



The IBA report on
the social and economic
impact of the legal profession

2024

Executive Summary



Executive summary

“Lawyers have their duties as citizens, but they also have special duties as lawyers. Their obligations go far deeper than earning a living as specialists in corporation or tax law. They have a continuing responsibility to uphold the fundamental principles of justice from which the law cannot depart.” —

Robert F. Kennedy, Attorney General of the United States, 1961-1964

Purpose of this report

This report aims to assess the impact of the legal profession on society, explore the relationship between this role and the general public's perception of it, and identify the levers to improve its positive impact.

Lawyers' contributions to society often are not well known or recognized even within the legal profession itself. This lack of awareness of and appreciation for what lawyers contribute to society is even greater among the general public, civil society, institutions and states.

For this reason, the International Bar Association (IBA) has produced this report drawing on multiple sources, with McKinsey & Company as a contributor to the analysis. The IBA wishes to raise awareness among the public of the vitally important role the legal profession plays. As a result, this report seeks to make the intangible and sometimes difficult to comprehend daily contributions of the legal profession more intelligible, relevant, and easier to understand. The legal profession itself should also become more conscious of the importance of its role and the responsibility attached to it.

Lawyers have a special status in society. Lawyers and bar associations are regulated by law. In turn, the law recognizes that for lawyers to undertake this role, and to protect the best interests of their clients, communications must be protected by attorney-client privilege and professional confidentiality. Moreover, lawyers must be free from ethical conflict, and the profession must be free from state control. Also, lawyers have a duty to follow ethical rules and if they violate these rules they may be disbarred. Clients of lawyers and society as a whole benefit from these protections, which do not apply, for example, to consultants or other advisors.

One of the main – but often unnoticed - contributions lawyers make to society involves the access to a good operating and independent system of justice, which forms the foundations of a strong Rule of Law. As described in this report, it is well documented that respect by all players for the Rule of Law contributes to economic growth and social welfare.

It is therefore a major responsibility for lawyers as well as for bar associations, law societies and associations such as the IBA, to assume the function of a watchdog on behalf of citizens in the defense and promotion of the Rule of Law. Lawyers have a duty to draw the public's attention to threats to the Rule of Law, whenever such threats emerge, especially nowadays when the Rule of Law is declining in almost 60% of the countries. Lawyers should also ensure that human rights and the Rule of Law are always given their proper place in the mindset of the legislator. In order to perform this duty, lawyers must be guaranteed independence.

Lawyers – who, for the purpose of this report, include private practitioners, in-house counsel, judges, prosecutors, academics, and lawyers in the government service - partake in many aspects of daily life in society. Lawyers engage in important occasions of a **person's life** (e.g., purchasing one's home, and drawing up and managing wills), **business interactions** (e.g., labor and employment agreements, purchasing goods online, and insurance agreements), **citizens' relations with the state** (e.g., providing support to immigrants, especially unaccompanied minors, the requirements to register a birth, the payment of taxes, ensuring the

enforcement of criminal law and the protections afforded to criminal defendants), **business to business relationships** (e.g., purchase and sale agreements of any goods or services, joint ventures, and investment agreements such as in start-ups), **state to state relationships** (e.g., trade agreements, tax conventions and peace treaties), and of course, in resolving disputes in any of these relationships.

However, for many individuals, the legal system is simply too daunting and expensive. Access to justice can be difficult or even impossible to achieve, which may create a negative impression of the role of lawyers. Some stereotypes portray lawyers as purely driven by financial gains in the provision of their services, and the media, from time to time, focuses on lawyers facilitating unethical or even criminal behavior. While these cases unfortunately do exist, they are the rare exception rather than the rule. However, they affect the general public's perception. Indeed, the information gathered for this report clearly shows that an overwhelming majority of citizens unrelated with the legal profession pays significant attention to lawyers' ethical performance.¹

In other instances, the accused person's fundamental right to defense, which is essential for the proper administration of justice, can cast lawyers in a negative light. For example, legal professionals performing their job in an adversarial system where they support the accused in a trial should be seen as positive for society, and not negative, because they strengthen the Rule of Law that benefits everyone. An independent legal profession and an independent judiciary are utterly essential for justice to operate as it should.

The IBA understands the essential role of the legal profession and has therefore launched this report to assess – **for the first time** – the social and economic contribution of the legal profession **in a comprehensive way** and identify how to enhance this contribution. Based on a **bespoke methodology** developed for this purpose, this report provides a comprehensive assessment of the profession's contribution to society.

The qualitative evaluations and the quantitative data analysis in the report provide evidence of the legal profession's contributions to society. Some findings relate specifically to private practitioners, while others highlight the contributions and impact of the entire legal profession. The IBA also recognizes that non-lawyers – non-legal state officials (elected and appointed), non-governmental organizations, governmental bodies, and the media – are also fundamental to the Rule of Law. The harmonious, collective contribution of all parts of society is required to build a strong Rule of Law that heightens the social and economic impact described in this report.

About the Rule of Law

The report constantly refers to the Rule of Law. Indeed, it is one of the most relevant areas to which lawyers contribute and, at the same time, upholding the Rule of Law is one of the most relevant duties of the legal profession.

Although the Rule of Law is in place for only a minority of the world's population, its benefits are widely accepted and endorsed because of its intrinsic value, as well as for its contribution to economic growth and social welfare.² However, its precise meaning is subject to certain flexibility and, most importantly, the standards it should be held up to, are not clearly defined nor widely accepted.

