



Justice Needs and Satisfaction in **Tunisia** **2025**

Legal problems in daily life



Introduction

Over the past 12 years, HiIL has conducted over 40 Justice Needs and Satisfaction (JNS) Surveys globally. Each survey collects extensive people-centred data, concluding with a report highlighting the current state of people's justice needs and experiences. But what happens to people and their problems after we interview them? Do they manage to resolve the legal problems they were dealing with at the time? Are they able to move on with their lives after resolution? Do their problems resurface? Do they give up on reaching a resolution? Do they encounter new legal problems? While numerous JNS Surveys provide valuable snapshots of the legal landscape at a specific point in time, this longitudinal study uniquely addresses the critical gap in understanding how people's legal problems evolve over time.

This report presents the findings from the three-year JNS panel study in Tunisia. Starting in 2023, we surveyed a representative group of 5,008 randomly selected Tunisians, followed by a 2024 phone survey where we interviewed 2,548 of the same people. In the first months of 2025, we interviewed 1,805 of the same people once more about their justice experiences. The interviewers asked follow-up questions about the problems people reported in years one and two of the study, gaining insight into whether these problems had been resolved, resurfaced, abandoned, or were still ongoing. They also asked about any new problems experienced in the previous twelve months between surveys, as well as opinion questions to gauge their perspectives on the Tunisian justice system. In this third year, we also added questions about people's preferred ways to resolve their legal problems, to better understand how we can ensure justice innovation is truly people-centred.

The report consists of four parts. The first part focuses on legal problems, discussing who experiences legal problems and what the most common problem types are in Tunisia. The second part looks at resolution, in particular of problems reported in wave one. What is the current status of these problems three years after they occurred? The third section discusses people's preferred way to resolve legal problems, while the fourth section deals with people's perceptions of the justice system and their trust in different actors. The report finishes with a conclusion and recommendations.



Over half of all Tunisians experience a legal problem over a three-year period

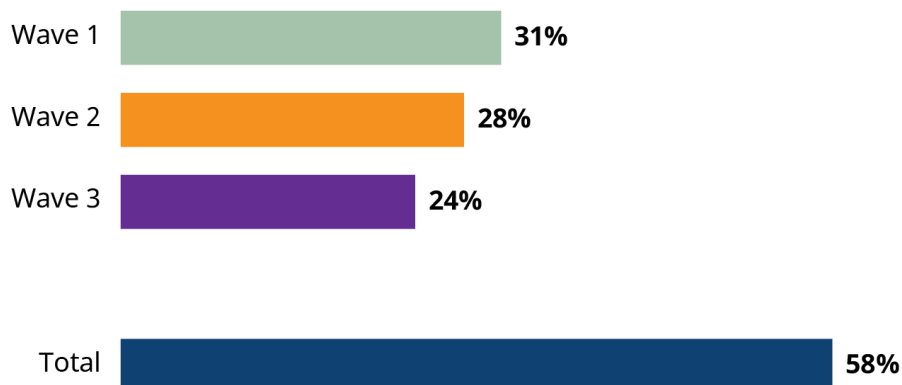
Legal problems are a common occurrence in Tunisia. Rather than obtaining a one-time static view of how many people experience legal problems, by surveying people annually for three years, we are able to really see just how common legal problems are in Tunisians' lives.

The JNS Tunisia 2023 showed that around 31% of Tunisian adults experienced one or more legal problems in the year before, with many people facing multiple problems. The second wave study showed a slightly lower prevalence rate, with 28% of people experiencing one or more new legal problems between the first and the second interview.

In the current third wave of the study, around 24% of people reported having experienced a new legal problem in the past year. Although this is slightly lower than in previous years, this does not necessarily mean that fewer people experienced legal problems than three years ago. Despite the survey asking about problems that first appeared in the previous twelve months, it is likely that during the first interview, more problems were reported that had started more than a year ago and still continued at the time of the interview.

