial cutbacks in certain areas. However, we plan to expand our legal counseling services in the future to secure additional funding and respond more effectively.

7. Does the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country engage in strategic litigation or class actions on specific issues? If that is the case, please provide examples and explain how it was done.

KLAC handles multiple plaintiff claims in cases like wage claims and does not engage in class-action lawsuits. In particular, for cases involving victims **of humidifier disinfectant damage or housing lease fraud**, we handle individual claims due to the substantial damages involved. Additionally, in the case of humidifier disinfectant damage claims, the scope of the claims may need to expand based on appraisal results, and these cases are generally managed individually.

8. Is there a system of citizen participation in trials in your country? If that is the case, please explain how the system works, the system structure, and the role of the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country in the system and in cases involving citizen participation.

Please refer to Criminal Defense in the System of Trials with the Participation of Jurors in 3(a).

9. What specific measures has the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country taken to protect victims? What is its role in implementing protective measures? Does it collaborate with other groups or professionals (such as social workers, counselors, or healthcare professionals) to provide holistic services?

-Crime Victim Protection and Support Program

In addition to classical legal consultation and litigation services, KLAC has expanded its scope of activities. Since July 2013, we have assigned specialized attorneys called "Crime Victim Public Defender" to each regional office. These attorneys handle cases related to sexual violence and child abuse, providing legal assistance for crime victims, including acting as their legal representatives for criminal procedures and preventing secondary victimization during the investigation and legal proceedings (Article 21-2 of the Legal Aid Act, Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment, etc. of Sexual Crimes, Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment of Child Abuse Crimes).

The 10th-anniversary academic conference is scheduled for December.

10. In the past five years, has the organization you work for or the legal aid organization in your country ever conducted surveys on the legal needs of the public or specific vulnerable groups and their behavioral patterns in seeking legal services, or has it conducted studies on the historical service data? If yes, please provide files or links to the studies.

N/A

11. How does your country fulfill the requirements to provide specific legal aid to specific vulnerable groups in line with the international human rights instruments (e.g., Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, etc.)? What is the progress in the implementation of these requirements?

In criminal cases, the mandatory state-appointed defense counsel system exists, requiring the selection of a state-appointed defense attorney by the relevant trial court for certain conditions such as detained defendants, minors, and those aged 70 or older. Additionally, in cases involving sexual crimes or child abuse, prosecutors may designate a crime victim advocate attorney to provide legal support to the victim.

Moreover, in civil litigation, individuals can receive support for litigation costs through a litigation structure decision and appoint an attorney to represent them in court. KLAC is a nationwide public institution in Korea that provides legal services, including those for vulnerable populations, in addition to private defense counsel. This institutional framework ensures legal services for vulnerable groups beyond court-appointed defense attorneys.