¹ The survey performed for this report reveals that 70% of non-legal respondents and 50% of legal respondents support actions addressed at pursuing the highest ethical standards. See Section *Looking Ahead* of this Executive Summary and page 120 of the Report.

² The Rule of Law index published by the World Justice Project is one of the best-documented examples of the relationship between the Rule of Law and growth: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/>. There are multiple recognitions of this fact. For example, the Declaration of the UN High-Level Meeting on the Rule of Law, September 24th 2012, states "We agree that our collective response to the challenges and opportunities arising from the many complex political, social and economic transformations before us must be guided by the rule of law, as it is the foundation of friendly and equitable relations between States and the basis on which just and fair societies are built <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n12/478/66/pdf/n1247866.pdf?token=eX4Zy2s3N7y3rRpr4o&fe=true>. See also the European Commission Annual Rule of Law Reports initiated in 2020. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/rule-law-mechanism/2023-rule-law-report_en. The doctrine also recognizes this aspect: "The Rule of Law is held to be not only good in itself, because it embodies and encourages a just society, but also a cause of other good things, notably growth", quoted by Lord Bingham at *The Rule Of Law*, 2010, from 'Economics and the Rule of Law: Order in the Jungle', *The Economist*, 13 March 2008.

To avoid any misunderstanding, when using the Rule of Law concept, this report does so with the extent of the formulation offered by the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan. He said:

*“For the United Nations, the Rule of Law refers to a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions, and entities, public and private, including the state itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced, and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency”.*³

Lord Tom Bingham formulated the Rule of Law concept along the same lines, which he then broke down into eight sub-rules:

1. The law must be accessible and as far as possible, intelligible, clear, and predictable.
2. Questions of legal rights and liabilities should ordinarily be resolved by application of the law and not the exercise of discretion.
3. Laws of the land should apply equally to all, save to the extent that objective differences justify differentiation.
4. The law must afford adequate protection of fundamental human rights.
5. Means must be provided for resolving, without prohibitive cost or inordinate delay, bona fide civil disputes which the parties themselves are unable to resolve.
6. Ministers and public officers at all levels must exercise the powers conferred on them reasonably, in good faith, for the purpose for which the powers were conferred and without exceeding the limits of such powers.
7. Adjudicative procedures provided by the state should be fair.
8. The existing principle of the Rule of Law requires compliance by the state with its obligations in international law, the law which whether deriving from treaty or international custom and practice governs the conduct of nations.

Thus, the Rule of Law does not simply impose formal rules on the legal systems. It also contains an essential substantive element: the Rule of Law must include protection of human rights and adherence to international law, which connects the concept to modern international legal conventions.^{4,5}

The relevance of law regulating relations between nations should not be underestimated especially at present times. This is done by treaty law, but also increasingly by International Conventions. Following the conclusion of World War Two, there was a common resolution to work towards an international ‘rules-based order’, leading to the establishment of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the International Law Commission, and the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The idea was to establish order in times of peace and conflict alike. Many of the great issues we face today are cross border: climate change, cyber-attacks, national security, trafficking of humans, drugs, or arms. They require global responses, with lawyers working to bridge gaps in existing international law.

³ Mr. Kofi Atta Annan was Secretary General of United Nations for the term 1997-2006, being awarded with The Peace Nobel Prize in 2001, jointly with the UN.

⁴ “I firmly believe in the Rule of Law as the foundation for all our basic rights”, US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, 2009.

⁵ See Toward a Common Ground Definition of the Rule of Law Incorporating Substantive Principles of Justice, University of Pittsburgh Law Review, Volume 72, Issue 2, Winter 2010, by Dr Mark Ellis, IBA Executive Director.

International law is now acknowledged as a tool to enhance global cooperation, resolve conflicts by means other than war, protect human rights and advance common interests. Inevitably, there need to be international courts and tribunals to recognize and uphold this law, and an increasing number of lawyers around the world support these efforts through international arbitration or by taking cases to international courts or tribunals such as the International Criminal Court. Through these activities, lawyers add considerable value to our global fabric.

Despite the acknowledged benefits of the Rule of Law, it is suffering a constant erosion in recent years, to the point that some already refer to the risk of the rule of *lawlessness*.⁶ Attacks on Rule of Law proliferate all over the world. There are flagrant cases, diametrically opposed to the Rule of Law, which require a complete reversal of the situation. A more subtle attrition, but equally dangerous, happens in many countries with democratic governments.⁷ Last year, and for the sixth year in a row, the Rule of Law declined in most countries in the world (59% out of the 140 jurisdictions reviewed).⁸

The legal profession can take a more active role being spokespersons for the Rule of Law's values, educating the public about them, increasing awareness of their importance, and finally, denouncing the failures of its operation.⁹ These actions are further developed in the report.

Approach and methodology

The assessment in this report is based **on four major sources of insight**; McKinsey & Company's having been a contributor to their collection and analysis:

- An extensive review of existing studies and impact assessment tools developed by independent or multilateral entities (e.g., ClarityAI, the United Nations).
- A big data analysis that **has never before been performed in the context of assessing the profession's impact**, measured according to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Two global surveys, one including approximately 700 legal professionals and the other including approximately 7,600 members from the general public, on their perception of the profession's impact.
- Interviews with over 50 leading legal experts from different regions, practising law in different ways (e.g., judges, academics) and, in the case of private practitioners, from different areas of practice and across multiple legal systems, including civil and common law.