PROBLEM PREVALENCE

all waves



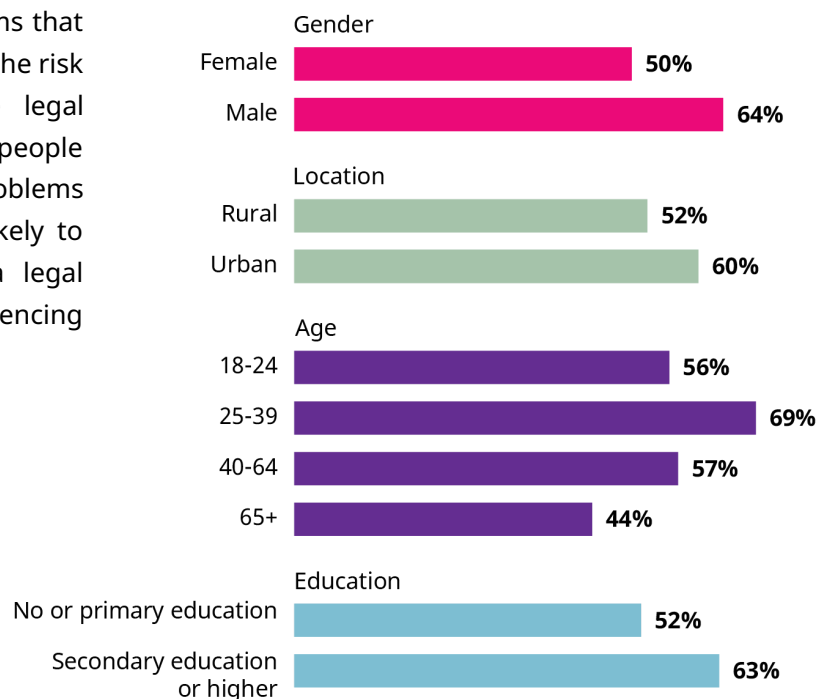
During the total study period, around 58% of people experienced at least one legal problem. This includes people experiencing only one legal problem during the three-year report and people experiencing multiple, different legal problems. In other words, over the course of a period of three years, more than half of the Tunisians can expect to encounter at least one legal problem, highlighting how important it is to have accessible resolution mechanisms that can help people address this.

The results of wave two already revealed that people who reported one or more legal problems during year one were significantly more likely to report one or more new legal problems the following year. The results of year three further supported this hypothesis. People who reported one or more legal problems during the previous two years are significantly more likely to report a new problem in the current third wave of the study (34% versus 14%). After surveying these people over three years, it indeed seems that experiencing legal problems increases the risk of subsequently experiencing more legal problems. It may also be that certain people are more prone to experience legal problems than others or that they are more likely to report or recognise something as a legal problem, especially after already experiencing a problem before.

The likelihood of experiencing a legal problem depends on the demographic group someone belongs to. Looking at a three-year period, men are significantly more likely to experience a legal problem than women. As we already highlighted in the first report of the current study project, it is likely that men in general are more active in certain aspects of daily life, thus making it more likely they encounter legal problems. For example, men are much more often employed than women, making it more likely they would experience an employment problem. It is also possible that women are more reluctant to report certain categories of problems. For the same reason, people aged 25 - 39 and people with a higher level of education are more likely to experience a legal problem.

PROBLEM PREVALENCE

all waves, demographic differences



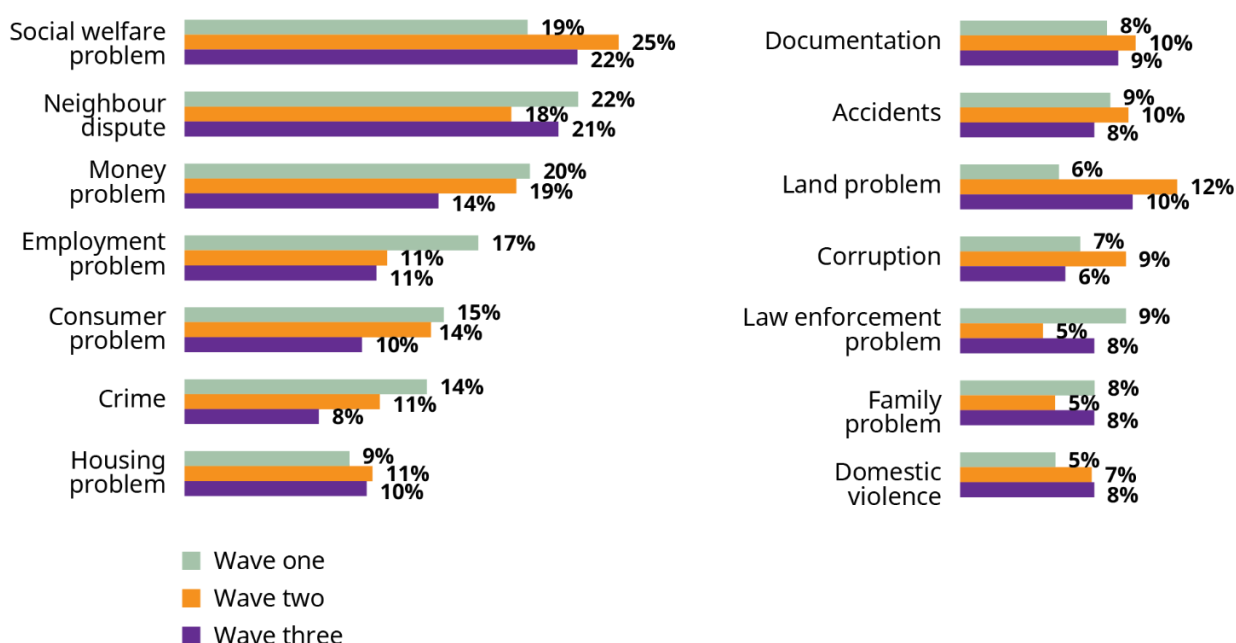
The two most common legal problem categories are social welfare problems and neighbour disputes

