



Systemic Justice

Community-driven litigation for racial, social, and economic justice

Strategic plan, 2022-2026

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1. Introduction

Systemic Justice works to radically transform how the law works for communities fighting for racial, social, and economic justice. We do this by building communities' power to leverage the courts in their campaigns for change and opening up their access to justice.

Certain groups in society are fundamentally and structurally disadvantaged. Racialised groups are disproportionately affected by police violence; migrants are treated inhumanely on and within Europe's borders; and social services and commercial products, such as mortgages and consumer credit, are provided based on assessments that include people's identity markers like ethnicity, religion, and gender, disproportionately affecting those who are already marginalised and placed at a disadvantage.

The courts are powerful agents for change, but marginalised communities are currently unable to leverage their full potential. Recent news cycles illustrate how court victories can spur on change: in climate justice, we see how litigation against states is sparking them to take action on reducing carbon emissions, and decisions on marriage equality are spurring on the "legalisation" of gay marriage.

But strategic litigation is not used as widely as it could be by those working on racial, social, and economic justice. Moreover, existing litigation efforts do not always serve these communities or centre their needs. For example, current climate litigation does not address the needs of marginalised groups, and the marriage equality movement has been critiqued for privileging whiteness and subordinating non-normative relationships. An intersectional approach is lacking, often due to uneven power dynamics between communities and those doing the legal work. Legal fees are high, processes are complex, and the legal profession continues to inadequately reflect our society. This means that litigation tends to be closed off to and not driven by the communities that could use it the most.

By creating a truly participatory, open model of partnership, strategic litigation can not only strengthen existing campaigns for justice but also be a point of gravity around which solidarity and new campaigns are built. Centring communities' perspective and lived experience is key here. Instead of having lawyers take over and set the agenda, Systemic Justice develops community-driven litigation campaigns, making it possible for communities to take back power and go to court on their own terms.

Systemic Justice is the [first organisation in Europe that is Black-led](#) with a majority BPOC team and works with community partners on strategic litigation by taking a community-driven, intersectional approach. Our litigation focuses on issues of racial, social, and economic justice. We applying [an intersectional lens in all our work](#), and address issues across [the digital and non-digital context](#).

Our foundational values:

- **Anti-oppression**: we challenge oppression (racism, homophobia, ableism, sexism, xenophobia, transphobia) by confronting systems of domination, privilege, exclusion, and institutional violence.
- **Intersectionality**: we approach our work through an intersectional lens that centres how an individual's social or political identity and personal characteristics can overlap and combine to create different modes of discrimination, exclusion, and oppression.
- **Justice**: we believe that justice means providing all individuals with an equal opportunity to enforce their rights, access remedies and receive reparations for violations of their rights, and to push for change before the courts.

2. Towards racial, social, and economic justice

Systemic Justice works on the basis of a theory of change (see [Annex 1](#)) developed in 2022, which will be subject to revision following an external evaluation of Systemic Justice’s five-year pilot phase in 2026.

SYSTEMIC JUSTICE VISION

A world where communities have the power to use the courts on their own terms to secure racial, social, and economic justice

Towards this overall vision, Systemic Justice works to radically transform how the law works for communities fighting for racial, social, and economic justice. This work is organised into three tracks of work. The three tracks of work, which also provide the structure for our theory of change, are:

1. Building the knowledge and power of organisations and movements fighting for justice and equality.
2. Launching and sustaining community-driven strategic litigation.
3. Scaling impact by promoting equitable working models with the broader field of litigators.

Each of which these tracks of work have an outcome as set out below.

OVERALL OUTCOME 1	Power is built and communities are confident and well-equipped to use litigation on their own terms
OVERALL OUTCOME 2	Community-driven litigation is used as a tool to advance community-defined priorities of racial, social, and economic justice movements
OVERALL OUTCOME 3	Equitable working models and practices for community-driven litigation are considered the norm amongst litigators working on racial, social, and economic justice

2.1. Building the knowledge and power of organisations and movements fighting for justice and equality

We believe that communities should be able to make informed choices about how they want to incorporate litigation in their campaigns for change. This is why we work to build the knowledge and power of organisations and movements fighting for justice and equality to better decide if and how to integrate litigation in their strategies for change. We do this by:

- Developing resources on strategic litigation, to assist in better understanding the different aspects of it, and to help guide considerations on if or how litigation might be a tactic to include in campaigns for change.
- Delivering workshops and knowledge-sharing events to assist those doing community-based or -facing work in better understanding strategic litigation as a tool for change and what it might do for their campaigns.
- Hosting regular drop-in calls to address community questions and assist in finding support elsewhere for matters outside Systemic Justice’s scope of work.

- Ensuring that all our resources are accessible-by-design and offered in multiple formats and languages so they can benefit and be used by as large an audience as possible.

2.1.1. *Connected outcomes, immediate outcomes, outputs*

Under this track of work, the following outcomes will bring Systemic Justice closer to achieving its overall outcomes and long-term impact:

OVERALL OUTCOME 1	Power is built and communities are confident and well-equipped to use litigation on their own terms
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs are identified and responded to. • Relationships and connections are built, reinforced, and knowledge is shared. • Communities are better informed of the opportunities, processes, and (dis)advantages of strategic litigation. • Communities have access to knowledge and practices to support them in setting the agenda when collaborating with the legal community.