Regarding the big data analysis in particular, the bespoke methodology developed has helped identify and quantify statistical links between the work of legal professionals and the indicators that reflect their social and economic impact. To achieve this, the methodology builds the analytical model in five stages:

1. Stage 1 builds a long list of KPIs that can be used as proxies for the activities of the legal profession (approximately 200 KPIs) and to measure the different SDG areas (as defined by the UN). SDGs were chosen to structure the impact assessment because they are globally recognized for their ability to guide sustainable development. Many institutions (for example, companies and industry associations) therefore use SDGs to measure their socioeconomic impact.
2. Stage 2 collects the data for the KPIs identified in Stage 1, from all available countries and years. Based on availability, KPIs were narrowed down to approximately 60, with 20 linked to the activities of legal professionals and 40 linked to SDGs.

⁶ <https://www.euronews.com/2023/01/13/un-chief-warns-that-rule-of-law-risks-turning-into-rule-of-lawlessness>

⁷ See Rule of Law: our daily bread? by Almudena Arpón de Mendivil at <https://www.ibanet.org/About-the-IBA/Presidency-Blog-May-2023>

⁸ <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/insights#global-decline>

⁹ See IBA presidential initiative, The IBA Legal Agenda 2023-2028, item 7, at <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=IBA-Legal-Agenda-2023-2028>.

3. Stage 3 builds and runs a correlation model with the 60 KPIs per country by year and their evolution over time. The model also segments countries into four quartiles based on their GDP per capita to better control developmental differences.
4. Stage 4 prioritizes the KPI pairs with the most significant correlations. It is worth noting that, while the analysis identifies strong links between the activities of legal professionals and indicators of social and economic progress, the latter are often the result of complex social changes and phenomena, thus making it impossible to isolate the changes that can be attributed to the work of legal professionals. Therefore, these relations should be considered as mere strong directional relations between the selected pairs. In short, this is not cannot be considered as true correlations.
5. Finally, stage 5 quantifies the potential impact of bringing all the countries up to the performance of the top-quartile countries in terms of KPIs related to the legal professionals' activities. In some cases, where information was available, the GDP impact is also estimated.

The conclusions and recommendations of the report have been prepared by the International Bar Association.

Findings

The results of the assessment are structured into **three mutually reinforcing categories** of the legal profession's impact:

- social impact,
- indirect economic impact through the contribution to the Rule of Law, and
- direct economic impact.

The following examples illustrate the interconnection among the three types of impact:

- A citizen reclaiming their right to property expropriated by the state through legal representation creates a social impact (providing security versus the state), indirect economic impact (protecting the property and its future production), and direct economic impact for the lawyers involved.
- A lawyer defending an heir in a succession trial creates social impact (by preserving the will of the deceased), and a direct impact for the defendant if the trial is won (through the protection of their wealth) and the professionals involved (through the legal fees and taxes generated).
- The work of a law firm on an Intellectual Property patent registration creates social impact (by promoting creativity and future innovations), indirect economic impact (through protecting innovation and its economic benefits) and direct impact for the lawyers representing the parties.

Moreover, these effects **have a cumulative and long-term nature**, as the property recovered supports the citizen in their livelihood, the inheritance passes on to future generations, and the patent protection funds continuous research and development to discover, for example, new medicines that extend human life.

Thus, almost any legal professional activity creates one or more types of social impact, indirect economic impact, and direct economic impact.

Social Impact

The work of the legal profession contributes to weaving the tapestry for the Rule of Law to operate at its best, spurring social impact and triggering the advancement of democracies and the development of societies.

The report structures this impact category according to the following five areas of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):¹⁰ (1) peace, justice, and institutional strength; (2) equality and inclusion; (3) education; (4) environmental sustainability; and (5) health and well-being.

1. Peace, justice, and institutional strength

The legal community helps establish the foundation for **peace, justice, and institutional strength**.

Lawyers often serve as **peacemakers** preventing disputes from escalating by bringing the parties to a fair agreement, achieving settlements that reduce the strain on saturated courts, and avoiding unforeseen judgments and additional costs for the parties involved. This was also Gandhi's view, following his experience as a practising lawyer:

"I realized the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder. The lesson was so indelibly burnt into me that a large part of my time during the twenty years of my practice as a lawyer was occupied in bringing about private compromises of hundreds of cases. I lost nothing thereby- not even money, certainly not my soul"- Mahatma Gandhi¹¹

Lawyers' efforts are essential to the implementation of the Rule of Law and the provision of access to justice. The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers emphasize that lawyers have a vital role to play in upholding the Rule of Law by informing the public about their rights and duties under the law and in protecting their fundamental freedoms.¹² Lawyers' advocacy work provides the public with access to the courts to enforce their rights and resolve disputes, often without court intervention. Lawyers with expertise in human rights promote justice through taking on cases in the defense of people facing grave deprivation of their basic human rights and liberties, often putting their own safety at risk in the process. There are many lawyers who devote their efforts to the prosecution of war crimes such as the late Mr. Ben Ferencz, prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials. His mottos were "law not war" and we must "never give up" in the pursuit of justice. Through the above activities, lawyers help expand a country's justice system, promote dispute resolution, help curb criminality, and generally contribute to the advancement of justice in society. Much of this type of work is conducted on a pro bono *publico* basis, meaning "for the public good" where lawyers offer their expertise to assist members of the public with meaningful causes and without the burden of fees.

