



Aristotle's Distributive Justice as the Basis for Evaluating Criteria for Low-Income Individuals Receiving Legal Aid

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Abstract

This study examines the philosophical and juridical foundations of legal aid eligibility criteria for low income individuals in Indonesia through the perspective of Aristotle's distributive justice. The research employs a non empirical normative legal method using statutory, conceptual, and philosophical approaches. Primary legal materials include the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945, Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, and Government Regulation Number 42 of 2013. The analysis reveals that the existing legal aid framework primarily relies on administrative indicators of poverty, particularly certificates of indigence and social assistance documentation. While these mechanisms provide procedural certainty, they do not adequately capture actual legal vulnerability, social exclusion, and barriers to accessing justice. Aristotle's distributive justice demonstrates that the allocation of legal aid should be based on proportional need rather than formal administrative status alone. The study proposes a reconstructed eligibility model incorporating economic capacity, social vulnerability, legal access barriers, legal literacy, and structural disadvantage. Such a framework strengthens substantive justice, improves the accuracy of legal aid distribution, and enhances the realization of equal access to justice within Indonesia's constitutional legal order.

Keywords : Aristotle, Distributive Justice, Legal Aid, Low Income Individuals, Access To Justice.



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INTRODUCTION

The question of how legal aid should be distributed among economically disadvantaged populations has become increasingly significant within contemporary debates on social justice, human rights, and democratic governance across both developed and developing legal systems. Recent scholarship has demonstrated a growing shift from procedural understandings of equality before the law toward substantive conceptions of justice that emphasize the actual capacity of vulnerable groups to access legal institutions and defend their rights effectively. This transformation reflects broader developments in social theory and public policy that increasingly recognize inequality as a multidimensional phenomenon extending beyond income deprivation to include structural exclusion, unequal citizenship, and restricted participation in public life. Studies examining social exclusion and citizenship have shown that formal recognition of rights often fails to translate into meaningful access when institutional arrangements do not adequately account for entrenched social disadvantages (Singh & Sharma, 2022). Similar concerns have emerged in discussions regarding education, urban development, and global citizenship, where justice is increasingly understood as requiring equitable distribution of opportunities and resources according to differentiated social needs rather than uniform treatment (Sunkad et al., 2025; Sjaaf et al., 2025). Within this evolving intellectual landscape, legal aid has become a critical instrument through which states attempt to operationalize distributive justice by ensuring that economically and socially vulnerable individuals are not excluded from legal protection and judicial remedies.

Existing literature has generated important insights into the relationship between distributive justice, public resource allocation, and the protection of vulnerable groups. Contemporary studies on distributive justice have emphasized that equitable allocation cannot be reduced to formal compliance with administrative rules because justice ultimately concerns the normative justification of who deserves access to public resources and on what grounds such access should be granted (Torres, 2023). Research on land policy and public resource distribution similarly demonstrates that tensions between

efficiency and equity frequently arise when governments rely excessively on technical criteria while overlooking substantive dimensions of fairness and social need (Vejchodská et al., 2022). Comparable findings emerge in studies examining taxation, land acquisition, and public development policies, which reveal that legal frameworks often struggle to reconcile procedural certainty with broader demands for justice and proportionality (Prayantama et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies suggest that distributive arrangements are most legitimate when they reflect an ethically defensible assessment of individual circumstances rather than merely satisfying bureaucratic requirements. Such scholarship has therefore reinforced the continuing relevance of Aristotelian distributive justice, particularly its emphasis on proportional allocation according to relevant differences among members of society.