Every year we mapped the types of legal problems people in Tunisia experience. And although there are some variations from year to year, the overall tendency remains the same, with most people reporting social welfare problems, neighbour disputes, money problems, and employment problems. Together these problem categories account for almost half of all the legal problems that happen in Tunisia. Although most problem categories are less often reported in the third wave, problems related to social welfare and neighbour disputes remain particularly common. These two problem categories remain among the two most common ones across all three waves.

The first JNS report already explored in-depth the demographic differences in terms of problems categories experienced. These findings have mostly not changed by the third wave. In particular, men are more likely to experience money problems and police-related problems, whereas women experience more neighbour disputes and domestic violence. Interestingly, employment problems used to be more common among men than women, but in the current third wave of the study, they experience this problem category at a similar rate.

PROBLEM CATEGORIES

all waves



The majority of legal problems never get resolved

As noted in the introduction, the main advantage of the current study design, with its longitudinal panel data, is that it allows us to track the development of legal problems over time. Problems reported during the first wave can be explored for multiple years after to see if they continue to impact people's lives and whether resolutions hold.

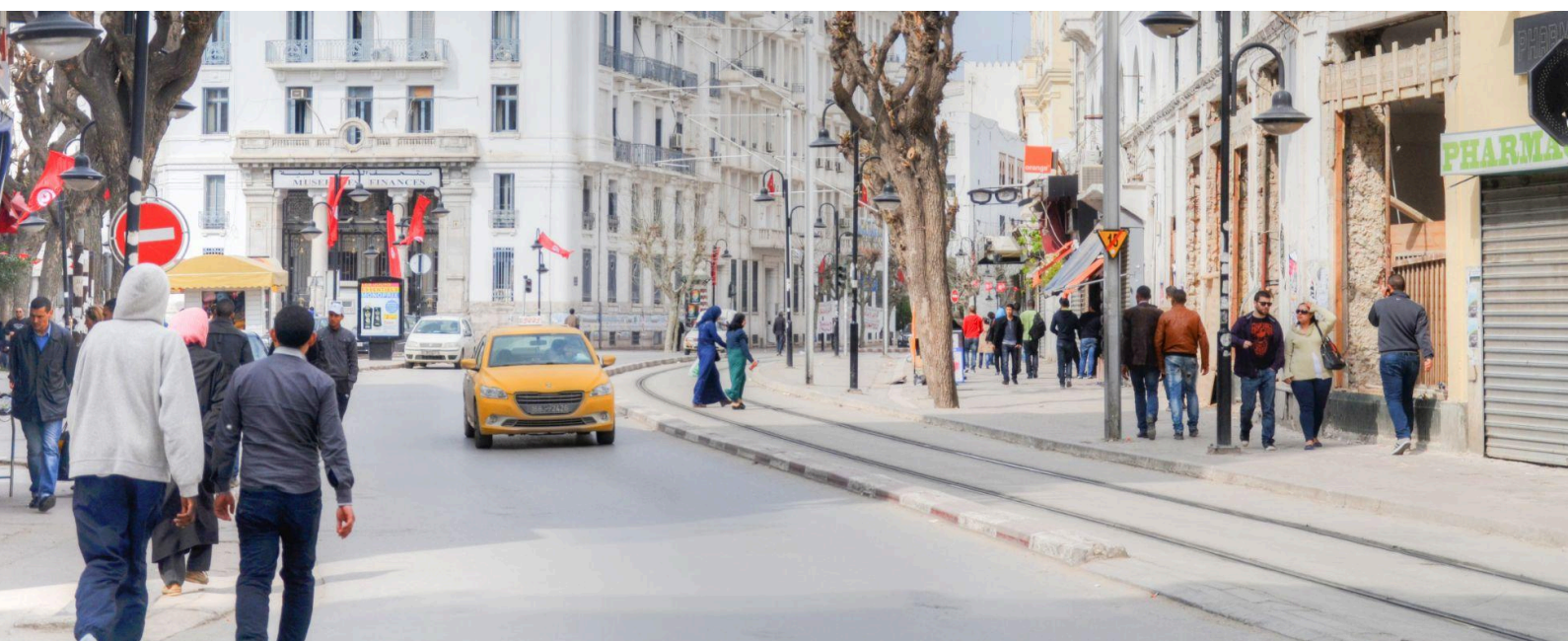
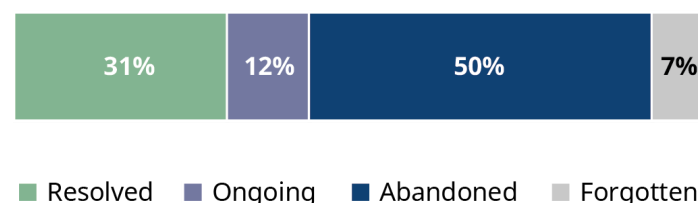
In the second report, we already showed how neither problems nor resolutions are static. Instead, the justice gap is dynamic, with problems being resolved and resurfacing again, or being abandoned altogether. In the first wave, already 32% of all problems were abandoned, meaning people did not actively try to pursue a resolution anymore. This percentage increased to 46% in the second wave, as many problems that were initially ongoing were eventually abandoned. At that time, around 20% of the problems from wave one remained ongoing.