2.2. Launching community-driven litigation

We litigate with community partners to achieve change by leveraging the power of the courts. Through a truly participatory, open model of partnership, we jointly build litigation campaigns to bring about structural change on issues of racial, social, and economic justice. Recognising that structural change takes time, Systemic Justice enters long-term, trust-based partnerships and develops strategies that tackle root causes rather than addressing merely the symptoms of unjust and unequal power structures.

When exploring a partnership, we jointly discuss the following questions:

1. What is the bigger change the community wants to see?
2. Would the community want and be prepared to leverage litigation to support the campaign to bring about this change?
3. What are the shorter-term steps to achieving the change the community wants to see, and how might they translate into legal actions?

If we mutually decide to move forward together, we will jointly design the strategy for the litigation campaign. We will work together closely as the effort unfolds, in which Systemic Justice will take care of the legal aspects of the campaign whilst taking the lead from the community partners themselves.

2.2.1. *Connected outcomes, immediate outcomes, outputs*

Under this track of work, the following outcomes and outputs will bring Systemic Justice closer to achieving its overall outcomes and long-term impact:

OVERALL OUTCOME 2	Community-driven litigation is used as a tool to advance community-defined priorities of racial, social, and economic justice movements
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Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities gain clarity of strategic vision and objectives in their potential area of litigation. • Litigation pushes for the changes that community partners working on racial, social, and economic justice want to see in the world. • Case management and strategy are managed in a transparent, accessible, and accountable way to facilitate informed decision-making.
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2.2.2. Evidencing Racial, Social and Economic Injustice

Our research projects and activities are undertaken to guide and infuse Systemic Justice litigation projects and legal work, and to provide reliable up-to-date information in service to organisations and movements across the region. This involves the design and implementation of innovative, non-extractive research methodologies which foreground experiences of the harms caused by injustice; evidencing structural harms on marginalised groups and communities.

2.2.2.1. Connected outcomes, outputs, and activities

Our research supports our work to build the power of community organisations, and guides and informs community-driven litigation projects. The following outcomes and outputs will bring Systemic Justice closer to achieving its overall impact:

Overall outcome	Research knowledge, information, and evidence drives the identification and prioritisation of litigation and other opportunities for change and action, and informs all Systemic Justice’s legal action and litigation projects.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular production of evidence outputs of systemic injustice as experienced by racially, socially, and economically marginalised groups and communities across Europe. • Systemic Justice recognised as a leading authority in the production of reliable, accessible, and community grounded research knowledge and information. • Organisation remains aware of the trends, changes, and community effects of systemic injustices across the region.

2.3. Scaling impact by promoting equitable working models

There is a growing desire within the legal field to take a more community-focused approach in litigation work. To meet this need, Systemic Justice facilitates a community of practice for litigators, legal practitioners, and litigating organisations working on cases that concern racial, social, and economic justice issues in Europe. In the Community of Practice, participants come together to:

- Share ideas, experiences, and best practices.
- Support each other towards individual and shared goals.
- Pool valuable learning and create new knowledge.

Systemic Justice’s role in the community of practice is to cultivate, organise, and facilitate the community to ensure that members get high value for their time and participation. In 2022, the community of practice defined a shared objective for the work, which was to "to work collectively to promote community-centred lawyering and reframe litigation processes so they can be more accessible and better serve communities and their objectives."

2.3.1 Connected outcomes, immediate outcomes, outputs

Under this track of work, the following outcomes and outputs will bring Systemic Justice closer to achieving its overall outcomes and long-term impact:

OVERALL OUTCOME 3	Equitable working models and practices for community-driven litigation are considered the norm amongst litigators working on racial, social, and economic justice
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collaborative/engaged and sustainable Community of Practice is established. • New lawyers are identified, and knowledge on good practices of community-centred litigation is shared. • Good partnership practices to facilitate community-driven litigation are identified and introduced.

2.4. Theory of Change

Systemic Justice works on the basis of a theory of change which is structured along the above three tracks of work. See Annex 1.

3. A different kind of organisation

Systemic Justice is a non-profit (*stichting*) registered in the Netherlands with ANBI (Dutch Public Benefit Organisation) status. Our board consists (per October 2022) of five individuals.

From the very beginning, we have sought to build an organisation that is truly aligned with its foundational values of anti-oppression, justice, and intersectionality. Ensuring that such values are lived in practice requires critical questioning of the wisdom of “best practices” in non-profit governance and implies thinking of governance in a more holistic way to co-create a governance structure that aligns to our values. This also includes the team and the board reflecting on how power should be shared within the organisation and what ways of working together can make it possible for everyone involved to help accomplish its mission.