The legal profession also pursues justice by restraining the executive and protecting the separation of powers within the state. These are both essential tenets of the Rule of Law. To illustrate, consider the efforts of the Malaysian Bar Association to uphold the separation of powers in the aftermath of the 1980s elections, or the 2019 UK Supreme Court challenge related to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's attempt to prevent the United Kingdom Parliament from passing laws against his Brexit deal.¹³ The profession's independence acts as a check on the executive power, which serves to strengthen the institutions. Indeed, countries with greater access to civil justice tend to experience lower levels of state abuse.

The "eyeWitness to Atrocities" app, which the IBA developed with support from LexisNexis, is a flagship example of how lawyers contribute to human rights and justice.¹⁴ This app facilitates the collection and submission of visual evidence of atrocities while protecting the identity of witnesses and preventing evidence tampering. It aids criminal prosecution in the most challenging circumstances, such as war zones, where access to unadulterated evidence is especially difficult.

¹⁰ For the purposes of this report, the 17 SDGs have been grouped into six clusters. Five of them are related to social impact (peace, justice, and institutional collaboration; education; environmental sustainability; equality and inclusion; and health and well-being), and the sixth to economic impact.

¹¹ An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part II, 14. Preparation for the Case, at page 159 of <https://www.mk gandhi.org/ebks/An-Autobiography.pdf>

¹² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-role-lawyers>

¹³ See page 43 for further details.

¹⁴ See page 48 for further details.

Institutional strength is essential in today's world, both at global and local levels to ensure that peace and justice are maintained and upheld. This requires effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, that collaborate with each other, and which generate citizens' trust. Lawyers contribute to this goal through efforts to improve anti-corruption laws, regulations, enforcement, and compliance,¹⁵ by for example, denouncing governments' wrongful conduct and promoting collaboration among them to ensure a consistent application of different regulations and developing common standards or positions. An excellent example of this is that of convergence and cooperation within the International Competition Network (ICN). This body, which the IBA played a major role in founding in 2002, brings together over 100 antitrust agencies from more than 90 countries. The ICN has provided benchmarks, recommendations and other work product which provide greater coherence and convergence in the world's ever-growing number of antitrust laws.¹⁶ Looking ahead, collaboration between the relevant authorities in charge of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) regulations, at global level as well as between the EU and national authorities, will be essential to ensure a harmonized legal framework. The legal profession is already playing an important role in this.¹⁷

The big data analysis performed for this report shows that if all countries were similar to the highest level (the so-called "top quartile") of accessible and affordable civil justice, there would be 25% fewer executive overreaches. The benefit of this improved access to justice would also improve the Rule of Law by 20%.

Overall, the results of the survey found that both legal professionals and the general public agreed - with a high level of alignment between the two groups - that peace, justice, and institutional strength is the area where the legal profession has the most positive impact.

Despite this, the interviews conducted for this report, the big data analysis and the surveys suggest that **actions** related to increasing access to legal representation, fighting against corruption, and policymaking to promote state effectiveness could further strengthen the legal profession's contribution to this impact area.

2. Equality and Inclusion¹⁸

Legal professionals also act as champions of increased **equality and inclusion**. Empathy, placing themselves in the shoes of their clients and listening are qualities *sine qua non* for any successful legal professional. A law firm of diverse lawyers, providing an inclusive environment, conducting reports on how to promote these essential values, acting pro bono to counsel, and representing the underrepresented in our society, strongly furthers equality and inclusion.

Many legal professionals go a step further by independently and actively addressing inequality, especially defending human rights.

On the very relevant area of gender equality, women around the world are still facing serious inequities and legal reform must remain high on the legal agenda. Lawyers play a vital role in arguing the case for women's rights and the creation of justice systems which will achieve that end. For example, legal professionals have been instrumental in advancing the #MeToo movement, which has been pivotal in the fight for gender

¹⁵ See the different works of the IBA Anticorruption Committee, such as the Task Force created to help Ukraine address, and avoid, the common pitfalls countries make during the reconstruction process following war or natural disasters <https://www.ibanet.org/unit/Criminal+Law+Section/committee/Anti-Corruption+Committee/3119>.

¹⁶ The ICN is unique as it is the only global body devoted exclusively to competition law enforcement and its members represent national and multinational competition authorities. More on the ICN and the role of the IBA can be found <https://internationalcompetitionnetwork.org/about/>.

¹⁷ See the "AI&IBA Presidential Project" at <https://www.ibanet.org/Artificial-intelligence-hubpage> also accessible through <https://www.ibanet.org/IBA-Presidency-Blog>. Bar associations and law societies are also undertaking significant steps regarding the effects of AI in the legal profession such as the American Bar Association (https://www.americanbar.org/groups/leadership/office_of_the_president/artificial-intelligence/) and The Law Society of England and Wales (<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/ai-and-lawtech/generative-ai-the-essentials>).

¹⁸ For this report, the Cambridge Dictionary definitions of equality ("a situation in which men and women, people of different races, religions, etc. are all treated fairly and have the same opportunities") and inclusion ("the act of allowing many different types of people to do something and treating them fairly and equally") are used.

equality. Lawyers represented the women who came forward, helped them understand their legal rights, and allayed their fears of speaking out.¹⁹

The defense of LGBTIQ+ minorities has been of similar importance. The law, especially in Anglophone countries, played - until recently - a strong role in reinforcing prejudice, hatred, and violence against sexual minorities, and some lawyers enforced this discrimination. Following the advocacy work of many legal professionals and institutions, including the IBA, the situation has been successfully reversed in most jurisdictions.²⁰ Sadly, some countries are moving in the opposite direction.²¹ Therefore, this remains a field where the active commitment of the legal profession remains of essence.

