

UN DEMOCRACY FUND

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UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR PARTNERSHIPS

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ABOUT UNDEF

The UN Democracy Fund partners with civil society to advance human rights and good governance around the world.

UNDEF accompanies its partners on their journey to protect and promote civic space.

Working to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, the Fund is agile and able to respond to a changing global landscape.

As part of the UN Office for Partnerships, the Democracy Fund has built a knowledge platform and global partnerships to share best practices with civil society worldwide.

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CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS

UNDEF works directly with civil society partners at local, regional and global levels, complementing the UN's work with governments, to strengthen governance around the world.

Engaging closely with our partners, we are committed to making their projects a success. We build capacity and capabilities through mentoring, evaluation, and a platform where groups and institutions can share experience and expertise. Lessons learned from projects become a resource for all – participants, future applicants, other funders, and the larger community working to build more responsive and inclusive societies.

A GLOBAL REACH

UNDEF projects span over 130 countries across the globe, advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

By creating networks and convening opportunities, UNDEF nurtures and strengthens partnerships among civil society, the UN, governments, and academia. UNDEF is bolstering inter-agency coordination around democracy support, with the creation of a working group of 10 UN entities amplifying advocacy and impact.



The Fund drives dialogue in multi-lateral spaces and major global events. Its partners actively engage in high-level events, such as the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and United Nations' Civil Society Conference amplifying their voices and reinforcing their contributions to democratic principles of governance as a pillar of SDG 16.

UNDEF's dedicated sessions for the International Day of Democracy continue to emphasize the vital role of democratic values in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals highlighting topics such as; participatory decision-making to grow from local to global solutions, climate action to spotlight youth's critical role in safeguarding civic space and propelling climate initiatives, press freedom to counter mis- and disinformation and promote objectively informed decision-making, and navigating the changing landscape of artificial intelligence for governance and citizen engagement.

At the High-Level Political Forum, UNDEF as part of UN Office for Partnerships, advanced the importance of SDG 16, with a video message from UN Deputy-Secretary General Amina J. Mohammed to launch the 2nd Global Report on SDG 16 developed by the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other entities. Furthermore, UNDEF leadership participated in high-profile panels highlighting the role of civics education in promoting peace, justice and strong institutions.

The Fund is engaging with academia such as IE University's Center for the Governance of Change to bring new perspectives to UN spaces.

As a self-sufficient and largely autonomous part of the United Nations system funded entirely by voluntary contributions, UNDEF is uniquely positioned to build mutual understanding and cooperation between states and civil society at the local, national, and global levels.



TOP:

International Day of Democracy at SDG Pavilion
UNDEF hosted the first event at the SDG Pavilion during the UN General Assembly marking the International Day of Democracy 2023.

BOTTOM LEFT:

UNDEF Civil Society Roundtable at CSW
UNDEF convened a round table of civil society partners dedicated to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment on the sidelines of the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

BOTTOM RIGHT:

UN Partnerships Executive Director advocated to advance SDG 16 on the sidelines of HLPF
UN Office for Partnerships Executive Director, Annemarie Hou spoke at the HLPF side event, "Unlearning intolerance: Global Citizenship Education and SDG 16" organized by the University for Peace, the Asia-Pacific Centre for Education for International Understanding, and the Ban Ki-moon Foundation, and co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Costa Rica and the Republic of Korea to the United Nations.

A LOCAL APPROACH

UNDEF supports projects designed at the local level to address democratic deficits and freedoms denied. UNDEF has the infrastructure to reach a large number of civil society organizations globally, providing critical local support with grants that complement the wider UN activities around development and peacebuilding.

The grant process begins and ends at the project site: the Fund is demand-driven, not supply-oriented. UNDEF works with its partners to generate, design, manage, and fund projects that can strengthen democracy and good governance in six main areas: rule of law and human rights; youth engagement; women's leadership and gender equality; media and freedom of information; strengthening civil society interaction with government; and support for electoral processes.

“ACHIEVING SDG 16 – PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS REQUIRES BUILDING TRUST AND CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN OPPOSING VIEWS. IF WE CAN OPEN THE SPACE TO TALK ABOUT THESE ISSUES, THAT IS HOW WE CAN GET TO THESE INTERESTING CONVERSATIONS THAT GET US TO THE SOLUTIONS THAT GET US TO THE SDGS,”

ANNEMARIE HOU
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
THE UN OFFICE FOR PARTNERSHIPS



TOP TO BOTTOM:

International Day of Democracy at SDG Pavilion
Audience members share their views on climate action during the International Day of Democracy event.