Now, in the third wave of the study, 50% of all the legal problems reported in wave one have been abandoned. In other words, half of all the legal problems people experience do not reach any form of resolution, clearly illustrating the limits of the current system in providing adequate access to justice for all.

Around 31% of problems are resolved, while 12% remain ongoing. This last group comprises problems that people have been trying to resolve for at least two to three years.

RESOLUTION STATUS

wave one problems



When asked why they abandoned their problem, people gave various reasons. However, the most common reason is that people felt that it was too expensive to continue pursuing a resolution. This is followed by not believing that more action would be helpful, that the other party was more powerful, and not having enough time.



MAIN REASON TO ABANDON PROBLEM

wave one problems



n = 143

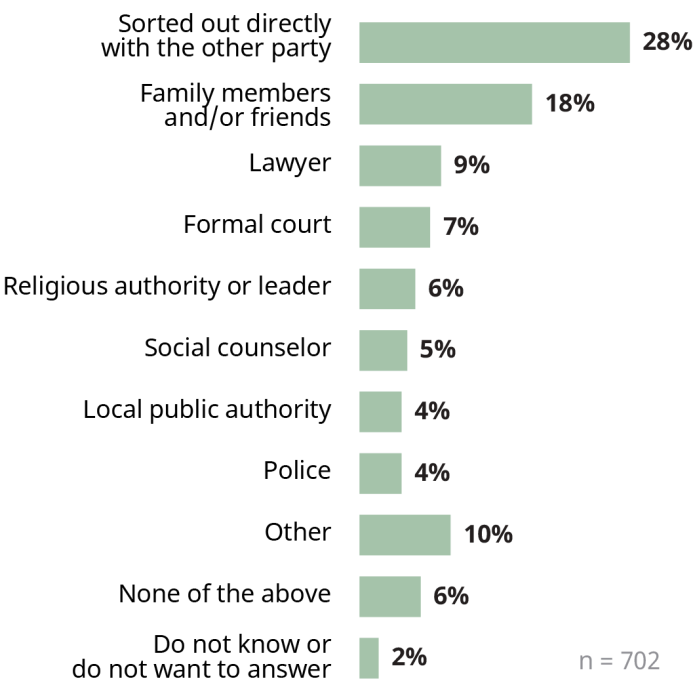
Question asked: Why did you decide to no longer take action to resolve the problem?