The impact of legal representation on such issues is, unfortunately, heavily dependent on the economic status of the population at both the country and individual levels. Most statistical relationships show that the impact applies to high-income countries. High-income households also remain 2.5 times more likely to use legal services than low-income ones.

The report's big data analysis found that a higher share of legal professionals in a country's population does not necessarily guarantee lower levels of inequality. In fact, better access to legal aid, for example, relates more positively with greater equality. As mentioned earlier, access to justice can be expensive and difficult or even impossible to achieve, due to the affordability barrier to access to justice that exists in many countries. By lowering this barrier through mechanisms such as legal aid, inequality decreases.

The report's big data analysis found that better access to legal aid positively relates with greater equality: if all analyzed countries had the same level of access to justice as those ranking in the highest levels, inequality would be lowered by 5%.

The survey reveals that, compared to legal professionals, the general public has a more positive perception of the impact of lawyers in this area. This poorer perception among legal professionals may be rooted in the struggle to increase diversity and inclusion within their own professional staff.

The surveys, interviews, and the big data analysis suggest reenergized *efforts* to increase access to legal representation and legal aid, advocacy on equality as a matter of law and improving the performance in diversity and inclusion within the legal profession itself as potential levers to further enhance the legal profession's contribution to this impact area.

3. Education

Education is the departure point to ensure that equal opportunities are granted to citizens so that legal and economic justice exists for all. Legal professionals contribute to this impact area by drafting policies, advocating, and fighting for the **universal right to education**, and teaching citizens about their rights and the legal system. This connects again with the important role of lawyers in supporting the Rule of Law by informing the public about their rights and duties under the law and in protecting their fundamental freedoms.

There are many good examples in this area. First, the *Serrano v. Priest* case in California illustrates how a legal battle ignites institutional reforms to address economic-based disparities in public education. Second, legal professionals are fighting alongside the United Nations to compel Afghanistan's reinstated Taliban

¹⁹ See page 57 for further details.

²⁰ Examples of these are Mauritius (<https://www.humandignitytrust.org/resources/ah-seek-v-the-state-of-mauritius-case-digest/>), Botswana (<https://www.humandignitytrust.org/resources/attorney-general-of-botswana-v-motshidiemang-ors-2021/>), Dominica (<https://www.humandignitytrust.org/resources/b-g-v-the-attorney-general-of-the-commonwealth-of-dominica-and-others/>), and Singapore (<https://www.humandignitytrust.org/news/singapore-prime-minister-announces-plan-to-decriminalise-of-homosexuality/>)

²¹ Whilst very recently the Human Rights Council of the United Nations has adopted, for the first time, an expression of commitment to the abolition of discrimination against "Intersex" persons, unfortunately in Uganda and Ghana, laws have been introduced to the legislature; signed into law; or upheld as constitutionally valid; and enforced. Moreover, in the Russian Federation and countries within its orbit have moved backwards to restoration of oppression and state organized violence in recent years. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/04/united-nations-passes-groundbreaking-intersex-rights-resolution>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2024/04/human-rights-council-adopts-seven-resolutions-extends-mandates-human>

rulers to remove the widespread restrictions on girls' and women's access to education. Several bar associations (e.g., Ireland, China) are also launching initiatives to educate underprivileged communities on their rights.²²

Beyond these illustrative cases depicting the impact of individual legal professionals, the research conducted for this report shows that increased participation in formal education is linked to higher levels of access to civil justice within a country. Indeed, being educated about one's rights seems to ease one's resort to them; for example, an individual's lack of knowledge about his property rights would impede him from claiming what should belong to him.

Upholding the Rule of Law, a critical contribution of the legal profession, has a significant impact in increased access to formal education. The big data analysis conducted for this report clearly shows that given a stronger adherence to the Rule of Law, reaching the levels of those countries having the best positions, 30% more girls would be graduating from secondary education. A second very relevant consequence resulting from the data analysis is that youth's engagement would be improved: reaching the level of the top quartile of countries in the Rule of Law Index could reduce the number of youths not engaged in education, working or training by 34 million.

Based on the respondents' answers, 70% of legal professionals and 60% of the general public perceived lawyers' roles in furthering education as having a positive impact.

They also identified increasing educational and communication activities as potential *actions* the legal profession, especially through bar associations and law societies, could take to further contribute to this impact area.

4. Environmental sustainability

The work of legal professionals also promotes **environmental sustainability**. This is achieved through policymaking, advising on the drafting and implementation of international climate agreements, representation in environmental cases, advocacy efforts, creating awareness for their clients about the impact of their activities, encouraging proactive behaviors to minimize such impact, and providing the legal advice required in the aftermath of disasters.

A decisive step for climate justice in Europe which could have global impact, derives from the landmark European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)'s ruling on global warming, declaring that Switzerland had failed to comply with its duties under the Convention on Human Rights concerning climate change.²³ This is the first time an international court has issued a decision in the environmental area related to human rights, which may inform other upcoming opinions by international courts, including the International Court of Justice.

Communities around the world are taking their governments to Court over their inadequate climate action.²⁴ For example, the 2023 court ruling that the US state of Montana,²⁵ by supporting the fossil fuel industry,

²² See pages 65, 67 and 70 for further details on these cases.