Advancing SDG 16 at HLPF

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed launched the 2nd Global Report on SDG 16 developed by the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other entities. Photo: UN Partnerships



BUILDING THE RULE OF LAW IN HAITI

Haiti's recent history has been marked by recurring episodes of political turmoil, socio-economic crisis, and disasters caused by natural hazards and epidemics, which undermine the country's stability and progress towards sustainable development. Entrenched corruption and widespread clientelism among some political and economic actors have eroded public trust in the state and the international community, and more broadly, the social contract.

But there are civil society organizations that are fighting for accountability and the rule of law. UNDEF is supporting Nou Pap Dòmi (the Citizens' Collective for Social Justice against Corruption and Impunity)— a grassroots movement that has emerged to tackle corruption and impunity by engaging the nation's youth in innovative civic education.

Nou Pap Domi has shifted its focus to long-term change by instilling anti-corruption values in Haiti's youth. The organization uses creative methods to reach young people, incorporating sports, music, and dance into its messaging to make civic education more relatable and engaging. This approach aims to re-engage disillusioned youth in civic processes and combat the normalization of corrupt practices. Nou Pap Domi plans to integrate a full election process into school activities, youth clubs and social media, teaching young people working to change social values in a fun and engaging way.

Etienne Jean Rollet, Founding member of Nou Pap Dòmi, said, "This project is part of this process of raising awareness, with the aim of equipping Haitian youth with the tools they need to question and challenge those to whom they entrust the management of public affairs. No democracy worthy of the name can exist without the active and responsible participation of citizens of all generations, aware of their role in guiding the destiny of their country."

"Every Haitian must ensure that every resource is required to pull country out of the ruts of this subhuman poverty. The fight against corruption and impunity is therefore, a civic obligation Nou Pap Dòmi is well aware of this and works to mobilize young people to involve them in what can be considered a fight for life. Our approach is part of this dynamic."

Véline Élysée Charlier,
Vice-president of
the Collective



TRANSFORMING LOCAL GOVERNANCE: THE POWER OF CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES

Democracies need robust citizen engagement and participation. But in a world where social-media echo chambers, misinformation, and declining trust in public decisions are rampant, there is often little space to find common ground to solve problems.

That is why many public officials have embraced the opportunity to involve a representative group of people in problem-solving. In 2018, the newDemocracy Foundation and UNDEF began exploring the use of Citizens' Assemblies – representative groups of individuals who are randomly selected – brought together to learn from experts, deliberate and make recommendations to policymakers on specific public issues, such as vaccination, air pollution and waste management. This method allows for finding common ground and fostering genuine conversations with elected officials who often seem remote.

The Citizen Assembly model has produced results. Organizations such as Delibera in Brazil, ZIP Institute in North Macedonia, and Edwin Msewa in Malawi have become leading local practitioners. Delibera Brazil has gone on to develop a regional hub for deliberation, co-hosting four climate assemblies in Latin America and several similar processes in Brazil.

In Fortaleza, Brazil, Delibera convened a citizen assembly that was tasked with the issue of making the city cleaner. Studying solid waste management issues, the assembly ultimately made 19 recommendations of which 17 were implemented, and two more that are in the planning stage.

Agim Selami, Founder and Executive Director at ZIP Institute, said, "At ZIP Institute's inaugural Citizens' Assembly on COVID-19, we witnessed firsthand the power of bringing diverse voices together to address the stigma around vaccines. This deliberative process not only fostered understanding and empathy among participants but also provided valuable insights to policymakers, demonstrating that citizen involvement is crucial in tackling public health challenges."

Additionally, a handbook—"Democracy Beyond Elections" has been produced, the first in the space, to guide other projects in building citizen-driven policy engagement. Since its publication, many have cited the Handbook as an authoritative, practical reference.

"WE WITNESSED FIRSTHAND THE POWER OF BRINGING DIVERSE VOICES TOGETHER TO ADDRESS THE STIGMA AROUND VACCINES. THIS DELIBERATIVE PROCESS NOT ONLY FOSTERED UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHY AMONG PARTICIPANTS BUT ALSO PROVIDED VALUABLE INSIGHTS TO POLICYMAKERS, DEMONSTRATING THAT CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IS CRUCIAL IN TACKLING PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES."

AGIM SELAMI, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AT ZIP INSTITUTE



SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The war that ravaged this country from 1992-1995 may have ended some 30 years ago, but there are still the scars that need healing. A surge of revisionist and denialist narratives about the war that tore the country apart has made healing more difficult. To address the flood of misinformation and disinformation about the conflict, UNDEF, together with its partner Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIRN BiH), developed a database of narratives and specific material to educate young people about the conflict. It has also trained teachers to use the database.