Problems mostly get resolved out of court

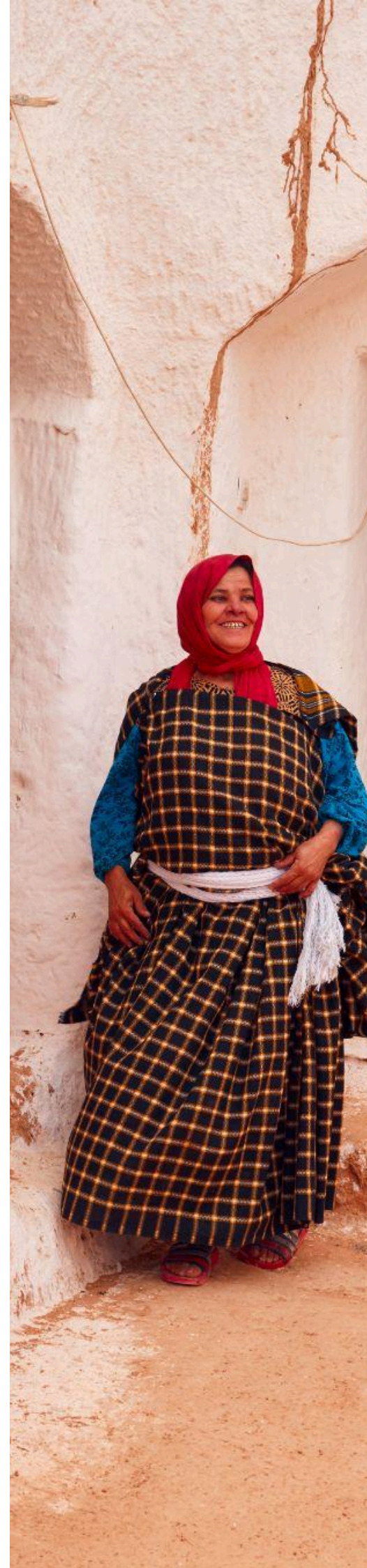
People who manage to resolve their problems do so in different ways. However, in most cases, they sorted out the issue themselves and directly with the other party. After that, it is most common to have family or friends play a key role in resolving the problem. Lawyers and formal courts typically become involved at a later stage, highlighting that only a small proportion of justice problems ultimately reach the formal system.

HOW WAS THE PROBLEM RESOLVED

all waves



Question asked: How was your problem (originally/eventually) resolved?

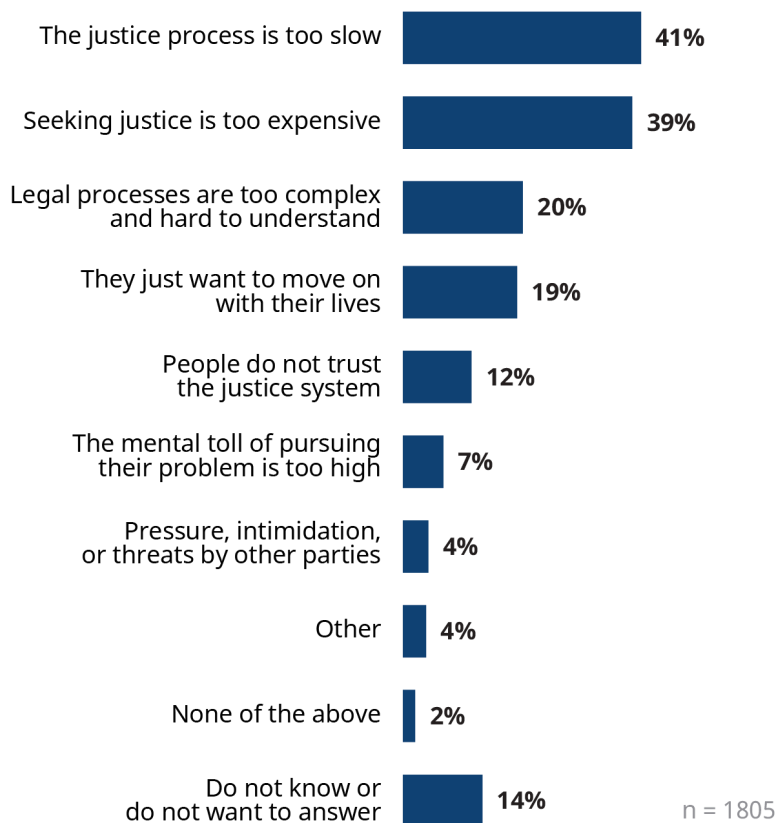


We also asked people more broadly why they believed so many people do not manage to resolve their legal problems in Tunisia. The two most common reasons people give are that the process of seeking justice is too slow and too expensive. Other reasons people give are that it is too complex or that people just want to move on with their lives.