Despite these advances, significant conceptual and empirical limitations remain within existing scholarship on legal aid and distributive justice. Much of the literature addressing access to justice concentrates on institutional effectiveness, regulatory implementation, or administrative compliance, while relatively limited attention has been devoted to the philosophical foundations that justify the criteria used to determine legal aid eligibility. This limitation is particularly evident in jurisdictions where legal aid recipients are identified primarily through documentary indicators of poverty, creating an implicit assumption that administrative verification accurately reflects actual legal vulnerability. Such an assumption remains insufficiently interrogated despite growing evidence that poverty is multidimensional and cannot be adequately captured through economic indicators alone. The resulting literature reveals a persistent gap between formal classifications of disadvantage and the lived realities of individuals who experience barriers to justice due to social marginalization, informational deprivation, geographic isolation, or institutional exclusion. Consequently, the normative basis upon which states determine who qualifies as deserving recipients of legal aid remains theoretically underdeveloped, while the potential relevance of Aristotelian proportionality as an evaluative framework has received only limited systematic examination.

This unresolved issue possesses substantial scientific and practical significance because the legitimacy of legal aid systems ultimately depends not only on the availability of legal services but also on the fairness of their distribution. In the Indonesian context, the constitutional commitment to equality before the law and access to justice is embedded within the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945, which establishes the state's responsibility to protect citizens' legal rights irrespective of socioeconomic status. These constitutional commitments are operationalized through Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid and further elaborated in Government Regulation Number 42 of 2013 concerning Requirements and Procedures for the Provision of Legal Aid and Distribution of Legal Aid Funds. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of these instruments continues to rely heavily on administrative indicators of poverty that may inadequately capture the complexity of social vulnerability and legal need. Such reliance risks producing distributive outcomes that are procedurally valid yet substantively inequitable, thereby undermining the very objectives that legal aid seeks to achieve. The challenge is therefore not merely administrative but fundamentally philosophical because it concerns whether the existing criteria reflect a defensible conception of justice capable of guiding the equitable allocation of limited public legal resources (Government of Indonesia, 2011; Government of Indonesia, 2013; Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945).

Against this backdrop, the present study positions itself at the intersection of legal philosophy, distributive justice theory, and access to justice scholarship. Rather than examining legal aid solely as a regulatory or institutional mechanism, this research approaches legal aid eligibility as a distributive question that requires normative evaluation. The study draws upon Aristotle's theory of distributive justice as a philosophical framework through which the adequacy of existing criteria for low income legal aid recipients can be critically assessed. This perspective is particularly relevant because Aristotelian justice rejects mechanical equality and instead advocates proportional allocation based on relevant differences in need and circumstance. Such an approach resonates with contemporary understandings of responsive legal systems that seek to align legal norms with changing social realities and substantive justice objectives (Sidharta, 2013). It also complements constitutionalist perspectives that view law as an instrument for realizing social justice rather than merely maintaining formal legal order (Asshiddiqie, 2019). By integrating classical normative theory with contemporary legal aid discourse, this study seeks to address an important gap in existing scholarship concerning the philosophical legitimacy of legal aid eligibility criteria.

This research aims to analyze Aristotle's concept of distributive justice and evaluate its relevance as a normative foundation for assessing the criteria used to determine low income individuals eligible for legal aid in Indonesia. The study contributes theoretically by advancing a justice based framework that moves beyond administrative definitions of poverty and incorporates proportionality, vulnerability, and substantive need as central evaluative principles. Methodologically, it contributes by combining statutory, conceptual, and philosophical approaches to examine the relationship between legal norms and distributive justice principles. Through this framework, the research seeks to generate a more comprehensive understanding of how legal aid eligibility can be structured to better reflect substantive justice and strengthen access to justice for those most in need of legal protection.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a non empirical normative legal research design aimed at examining the philosophical and juridical foundations of legal aid eligibility criteria for low income individuals in Indonesia through the lens of Aristotle's distributive justice theory. The research relied exclusively on documentary and textual sources rather than field based data collection. Primary legal materials consisted of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945, Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid, and Government Regulation Number 42 of 2013 concerning Requirements and Procedures for the Provision of Legal Aid and Distribution of Legal Aid Funds. Secondary sources included classical and contemporary works in legal philosophy and jurisprudence, particularly Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 2009), Rawls's theory of justice (Rawls, 1999), and leading scholarship on legal reasoning and jurisprudence (Bix, 2015; Hutchinson, 2018). Source selection was guided by relevance to distributive justice, access to justice, legal aid governance, and normative standards for allocating public legal resources. The study adopted a combined statutory, conceptual, and philosophical approach in order to examine the coherence between positive legal norms governing legal aid and the normative principles of proportionality, fairness, and substantive justice embedded in Aristotelian thought.

