

Legal Aid in the Low Countries

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PREFACE

A lot of research has been conducted on legal aid. A lot of publications have been produced on the subject, including in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Having said this, the approaches to legal aid are also very varied: the socio-legal approach, the policy approach, the critical approach, the legal approach, etc. However, the accessibility of those studies remains limited to an 'inner circle' of specialists within one particular field.

The editors of *Legal Aid in the Low Countries* try to broaden the questions about legal aid and to give the opportunity for all these disciplines to shed their light on the matter and to confront the reader with them. Moreover, the editors are convinced that the research done in Belgium and the Netherlands has not yet reached the international scientific community due to the language barrier. Therefore, they hope this book will make a large contribution to the necessary scientific dialogue.

The editors however not only brought together what is useful and interesting. Their starting point was a clear societal and political problem definition. 'Access to justice' is a fundamental democratic right for all citizens. Special attention also has to be paid to those citizens who experience all sorts of difficulties in getting access to justice because of various structural or systemic reasons. Nevertheless, this special issue cannot be dealt with thoroughly without also engaging in the debate on the general theme of 'access to justice'. The editors also wanted to stress the socio-legal approach, building bridges between society and the legal and judicial system.

But finally the editors realise that this book will not be the end of the debate, of course. A lot of work still has to be done, especially in the field of deepening socio-legal knowledge. Data often fail to give answers and a lot of work is too legalistic in nature.

Anyhow, this book will remain a 'milestone' when it comes to a better understanding and a better management of legal aid as a contribution to access to justice.

Em. Prof. dr. Jean Van Houtte

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