Article 39A of the Constitution of India provides for free legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society and ensures justice for all. Articles 14 and 22(1) of the Constitution also make it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before law and a legal system which promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity to all. In 1987, the Legal Services Authorities Act was enacted by the Parliament which came into force on 9th November, 1995 to establish a nationwide uniform network for providing free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society on the basis of equal opportunity. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) was thereafter constituted at the National level.

**OUR VISION:**

To promote an inclusive Legal System in order to ensure fair and Meaningful Justice to the marginalized and disadvantaged sections.

**OUR MISSION:**

To legally empower the marginalized and excluded groups of the society by providing effective legal representation,
conducting legal literacy and awareness programmes to bridge the gap between the legally available benefits and the entitled beneficiaries.

To strengthen the system of Lok Adalats and other Alternate Dispute Resolution mechanisms in order to provide for informal, quick and inexpensive resolution of disputes to the indigent and underprivileged sections of the society and minimize the burden of adjudication on the overburdened judiciary.

**Constitution of NALSA & SLSAs**

At the national level, the Chief Justice of India is the Patron-in Chief of NALSA. The Senior Most Judge of the Supreme Court is the Executive Chairman. The Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India has also appointed a person as the Member Secretary of NALSA.

Supreme Court Legal Services Committee has been constituted to administer and implement the legal services programme insofar as it relates to the Supreme Court of India.

In every State, a State Legal Services Authority (SLSA) has been constituted with the Chief Justice of the High Court as the Patron- in-Chief and the Senior Most Judge of the High Court as the Executive Chairman. There is a Member Secretary for each SLSA.
In every High Court, a High Court Legal Services Committee has been constituted with a Judicial Officer as the Secretary.

At the District Level, District Legal Services Authorities have been constituted with the District Judges as the Chairman of the District Legal Services Authority and a Senior Judicial Officer as the Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority.

Similarly, at the Taluka Level Taluka Legal Services Committee have been constituted to give effect to the policies and directions of NALSA.

**Functioning of Legal Services Institutions:**

NALSA lays down policies, principles, guidelines and frames effective and economical schemes for the State Legal Services Authorities to implement throughout the country.

Primarily, the State Legal Services Authorities, District Legal Services Authorities, Taluka Legal Services Committees, etc. are mandated to discharge the following main functions:

1. To provide free Competent Legal Service to eligible persons;
2. To organize Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes;
3. To create legal awareness about the rights of the weaker and marginalized sections of the society;
IV. To implement the Schemes and policy directions of NALSA through strategic and preventive Legal Services Programmes.

**Persons eligible for getting free legal services include:**

- Women and children
- Members of SC/ST
- Industrial workmen
- Victims of mass disaster, violence, flood, drought, earthquake, industrial disaster
- Persons with Disability
- Persons in Custody
- Persons whose annual income does not exceed Rs. 3 lakh or as notified by the Central/State Government
- Victims of Trafficking in Human beings or beggar.
- Senior Citizens

**Free Legal Services:**

Free legal services entail the provision of free legal aid in civil and criminal matters for those poor and marginalized people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer for the conduct of a case or a legal proceeding in any court, tribunal or before an authority.

**Provision of free legal aid may include:**

a. Representation by an Advocate in legal proceedings.

b. Preparations of pleadings, memo of appeal, paper book including
Printing and translation of documents in legal proceedings:

c. Drafting of legal documents special leave petition etc.

d. Rendering of any service in the conduct of any case or other legal proceeding before any court or other Authority or tribunal and;

e. Giving of advice on any legal matter.

Free Legal services also include provision of aid and advice to the beneficiaries to access the benefits under the welfare statues and schemes framed by the Central Government or the State Government and to ensure access to justice in any other manner.

How to apply for legal aid?

• A person in need of free legal services can approach the concerned authority or committee through an application which could either be sent in writing or by filling up the form prescribed by the Authorities stating in brief the reasons for seeking legal aid or the grievance.

• If the applicant is illiterate or not in a position to write, the Member Secretary or any officer of legal services Authority/Committee shall record his verbal submission and obtain his thumb impression / Signature on the record and such
• The applicant shall be required to verify the eligibility criteria for seeking legal services.

**When can legal services be withdrawn?**

• When the aided person is possessed of sufficient means.

• Where the aided persons obtained legal services by misrepresentation or fraud.

• Where the person engages a legal practitioner other than the one assigned by the Legal Services authority/Committee.