The analytical procedure involved systematic interpretation and critical evaluation of legal norms, doctrinal materials, and philosophical arguments through qualitative legal analysis. Legal provisions regulating the determination of legal aid recipients were first identified and examined to establish the existing normative framework. Subsequently, Aristotle's theory of distributive justice was employed as the principal analytical lens to assess whether the prevailing eligibility criteria adequately reflect proportional allocation based on actual need and vulnerability rather than solely administrative indicators of poverty. The analysis further incorporated comparative theoretical reflection with broader jurisprudential discussions concerning justice and rights in order to strengthen conceptual rigor. Methodological trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation across constitutional provisions, statutory instruments, and authoritative legal philosophy literature, as well as through interpretive consistency in applying theoretical concepts to legal norms. Since the study relied entirely on publicly accessible legal documents and scholarly literature and did not involve human participants, personal data, or institutional interventions, formal ethical approval was not required.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aristotle's Distributive Justice and the Normative Foundations of Legal Aid Allocation

Aristotle's theory of distributive justice provides a normative framework for evaluating how public resources should be allocated among members of society who possess different levels of need and vulnerability. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, justice is conceptualized not as equal distribution but as proportional distribution based on relevant differences among individuals (Aristotle, 2009). This conception remains influential because it offers a moral standard for assessing whether legal institutions distribute benefits according to substantive rather than merely formal criteria. The relevance of this framework becomes particularly significant when legal aid is understood as a scarce public resource intended to support disadvantaged populations.

The normative significance of distributive justice emerges from its concern with the relationship between rights and social allocation. Contemporary jurisprudence recognizes that legal systems must justify not only the existence of rights but also the mechanisms through which access to those rights is distributed among citizens (Bix, 2015). Legal aid occupies a distinctive position within this framework because it functions as an enabling right that allows individuals to exercise other legal protections.

Questions concerning eligibility therefore involve deeper philosophical concerns regarding fairness and legitimacy.

A close reading of Aristotle’s distributive model reveals that proportionality operates as the central criterion of justice. Individuals experiencing greater obstacles to social participation are entitled to a correspondingly greater share of institutional support because their needs are more substantial than those of others (Aristotle, 2009). This reasoning differs from procedural equality that treats all individuals identically regardless of their actual circumstances. Legal aid policies evaluated through this perspective must therefore consider social realities that influence legal vulnerability.

The importance of proportional allocation has also been recognized within modern theories of justice. Rawls argues that social institutions should be arranged in a manner that benefits the least advantaged members of society, although his framework differs from Aristotle in its contractual foundations (Rawls, 1999). Both perspectives nevertheless converge in rejecting purely formal understandings of equality. Legal aid eligibility criteria become normatively legitimate only when they are capable of identifying individuals who face the greatest barriers to accessing justice.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly associates justice with the capacity of institutions to recognize structural disadvantage. Studies on social exclusion demonstrate that unequal access to public goods often emerges from social and institutional conditions rather than individual choices alone (Singh & Sharma, 2022). Similar observations appear within research on education and citizenship where equitable outcomes require differentiated forms of support for marginalized groups (Sunkad et al., 2025). These findings reinforce Aristotle’s proposition that justice requires sensitivity to contextual differences among members of society.