²³ Ruling on the Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland case, delivered on 9 April 2024; <https://www.echr.coe.int/w/grand-chamber-rulings-in-the-climate-change-cases>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-68768598>. This case follows a previous very significant national judgement dictated in The Netherlands in 2019, the "Urgenda Case", where a Dutch environmental group, the Urgenda Foundation and 900 Dutch citizens sued the Dutch Government for failure to prevent global climate change. The Netherlands Supreme Court upheld that by failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by, at least, 25% by end of 2020, the Dutch government was in breach of the ECHR. See Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands, judgement of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands, 20 December 2019. <https://climatecasechart.com/non-us-case/urgenda-foundation-v-kingdom-of-the-netherlands/>. urgenda 77 for further details.

²⁴ According to the "Global trends in climate change litigation:2023 snapshot", there are 2,341 environmental litigation cases, 190 of which were filed in the period June 2022 to May 2023, https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Global_trends_in_climate_change_litigation_2023_snapshot.pdf

²⁵ See page 80 for further details.

violates its youth's rights to a clean and healthy environment was obtained by the legal case initiated by a non-profit organization with lawyers whose fees depend on donations to the non-profit.

Of course, as in all impact areas above, lawyers act on both sides of environmental disputes. In some cases, the lawyers aim to hold states accountable to international climate agreements or restrict private businesses' carbon emissions, while in others, they have challenged state actions intended to mitigate climate change or prevent environmental damage. The principal purpose of such litigation, whether viewed as pro-environmental or not, is to ensure that states comply with their law and international obligations.

In fact, this report's research demonstrates that countries that uphold a strong Rule of Law tend to experience decreased air pollution and more rapid adoption of renewable energy initiatives. This is linked to a better regulatory quality that can result in up to 53% lower pollution in the air.

Perhaps due to the nature of this type of litigation, both surveyed legal professionals and the general public view the profession's impact on environmental sustainability as relatively less favorable than the other SDGs. In fact, almost 50 percent of the general public and 40 percent of legal professionals do not see a link between the legal profession and environmental sustainability.

This indicates an opportunity for *actions* addressed at improving awareness, intensifying the legal profession's advocacy efforts in environmental matters, and playing a more relevant role in this area, to enhance the profession's contribution to this impact area.

5. Health and well-being

Lawyers also advance the **health and well-being** of society by drafting healthcare policies, representing people from underserved communities in important court cases, and advocating for more effective healthcare systems. Two examples powerfully illustrate this: (1) legal teams in the US successfully advocated for the enforcement and development of Medicaid policy, a program that helps cover medical costs for some people with limited income and resources,²⁶ and (2) the South African Treatment Action Campaign and Legal Resources Centre that challenged the South African government's denialist position on HIV/AIDS and managed to expand treatment to all adults in the country.

Data demonstrates that a country's Rule of Law is a strong indicator of its level of access to healthcare. The stronger the Rule of Law, the higher the country's level of access to healthcare. This again highlights the beneficial spillover effects of the Rule of Law on health and well-being. Such impact is visible in multiple areas of the big data analysis performed in the context of this report, improving the Rule of Law in all countries could extend life expectancy in the world by 13 years on average (from 62 to 75 years).

Regulatory quality and government effectiveness would yield additional benefits. A regulatory quality such as that maintained by countries ranking top in this field could extend health coverage to an additional 1.4 billion people. Finally, an increase in government effectiveness to the level of those countries in the top quartile could enable the survival of additionally 350,000 mothers during pregnancy and childbirth as well as reduce undernourishment by 520 million people.

Survey respondents are split on lawyers' impact on health and well-being: only 37 percent of legal professionals see a positive effect by the legal profession in this area, while 30 percent see a negative one. The legal professional respondents are likely influenced by the impact of the profession within their own community, where concerns about mental well-being and work-life balance need particular attention.²⁷ Respondents from the general public are evenly split between positive or no impact at all.

²⁶ See page 88 for further details.

²⁷ The IBA established the Commission on Well-being to find ways to improve societal attitudes towards mental health and related issues, which has developed a curriculum for law schools to address well-being issues. <https://www.ibanet.org/Mental-wellbeing-in-the-legal-profession>

Interviews, survey's respondents, and the big data analysis prioritize *actions* to improve access to legal representation relating to healthcare and well-being to increase awareness on the relevance of well-being at the workplace, especially within the legal profession, to enhance the contribution to this impact area.

Indirect economic impact through the contribution to the Rule of Law

A relevant indirect economic impact of legal professionals relates to upholding the Rule of Law – a required element to create the foundations for economic growth. The statistics developed for this report show a strong correlation between a strong Rule of Law protected by a fair, effective, independent, and accessible justice system and GDP's dedication to research and development, allowing for greater innovation for the benefit of society. A strong Rule of Law encourages higher levers of inward investment and M&A (e.g., the Rule of Law is among the top three considerations when multinationals make FDI decisions, together with "ease of doing business" and "a stable political environment")²⁸, which can support broader economic growth and prosperity. Most importantly, the Rule of Law is the foundation for all basic human rights and is held to be not only good in itself, because it embodies and encourages a just society, but also as a cause of other good things, notably economic growth.^{29, 30}

Empirical evidence demonstrates a substantial relationship between the Rule of Law and economic growth. The World Bank has found the correlation between the Rule of Law and the GDP/capita to be very strong, more than 80% in 2022. That is, a one-point increase in the Rule of Law Index could bring an 0.82% increase in GDP.³¹

In addition, the report's data analysis concludes that improving the effectiveness of civil justice to the level of countries in the top quartile in such area could unlock additional USD 82 billion for research and development.