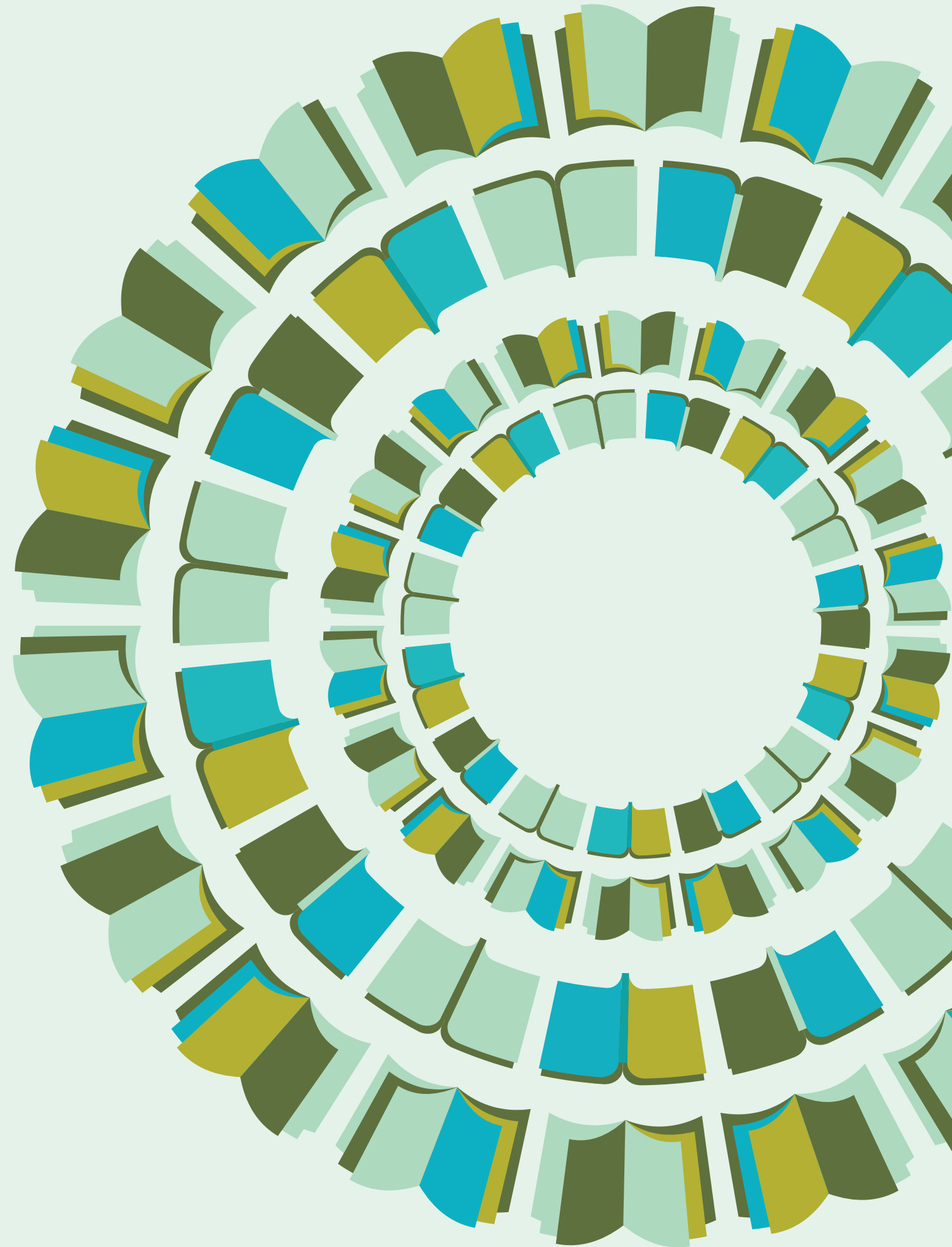


The project's database contains court-determined facts related to the war that can be accessed by teachers and students, complemented by educational material, journalistic articles, and documentaries. The project also used filmed personal testimonies which are part of the database, thus giving a human face to the facts presented.



More than 110 history teachers have participated in training sessions so far. The database, which now has 30,000 registered users and 57,000 views, has been well-received by a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives of ministries as well as teachers. It has been included in the compulsory curricula by two ministries of education and has been widely promoted and disseminated by the media. The documentaries and other educational materials produced have received over 550,000 views on social media and platforms.

Nadia Kovacevic, a teacher from Sarajevo, said, "The database is valuable source of information, helping students to learn and understands facts about the war, and I will continue to use the database on my classes."





BUILDING NETWORKS TO FIGHT DISINFORMATION IN AFRICA

Facts matter in a democracy and accurate information is a cornerstone of good governance. Building media networks can combat disinformation and promote accountability

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, UNDEF teamed up with Africa Check, one of the leading organizations in Africa dedicated to holding public figures accountable and debunking dangerous false statements, to launch a transformative project in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa to strengthen the public’s capacity to fact-check and critically engage with information. Facts matter.