Table 1. Comparative Principles of Distributive Justice Relevant to Legal Aid Allocation

Theoretical Perspective	Primary Criterion of Distribution	Implication for Legal Aid Eligibility
Aristotle (2009)	Proportionality based on need and condition	Assistance prioritizes individuals facing greater legal vulnerability
Rawls (1999)	Benefit for the least advantaged	Eligibility focuses on disadvantaged social groups
Contemporary Equity Approaches	Recognition of structural inequality	Eligibility incorporates social exclusion and vulnerability indicators
Administrative Equality Model	Uniform procedural compliance	Eligibility relies mainly on documentary requirements

Source: Adapted from Aristotle (2009), Rawls (1999), Kim et al. (2025), and Kim et al. (2024).

The comparison presented in Table 1 illustrates a significant distinction between substantive and procedural approaches to distributive justice. Aristotle and Rawls both emphasize conditions of disadvantage although they arrive at this conclusion through different philosophical routes. Contemporary equity scholarship similarly argues that institutional decisions should account for structural inequalities that influence access to public resources (Kim et al., 2025). Administrative models display greater concern for procedural consistency than for differentiated social needs.

This distinction becomes increasingly important within public sector decision making. Research on equity oriented governance demonstrates that underserved populations frequently remain excluded when policy implementation depends exclusively on standardized administrative indicators (Kim et al., 2024). Similar concerns appear in studies examining digital inclusion where socioeconomic disadvantage cannot be adequately understood through singular measurements of deprivation (Liang & Yang, 2026). Legal aid eligibility therefore requires a broader evaluative framework capable of recognizing multiple dimensions of vulnerability.

Normative legal analysis further indicates that distributive justice is inseparable from constitutional commitments to social welfare and equal citizenship. Indonesian constitutionalism recognizes the obligation of the state to create conditions that enable meaningful access to rights rather than merely guaranteeing formal legal status (Asshiddiqie, 2019). Recent studies of poverty alleviation

policies demonstrate that constitutional justice requires institutions to address substantive inequalities affecting vulnerable populations (Abqa et al., 2025). The constitutional foundation of legal aid can therefore be interpreted as an expression of distributive responsibility.

The philosophical relevance of proportionality extends beyond legal aid and appears across diverse policy sectors. Scholars examining housing rights, health protection, and environmental justice consistently identify equitable allocation as a central condition for realizing fundamental rights (Fiallo et al., 2025; Nuryanto & Ogli, 2025; Mercan & Selçuk, 2024). Similar conclusions emerge from analyses of social insurance systems that emphasize balancing collective welfare with differentiated social needs (Badeges & Ab Rahman, 2025). These developments indicate a broader movement toward substantive approaches to justice within contemporary governance.

Normative interpretation of Aristotle's theory suggests that legal aid eligibility should not be confined to administrative indicators alone because such indicators often fail to capture the complexity of social disadvantage. Justice requires an evaluative mechanism capable of identifying actual legal need, social vulnerability, and barriers to institutional participation. Philosophical analysis therefore supports a conception of legal aid allocation grounded in proportionality rather than formal uniformity. This interpretation establishes the theoretical foundation for evaluating the existing legal aid framework governing low income individuals in Indonesia.

Legal Aid Eligibility Framework in Indonesia and the Limits of Administrative Poverty Criteria

The constitutional architecture of Indonesia places access to justice within the broader framework of the rule of law and equal citizenship. Article 1 paragraph 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945 establishes Indonesia as a state governed by law rather than arbitrary power. This constitutional commitment requires legal institutions to guarantee meaningful protection for all citizens irrespective of socioeconomic status (Asshiddiqie, 2019). Access to legal assistance consequently becomes a constitutional mechanism through which equality before the law may be translated into practical legal protection.

The constitutional guarantee of equality before the law possesses normative significance beyond formal recognition of legal status. Constitutional rights require institutional arrangements capable of ensuring that disadvantaged groups can effectively exercise their legal entitlements in practice (Abqa et al., 2025). Legal aid emerges within this framework as an instrument designed to reduce disparities in access to legal representation and judicial remedies. The constitutional dimension of legal aid therefore extends beyond welfare policy and enters the domain of fundamental rights protection.

Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid operationalizes constitutional commitments by establishing state funded legal assistance for poor individuals. The statute recognizes poverty as the principal criterion for determining eligibility and identifies legal aid as a right that may be claimed by qualified beneficiaries (Government of Indonesia, 2011). Normative examination of the statute indicates a strong commitment to expanding access to justice through publicly financed legal services. Questions nevertheless arise regarding the adequacy of poverty indicators used to determine entitlement within administrative practice.

The legal framework is further elaborated through Government Regulation Number 42 of 2013 which specifies procedural requirements for obtaining legal aid. The regulation emphasizes documentary verification through certificates of indigence and evidence of participation in social assistance programs as the primary basis for eligibility assessment (Government of Indonesia, 2013). Administrative verification provides legal certainty and institutional efficiency because decision makers can rely on standardized documentation. Formal consistency does not necessarily ensure that all legally vulnerable individuals are capable of satisfying documentary requirements.

The reliance on documentary evidence reflects a broader administrative approach commonly employed in public service distribution. Normative legal analysis demonstrates that administrative criteria often function as proxies for socioeconomic conditions rather than direct measures of actual deprivation (Hutchinson, 2018). This distinction becomes important because legal vulnerability may emerge from circumstances not fully captured by official documentation. Individuals experiencing precarious employment, informal economic activity, or sudden economic hardship may encounter barriers in proving eligibility despite genuine need for legal assistance.

Table 2. Normative Structure of Legal Aid Eligibility Criteria in Indonesia

Legal Instrument	Eligibility Indicator	Verification Method	Potential Limitation
Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945	Equality before the law	Constitutional guarantee	No operational criteria
Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid	Poor persons	Administrative evidence	Narrow poverty definition
Government Regulation Number 42 of 2013 concerning Requirements and Procedures for the Provision of Legal Aid and Distribution of Legal Aid Funds	SKTM and social assistance documents	Formal verification	May exclude vulnerable groups

Source: Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945, Government of Indonesia (2011), Government of Indonesia (2013).

The normative structure presented in Table 2 reveals a gradual transition from constitutional principles to administrative implementation. Constitutional guarantees establish broad commitments to equality while statutory and regulatory instruments translate those commitments into operational requirements. The process creates a measurable framework for legal aid administration that facilitates institutional accountability. Tensions emerge when operational indicators become narrower than the constitutional objectives they are intended to serve.

A significant issue concerns the distinction between administrative poverty and legal poverty. Administrative poverty refers to conditions verified through official documentation and government classification systems. Legal poverty refers to an individual's inability to access legal representation or effectively defend legal rights because of economic and social constraints (Ogunbanjo, 2024). The two categories may overlap in many situations yet they do not always coincide in practice.

Normative examination suggests that documentary indicators such as SKTM and social assistance cards function effectively as bureaucratic verification tools but remain limited as measures of legal vulnerability. Similar concerns have appeared in studies examining rights based access to housing and social protection programs where formal eligibility standards occasionally fail to identify individuals facing substantive disadvantage (Fiallo et al., 2025; Nuryanto & Ogli, 2025). Institutional reliance on documentation can inadvertently privilege individuals who are administratively visible while overlooking those situated within informal or unstable socioeconomic conditions. Such outcomes raise questions regarding the alignment between regulatory procedures and constitutional objectives.

The problem is not confined to legal aid administration because comparable patterns have been observed across other public welfare initiatives. Research examining public benefit programs in Indonesia identifies recurring tensions between procedural compliance and substantive justice when eligibility assessments depend heavily on administrative classifications (Firdaus & Astuti, 2026). Similar findings appear within constitutional evaluations of poverty alleviation policies that emphasize the importance of ensuring that formal criteria remain responsive to actual social conditions (Abqa et al., 2025). These observations indicate that legal aid eligibility should be understood within a broader governance challenge concerning the categorization of disadvantage.