When legal practitioners interpret and apply the law for their clients, when they explain it, when they ensure that the advice provided is correct and fair, when they create contractual relationships or solve their client's problems, when they defend a case because a rule was breached or incorrectly applied, when they strongly prepare a case allowing for a better debate and decision by the court, they are supporting the Rule of Law.

Lawyers also support private individuals in their personal and professional lives, such as buying a house, writing a will, and registering for self-employment. These actions provide significant economic and social benefits. For instance, the International Labor Organization (ILO) develops legal frameworks tailored to the two billion people employed in the informal economy.^{32, 33} This ILO project advances economic stability, improves working conditions, and may pave the way for participation in the formal economy. The big data analysis performed for this report indicates that this impact is far from isolated: greater access to legal representation correlates with lower rates of informal employment.

The report's survey also found that legal professionals view their work as providing substantial indirect economic impact. Legal professional respondents view their role in economic development as the strongest

²⁸ <https://www.roleuk.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/FDI%26RoL.pdf>

²⁹ "The Rule of Law is held to be not only good in itself, because it embodies and encourages a just society, but also a cause of other good things, notably growth", quoted by Lord Bingham at The Rule of Law, 2010, from 'Economics and the Rule of Law: Order in the Jungle', The Economist, 13 March 2008.

³⁰ "I firmly believe in the Rule of Law as the foundation for all our basic rights", US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, 2009. See also note 4 above.

³¹ See page 98 for details.

³² Engaged in an employment relationship that is, in law or in practice, not subject to national labor legislation, income taxation, social protection, or entitlement to certain employment benefits <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/103bf23e-en.pdf?expires=1704891826&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=5D3B61C155E063D2AC35576509C81B41>

³³ https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_627189/lang--en/index.htm

area of impact ahead of any other social impact areas. Curiously, the surveyed general public has a different view of the impact: they rank peace, justice and institutional strength first, followed by economic growth, and finally health and well-being and environmental sustainability.

The *actions* identified to further improve the legal profession's indirect economic impact relate to strengthening the Rule of Law such as facilitating access to legal representation, educating on the relevance of the Rule of Law, mainly by bar associations and law societies, and increasing advocacy on the importance of respecting the Rule of Law at national and international level.

Direct economic impact

Employed lawyers produce revenues and generate tax contributions. This direct impact leads to an ecosystem that includes business and employment for legal personnel, suppliers, and the broader economy.

Legal services employ approximately 20 million professionals and create an additional 14 million jobs related to legal work. Legal professionals also make an outsized contribution to the GDP. Even though they represent only 0.25 percent of the world's population, they generate approximately USD 1.6 trillion of economic value, or 1.7 percent of the world's GDP (directly and through their supplier ecosystem).

This economic contribution is substantial not only for the many people employed by the legal profession. The taxes generated by this work contribute to the provision of social protection, healthcare, education, public order, and other state functions.

Overall, this report's surveys found that the direct economic impact of the profession is perceived positively by both legal professionals and the general public. Interestingly, the indirect economic impact is perceived by all respondents even more positively than the direct impact, which reinforces the value of the indirect nature of the legal profession's contribution.

Looking ahead

This report is only the first step toward **assessing the contributions** of the legal profession to society and **continuing to enhance** its positive social and economic impact. The research has identified actions to preserve and strengthen the profession's impact. These actions focus on access to legal representation, efforts in advocacy and policymaking, communication on and education about the Rule of Law and the role of the legal profession, and the pursuit of the highest ethical standards. These goals should be complemented by efforts to advance health and well-being and equality, diversity, and inclusion within the legal community itself.

The IBA is already driving multiple initiatives in the areas described above in collaboration with law societies, bar associations, law firms, law departments, multiple national and international partners, and other relevant stakeholders in the profession.

1. To help **enhance access to legal representation**, the IBA supports its Access to Justice and Legal Aid Committee and its Pro Bono Committee. These Committees work on building and disseminating research on barriers to access and ways to overcome them, including through pro bono legal services. Examples include a cost-benefit analysis of legal aid in collaboration with the World Bank,³⁴ a report on the link between access to justice and equality presented at the UN Commission on the Status of

³⁴ A tool for Justice, the cost benefit analysis of legal aid, 2019, <https://www.ibanet.org/MediaHandler?id=DB027287-2352-4269-8D0F-C1446B1023BC>

Women,³⁵ and a report on children and access to justice with the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law.³⁶

The Annual IBA Pro Bono and Human Rights Award program is another mechanism through which the IBA encourages members' efforts to make legal representation more accessible, especially to the most vulnerable people.³⁷ The IBA section dedicated to work on substantive law areas - the Legal Practice Division³⁸ - enhances the visibility and understanding of its covered practices to facilitate improved access to representation.³⁹ Additionally, the IBA is leading dedicated collaborations aimed at helping victims of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes access justice through, for example, the activities of the IBA Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), the IBA Human Rights Committee, the War Crimes Committee, collaborations with the International Criminal Court and the development of the "eyeWitness to Atrocities"⁴⁰ mobile application.