Africa Check has trained and supported over 4,400 students and 371 journalists to become vigilant watchdogs, equipping them to conduct their own fact-checks. The initiative’s multi-country approach facilitates knowledge sharing between teams and journalists, creating a sustainable, cross-border fact-checking culture. Initiatives like the “Matter of Fact” series and the “Slam Scam” campaign empower citizens with critical thinking and financial literacy skills. Key achievements include establishing the Nigeria Factchecking Coalition and Fumbua, which played pivotal roles combatting mis and dis-information during the 2023 and 2022 elections in Nigeria and Kenya. Africa Check’s efforts have garnered 123 million views and nearly two million new website visitors. Africa Check’s website has documented 1,846,922 new visitors during the project period. Gender stats were available for 540,000 of these visitors – 46% of these were female.

Hlalani Gumpo, head of outreach and impact at Africa Check, said there has been a significant increase in Africa Check’s impacts. “Public trust in Africa Check as a reliable source of accurate information has grown. Feedback from our audience indicates that they feel more empowered to make informed decisions regarding health (such as vaccinations), politics (like voting), and personal finance (such as investment choices). Our initiatives have not only provided accurate information on these key topics but have also equipped our audience with the skills to question and critically engage with information in the future.”

“While some may consider the fact-checking ‘petty’ or ‘nit-picking’, it’s crucial to ensure that all claims are accurate. Even small inaccuracies should not be overlooked because they can distort the overall picture. Fact-checking helps hold politicians accountable, no matter which party they represent”

**Africa Check
reader comment**



WOMEN IN NEPAL GET A BREAK

In Nepal, where the caste system determines a person's social status and life value, it is extremely difficult for women to move up. As a result, women in many rural communities, especially at the bottom of the social ladder, lack any access to the decision-making process and the local.

A project of the South Asia Partnership Nepal (SAP), supported by UNDEF, aims to give Musahar women—one of the most marginalized castes—a chance to participate in local decision-making procedures. The project is promoting gender-responsive local governance in two rural municipalities and two town municipalities of Sarlahi in west-central Nepal. Using human rights-based approaches, the project is working to empower Musahar women to claim their rights, making local government authorities accountable, and strengthening of multi-stakeholder partnership for consolidated efforts of promoting gender-responsive local governance.

As a result of the project, four Musahar women have been elected to local development committees, 32 Musahar Women Empowerment Forums have been established across four municipalities. As a result of these groups' advocacy for birth certificates for Musahar children, 405 children were able to receive birth certificates and enroll in school.

Sovita Majhi, Ward member, Haripur-8, said the project helped her discover her potential. "My journey from a toilet cleaner to the ward member of Haripur-8 has been transformative. As a Dalit woman of a low-status job, people hesitated to even talk to me. Encouraged by my friends, I ran for the local election and, after being elected, I gained recognition and an identity. Community members now approach me to solve local issues. I am grateful to SAP-Nepal and UNDEF for helping me discover my leadership potential."



ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN JORDAN: A GROUNDBREAKING INITIATIVE

The rule of law requires access to justice for everyone and in Jordan, a transformative project spearheaded by the Justice Center for Legal Aid, with support from UNDEF, has made significant strides in enhancing the rule of law and access to justice.

With the aim of boosting the availability of effective legal representation for detainees, and to ensure that human rights are upheld and respected, the project “Strengthening Rule of Law through Access to Justice in Jordan,” has focused on providing comprehensive training provided to lawyers and public security department officials. The training focused on pre-trial representation and detainee’s rights, which was instrumental in improving protection and access to legal counsel during pre-trial proceedings.

The project has produced results. Lawyers participating on a legal hotline report that they successfully used their training, and 85% of beneficiaries were able to resolve their issues through the project’s services.

Notably, there has been a shift in police attitudes, moving away from a traditional approach of seeking confessions as a primary goal towards a commitment to upholding human rights and adhering to the rule of law.

“Each time we hang up the phone, realizing that we have made a difference in the life of the person on the other side, we get the motivation to receive the next call,” says Aya Hijazi, a Detention Hotline Officer

The project’s advocacy efforts have significantly raised awareness among justice stakeholders about the importance of fair legal aid procedures and the pivotal role of lawyers in pre-trial processes. This heightened awareness has led to increased cooperation between lawyers and law enforcement, which has help institutionalize legal aid within the Jordanian justice system. The project’s awareness campaigns—through in-person sessions and social media—have played a crucial role in educating community members about their rights during detention. This protective approach empowers individuals to assert their rights, such as demanding legal representation during pre-trial detention and avoiding false confessions.