Juridical interpretation further indicates that equality before the law cannot be reduced to equal access to administrative procedures. Responsive legal systems require institutions to evaluate whether regulatory mechanisms effectively enable vulnerable individuals to exercise their rights in practical contexts (Sidharta, 2013). Discussions concerning restorative justice and human rights oriented legal education similarly emphasize the need to connect procedural frameworks with substantive legal empowerment (Geri et al., 2025; Madhlom & Antonopoulos, 2022). The existing legal aid framework therefore demonstrates a normative gap between formal eligibility verification and the broader constitutional aspiration of ensuring meaningful access to justice for economically disadvantaged citizens.

Reconstructing Legal Aid Recipient Criteria Through Aristotelian Distributive Justice

The normative findings indicate that the current legal aid eligibility framework remains predominantly dependent on documentary indicators of poverty, particularly certificates of indigence and social assistance registration. Such an approach prioritizes administrative certainty while providing limited attention to the actual conditions that hinder individuals from exercising legal rights. Aristotle's distributive justice offers a critical evaluative lens because allocation should correspond to relevant conditions rather than formal classifications alone (Aristotle, 2009). The analysis reveals that legal aid eligibility currently reflects procedural identification of poverty more strongly than substantive assessment of legal need.

A central limitation of the existing framework lies in its assumption that administrative poverty and legal vulnerability are equivalent categories. Documentary evidence may identify economic disadvantage, yet it does not necessarily capture obstacles related to social marginalization, discrimination, geographic isolation, or institutional exclusion. Contemporary distributive justice scholarship increasingly recognizes that deservingness cannot be determined solely through economic indicators because vulnerability is multidimensional in nature (Torres, 2023). The normative structure of legal aid regulation therefore risks excluding individuals whose legal disadvantages are substantial despite their inability to satisfy formal documentary requirements.

Aristotle's conception of proportional allocation requires decision makers to evaluate the characteristics that are directly relevant to the distribution of a particular good. In the context of legal aid, the relevant good is access to legal representation and legal protection rather than economic assistance alone. The distribution process should therefore consider conditions that directly affect a person's capacity to obtain justice within legal institutions (Aristotle, 2009). Such reasoning shifts the focus from administrative classification toward the practical realities of legal disadvantage.

The findings further demonstrate that poverty should be interpreted as a multidimensional condition rather than a purely financial status. Research on social exclusion shows that disadvantaged groups often experience barriers in education, participation, information access, and institutional recognition, which collectively affect their ability to claim legal rights (Singh & Sharma, 2022). Similar observations appear in studies of equitable public decision making that emphasize the interaction between socioeconomic position and structural barriers (Kim et al., 2024). A legal aid system that measures only income related indicators may therefore overlook significant forms of deprivation relevant to justice.

The concept of social exclusion provides an important analytical extension for evaluating legal aid eligibility. Exclusion operates through social processes that reduce participation in legal, political, and economic institutions, creating unequal opportunities to exercise rights (Singh & Sharma, 2022). Studies in human centered equity research demonstrate that disadvantaged populations frequently encounter systemic barriers that remain invisible within conventional administrative assessments (Kim et al., 2025). These findings support the argument that legal aid eligibility should incorporate indicators capable of identifying exclusionary conditions beyond documented poverty.

Table 3. Proposed Aristotelian Framework for Legal Aid Recipient Assessment

Dimension	Existing Criteria	Aristotelian Assessment	Proposed Indicator
Income	Administrative proof	Insufficient	Actual economic capacity
Social Vulnerability	Limited consideration	Essential	Social exclusion index
Access to Justice	Not explicitly measured	Essential	Legal access barriers
Educational Capacity	Not assessed	Relevant	Legal literacy indicator
Structural Disadvantage	Not assessed	Relevant	Multidimensional vulnerability

Source: Developed by the author based on Aristotle (2009), Torres (2023), Singh and Sharma (2022), Kim et al. (2024), and Kim et al. (2025).