3.1. Organisational development

Developing Systemic Justice over the period of 2022-2026 is a joint effort between the organisation’s team and board, which requires ongoing adjustment and learning. The below objectives and activities/outputs serve as a framework for this work which can be refined over time.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE	
<p>A structured, transparent, organisation that is intentional about the continuous creation and maintenance of an anti-oppressive, safe, and positive environment for staff, enabling the organisation to deliver on its mission.</p>	
TEAM CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing: Undertake continuous team capacity planning exercises and reviews to ensure capacity and structure matches workload.
GOVERNANCE AND LEARNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and undertake structured organisational learning that helps us deepen our knowledge around working in and shaping an anti-oppressive work environment. • Establish and facilitate feedback and self-reflection spaces where the team can reflect on the work environment, goals, and workload.
A REMOTE WORK SETUP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise three annual team retreats (spring, summer, autumn), to strengthen teamwork, and facilitate joint planning and strategizing. • Organise smaller team convenings and bilateral in-person meetings where needed. • Refine approach to remote working by setting and respecting clear boundaries, establishing clarity in availability, organising online social gatherings, implementing collaborative technology solutions. • Support colleagues who have special wishes for their remote working setup.
M&E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationalise SJ's impact measurement framework and refine framework as necessary. • Develop and implement project-specific monitoring and evaluation solutions, where needed. • Produce annual progress report (due February) for organisational funders. • Undertake review of pilot phase (2022-2026).
COMMUNICATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine and implement hope-based communications strategy. • Undertake organisation-wide rebranding exercise. • Refine and expand presence on social media in line with hope-based communications strategy. • Produce external annual report. • Develop integrated partner communications strategies for litigation projects as needed.

3.2. Operations

Systemic Justice seeks to ensure that its internal operational setup supports the team’s ability to deliver on the organisation’s mission. This means ensuring smooth and efficient day-to-day running of the organisation by designing and implementing policies, systems, and procedures.

OPERATIONS OBJECTIVE	
Create an operational structure and organisational practices that are responsive to team needs and that facilitate getting things done efficiently.	
HUMAN RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake recruitment of team colleagues and procurement of consultants as necessary to support organisational needs; • Work with the team to develop organisational practices that make sense for the way we work, are efficient, and responsive to team and partner needs; • Support staff with learning organisational practices and tools through onboarding, scheduled refreshers, and additional support; • Develop and continuously refine well-being support offers to team, including e.g. psycho-social support, healing, and therapy.
FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and refine financial management practices according to established best practice. • Budgetary planning and tracking of the organisation’s financial situation. • Develop and revise annual organisational budget for board approval. • Develop grant budgets, make adjustments, and produce financial reporting as necessary. • Prepare for annual external audits and ensure learnings from audits are integrated into financial management practice. • Develop and refine procurement policy and practice.
TECHNOLOGY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the organisation’s technology solutions provide for secure, reliable, collaborative, and user-friendly workflows. • Procure IT solutions and manage relations with external providers, including hosting, IT support, software, and hardware suppliers. • Deploy hardware and software and ensure information security practice in line with recognised standards.
RISK MANAGEMENT & COMPLIANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and bi-annually refine organisation-wide risk management framework covering internal organisational and external programmatic risks and mitigation measures. • Ensure all policies and internal procedures are values-aligned, are socialised, applied and updated as necessary. • Ensure regulatory reporting in line with ANBI requirements.

3.3. Funding

Systemic Justice seeks funding which enables it to act in line with our organisational values. While we acknowledge that philanthropy and the capitalist system need to change, the work we need to do is urgent and, given the challenges we’re facing, we require robust resources to make the work sustainable for our team and partners, and can thus not have the perfect be the enemy of the good. In this context, Systemic Justice’s foundational parameters for receiving funding include:

- No funder gets to dictate our actions: This includes what issues we take on, do not take on, the partners we do this with, who we act in solidarity with, and everything in between.
- No funding we accept should harm the communities we work with: For example, if funding directed at a specific litigation campaign puts communities in harm’s way or triggers trauma for them.
- We do not rely on donations from the communities we’re working with: While crowdfunding can be a powerful campaigning tool, and we do not exclude the possibility of using this for specific litigation projects, we will not seek direct donations from the communities we serve.

FUNDING OBJECTIVE	
To robustly resource Systemic Justice’s work via a diverse set of income streams	
FUNDRAISING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain ambitions of developing litigation projects, while ensuring no individual source of funding exceeds 30% of annual turnover. • Align reporting requirements and ensure a majority of funders receive annual narrative report and annual accounts as main source of reporting; • Convene two annual joint funder calls to discuss reporting and forward-looking plans; • Continue stewardship and explore synergies between Systemic Justice and other grantees of Systemic Justice funders.

POST-2026: SYSTEMIC JUSTICE BEYOND EUROPE

Systemic Justice’s five-year pilot period (2022-2026) will serve as a basis for evaluating the community-driven approach to strategic litigation which sits at the core of our work.

Beyond this period, the ambition is to continue and expand the work in Europe but also to explore options for testing the viability of Systemic Justice’s community-driven litigation model in other global regions and through other modalities (e.g. locally based chapters or other ways to maximise the impact of the work locally).

Annex 1: Theory of Change 2022-2026