2. The IBA is also engaged in **advocacy and the support of policy-making efforts**, which include issuing public statements condemning actions undertaken by states to the detriment of the Rule of Law and human rights, building and disseminating research, guidelines, best practices and legal advice on issues such as human rights, media freedom, modern slavery, arbitration or AI regulation, and advocacy efforts in support of specific cases of potential violations of human rights (primarily through the work of the IBAHRI and the IBA Rule of Law Forum).⁴¹ The leading role that the IBA has played in addressing the abolition of criminal punishments of LGBTIQ+ individuals should also be highlighted.^{42,43} The Legal Practice Division committees provide their views on policy-making through submissions to authorities, such as the European Commission, in areas like tax, antitrust and insolvency.
3. As the "global voice of the legal profession," a significant share of the IBA's efforts is related to **education and communication**.⁴⁴ This includes building educational programs to enhance the expertise of young lawyers, increasing the public's understanding of the Rule of Law,⁴⁵ raising awareness about social issues through publications, documentaries, conferences, or webinars, promoting social consciousness among members, and providing human rights training and technical assistance to legal practitioners and institutions.⁴⁶
4. Regarding professional **ethics stewardship**, the IBA actively creates guidelines and best practices to help legal professionals uphold the highest possible ethical standards (e.g., the Anti-Corruption

³⁵ Report on the UNCSW67 side event: 'Access to Justice – a Sine Qua Non for Inclusion and Equality' (<https://www.ibanet.org/report-uncsw-side-event-access-to-justice>)

³⁶ <https://www.ibanet.org/access-to-justice-and-legal-aid-2022-annual-conference-report>

³⁷ <https://www.ibanet.org/Scholarships-and-Awards>

³⁸ <https://www.ibanet.org/lpd>

³⁹ <https://www.ibanet.org/Covid-19-and-Court-Procedures-An-Access-to-justice-Report>

⁴⁰ <https://www.eyewitness.global/>

⁴¹ <https://www.ibanet.org/IBAHRI>

⁴² https://www.ibanet.org/Human_Rights_Institute/About_the_HRI/HRI_Activities/sexual-orientation;
[https://www.ibanet.org/unit/Section+on+Public+and+Professional+Interest/committee/LGBTQI%2B+Law+Committee/3282.](https://www.ibanet.org/unit/Section+on+Public+and+Professional+Interest/committee/LGBTQI%2B+Law+Committee/3282)

⁴³ The IBAHRI work targets state representatives to change legislation. Some examples regard the IBAHRI intervention letter to Ugandan government in 2009 and 2012 regarding the illegality of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2009; the letters sent in 2012 and 2014 to President Dmitry Medvedev urging the President to take immediate action to prevent the enactment of discriminatory laws in Russia, and to take measures to implement anti-discrimination laws; the writ sent to the UN Committee against Torture highlighting the IBAHRI concerns over the allegations of massive arrests, detention, torture, and other forms of abuse of certain men on account of their real or suspected sexual orientation in Chechnya. The IBAHRI have also released statements on Ghana, Uganda and Kenya (IBAHRI calls on President Akufo-Addo to repeal discriminatory LGBTQ+ Bill I International Bar Association (ibanet.org), IBAHRI Co-Chairs' statement on Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023 I International Bar Association (ibanet.org), IBAHRI states Kenya High Court's LGBTQ+ rights ruling very 'disappointing' and supports appeal I International Bar Association (ibanet.org)), among other.

⁴⁴ Notable in this respect are the IBA Policy Guidelines for Training and Education of the legal profession (23 October 2014) <https://www.ibanet.org/MediaHandler?id=1ff85676-0cdb-4ead-91c3-b533fdc79550>

⁴⁵ <https://www.ibanet.org/rule-of-law-videos-en>

⁴⁶ <https://www.ibanet.org/education-and-internships>

Strategy for the Legal Profession).⁴⁷ The IBA Professional Ethics Committee seeks to promote high standards of professional conduct and ethics among member lawyers. The IBA Arbitration Committee has published Guidelines on Conflicts of Interest for Arbitrators and Guidelines on Party Representation in International Arbitration. The IBA also works with bar associations to help enhance the dissemination and adoption of guidelines. Some examples include the cross-committee collaboration to address ethically ambiguous aspects of legal practice, notably in corporate law.

The IBA is committed to continuing to strengthen its efforts to enhance the legal profession's impact on society, as well as playing a leading role in driving a collective effort across the legal community to uphold the Rule of Law and promote easy access to justice. Though much remains to be done, the creation of this report is an important step in gaining a better understanding of the profession's social and economic impact, the factors that drive it, and the potential ways to improve it.

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others” —

Nelson Mandela. Lawyer, IBA Human Rights Institute Honorary President, and 1st democratically elected President of South Africa (1994-1999)

⁴⁷ Other initiatives include the IBA International Principles on Conduct for the Legal Profession ([https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=IBA%20International%20Principles%20on%20Conduct%20for%20the%20Legal%20Profession%20\(2018\)](https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=IBA%20International%20Principles%20on%20Conduct%20for%20the%20Legal%20Profession%20(2018))) the Report of the Task Force on the Role of Lawyers and International Commercial Structures (<https://www.ibanet.org/MediaHandler?id=3B4FDA81-D105-4C49-824C-2A3F6CB60BC2&.pdf&context=bWFzdGVyfGFzc2V0c3wzNDA1NjAwfGFwcGxpY2F0aW9uL3BkZnhoNjMvaDg0LzgzOTcwNTYwMDgyMjVhM0I0RkRBODEtRDEwNS00QzQ5LTgyNEMtMkEzRjZDQjYwQkMyLnBkZnhoNjMjZiY2NiOTQxNDRmMzAyYjIiNmVjMzM3ZDZiZjUwNDhiNDYxYjFhZWYxYjc1MzNmMzcwMzI3NjZjZmZmMmVj>), and the IBA Practical Guide on Business and Human Rights for Business Lawyers (<https://www.ibanet.org/MediaHandler?id=d6306c84-e2f8-4c82-a86f-93940d6736c4>).

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