Table 3 illustrates a reconstructed assessment framework derived from Aristotelian distributive principles and contemporary scholarship on equity and vulnerability. The comparison shows that current regulations concentrate primarily on economic verification while several legally relevant dimensions remain unaddressed. Social vulnerability, legal literacy, and structural disadvantage appear particularly important because they influence the practical ability of individuals to engage with legal institutions (Kim et al., 2024). The proposed framework seeks to align eligibility determination with conditions that directly affect access to justice.

The inclusion of legal access barriers as an independent assessment dimension reflects the distinctive nature of legal aid as a public legal service. Access to justice is shaped not only by income but also by procedural complexity, institutional distance, information asymmetry, and social power relations (Hampton et al., 2023). Research concerning equity and public resource distribution similarly emphasizes that fair allocation requires attention to barriers that prevent meaningful participation in public systems (Vejchodská et al., 2022). Legal aid assessments that fail to recognize these barriers may produce formally lawful yet substantively unequal outcomes.

Educational capacity also emerges as a significant component within a distributive evaluation framework. Individuals with limited legal literacy frequently encounter difficulties understanding legal procedures, asserting rights, and navigating institutional processes. Educational disadvantage has been associated with broader patterns of citizenship exclusion and reduced access to public institutions (Sunkad et al., 2025). From an Aristotelian perspective, such conditions are relevant because they directly affect the ability of individuals to benefit from legal protections that are formally available.

The proposed reconstruction additionally recognizes structural disadvantage as a distinct criterion requiring normative consideration. Urban justice studies demonstrate that inequality is often reproduced through spatial, institutional, and socioeconomic structures that systematically affect vulnerable populations (Sjaaf et al., 2025). Similar concerns appear in analyses of public policy fairness which emphasize that merit and need must be interpreted within broader structural contexts rather than isolated individual circumstances (Pinto & Scalzo, 2026). Eligibility assessments that ignore structural disadvantage may underestimate the depth of legal vulnerability experienced by marginalized groups.

A reconstructed legal aid framework grounded in distributive justice would not eliminate administrative verification, yet it would reposition such verification as one component within a broader evaluative model. Critical scholarship on equity consistently argues that fair allocation requires contextual judgment concerning actual disadvantage rather than reliance on simplified classifications (Goudarzi et al., 2022, Mascarenhas et al., 2024). The normative implication is that legal aid regulations should incorporate multidimensional indicators capable of identifying legal need, social exclusion, and access barriers alongside economic conditions. Such a framework would strengthen the coherence between legal aid governance and the principle that public legal resources should be allocated according to proportional need and vulnerability (Prayantama et al., 2025, Aristotle, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that Aristotle's distributive justice provides a coherent philosophical foundation for evaluating legal aid eligibility criteria for low income individuals in Indonesia. The normative analysis confirms that legal aid regulations are constitutionally oriented toward equality before the law, yet their implementation remains heavily dependent on administrative indicators that do not fully reflect actual legal need and vulnerability. The examination of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945, Law Number 16 of 2011, and Government Regulation Number 42 of 2013 reveals a gap between formal eligibility requirements and substantive access to justice. Administrative proof of poverty offers procedural certainty but remains insufficient for identifying individuals who experience social exclusion, legal incapacity, and structural disadvantage. Applying Aristotle's distributive justice as an evaluative framework indicates that legal aid should be allocated according to proportional need and conditions directly related to legal vulnerability. The proposed reconstruction expands eligibility assessment beyond documentary poverty by incorporating multidimensional indicators that capture economic, social, educational, and institutional barriers. Such an approach strengthens substantive justice, promotes more equitable distribution of public legal resources, and enhances the effectiveness of legal aid as a constitutional mechanism for ensuring meaningful access to justice.

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