• In the event of death of the aided person except in the case of civil proceedings where the right or liability survives.

• Where the application for legal service or the matter in question is found to be an abuse of the process of law or of legal services.

**Whether and where appeal can be filed for denial of legal services?**

Yes, appeal can be made to the Chairman of the Authority/Committee on denial of grant of legal services within a reasonable time. **Whether and where complaints of**
suggestion can be filed?

Yes, Complaints/Suggestions are welcome for improvement in the provision of free legal aid and services.

Complaints/suggestions can be sent by post or email addressed to the Member Secretary/Secretaries or deposited in the complaint boxes placed at the Legal Services Clinics or Front offices for this purpose.

Lok Adalats:

Lok Adalat is an important Alternative Disputes Resolution mechanism available to a common person. It is a forum where the disputes/cases pending in the court of law or at pre-litigation stage are settled/compromised amicably. Under the Legal Services Authority Act, 1987 an award made by a Lok Adalat is deemed to be a decree of a civil court and is final and binding on all parties and no appeal lies against thereto before any court.

Lok Adalats are being organized by the Legal Services Authorities/Committees for settlement of cases pending before courts u/s 19 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 and also for matters at pre-litigative stage. The following types of matters may be taken up in the Lok Adalats:

+ Matrimonial/Family disputes
+ Criminal/Compoundable Offence cases
• Land Acquisition Cases Labour Disputes
• Workmen’s compensation cases
• Bank Recovery cases (Nationalised, Multinational & Private Banks)
• Pension cases
• Housing Board and slum clearance cases & Housing Finance cases
• Consumer Grievance cases
• Electricity matters
• Telephone Bills disputes
• Municipal matters including House Tax cases etc.
• Other Civil matters such as partition, recovery of possession, rent matters, easementary rights, contracts etc.

Chapter VI-A had been inserted in the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 in the year 2002, with a view to provide compulsory pre-litigative mechanism for conciliation and settlement of disputes relating to Public Utility Services ('PUS').

PUS are those relating to transport service, postal, telegraph or telephone service, supply of power, light or water to the public, system of public conservancy or sanitation, service in hospital or dispensary or insurance service. Pursuant to this, Permanent Lok Adalats have been set up in most states.
Legal Awareness Programmes:
The Legal Services Institution are mandated to conduct legal literacy and awareness programmes about the rights of the weaker and marginalized sections of the society. These awareness & legal literacy programmes are organized not only in cities & towns but also in rural and remote areas. Legal literacy clubs and clinics also been set up schools and colleges.

The legal awareness programmes cover issues such as Child Rights, Rights of Senior Citizens, Un Organised Workers Transgenders, Jail Inmates, Mentally ill and persons with Disability, Disaster Victims and Women Rights, Fundamental Rights and Fundamental Duties.

Regulations & Schemes Formulated By National Legal Services Authority:

NALSA has promulgated and formulated various Regulations for Legal Services institutions for effective discharge of their core function and schemes under the preventive & strategic Legal Services Programme.

NALSA Regulation & Schemes:

- National Legal Services Authority (Lok Adalat) Regulation, 2009.
- National Legal Services Authority (Free and Competent Legal Services) Regulation, 2010.
- National Legal Services Authority (Legal Service Clinics) Regulation, 2011.
- Scheme of Para-Legal Volunteers (Revised) & Module for the Orientation-Induction-Refresher Courses for PLV Training.
• Scheme for Legal Services to Disaster Victims through Legal Service Authorities.

• NALSA (Victims of Trafficking and Scheme, 2015).

• NALSA (Child Friendly Legal Services to Children and their Protection) Shemes, 2015.

• NALSA (Legal Services to the Workers in the Unorganised Sector) Scheme, 2015.

• NALSA (Protection and Enforcement of Tribunal Rights), Scheme, 2015.

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• NALSA (Legal Services to the Workers in the Unorganised Sector) Scheme, 2015.

• NALSA (Legal Services to the Men tally Ill and Mentally Disabled Persons) Scheme, 2015.

• NALSA (Legal Services to the Victims of Drug Abuse and Eradication of Drug Menace) Scheme, 2015.

• N A L S A S c h e m e ( f o r Effective Implementation of Poverty Alleviation) Scheme, 2015.

• NALSA (Legal Services to Victims of Acid Attacks) Scheme, 2016.

• NALSA (Legal Services to Senior Citizens) Scheme, 2016.
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