Low levels of trust in the justice system do not seem to be a particular pressing issue. Rather, making sure justice is affordable, fast, and easy to navigate should be a priority for Tunisian policymakers.

MAIN REASONS FOR UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS

multiple answers possible



Question asked: In your opinion, what are the main reasons people do not manage to resolve their justice problems in Tunisia?

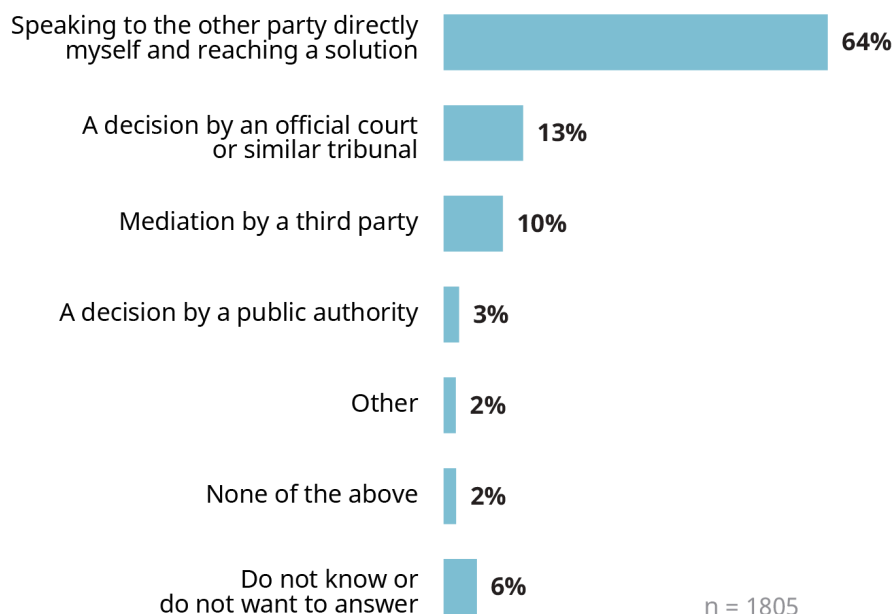


Tunisians want more options to resolve their legal problems

The current justice system faces challenges in providing accessible justice to the majority of Tunisians. A better and more innovative approach is needed. In order to understand how dispute resolution mechanisms can be designed in a truly people-centred way, we asked people how they would prefer to go about resolving their problems.

Nearly two out of three people indicate they prefer to resolve a problem directly with the other party, without any outside intervention. A minority of people prefer a decision by an official court or mediation by a third party. This is currently also how many problems are already resolved. These findings suggest that, rather than focusing solely on expanding the formal legal system (lawyers and courts), reform policies could also explore and invest in other non-traditional ways of resolving legal problems.

PREFERRED DISPUTE RESOLUTION STRATEGY



Question asked: Imagine tomorrow you experienced a legal problem, such as a dispute with your neighbours, a debt-related problem, or a disagreement with your employer. In an ideal world, how would you want such a problem to be resolved?

We also asked people what they believed was most important when seeking justice, allowing them to give multiple answers. The most common answer given is that the solution is fair, highlighting the importance of outcomes in the justice system. In line with common concerns about the current system, people also often indicated it is important that this solution is provided fast and through a process that is affordable and respectful. These answers provide some important pointers when designing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

IMPORTANT IN DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS
multiple answers possible



n = 1805

Question asked: In your opinion, which of the following are the three most important characteristics of a process for resolving a legal problem?



Technology could help close the justice gap, but people have requirements

It is clear that innovation is needed to start closing the justice gap in Tunisia. Technological solutions could play an important role in this process, making justice more accessible and affordable. To better understand we therefore asked people whether they would be willing to consider using technology or online tools to help them resolve a legal problem.

Most people indicate they would prefer more traditional methods to resolve their dispute, such as hiring a lawyer and/or going to court. It is possible that some of these people might consider using technology, even if they prefer more traditional methods. A small minority of people indicate they do not use technology at all. Finally, just over twenty percent of people say they would definitely use technology or might consider it.

WILLINGNESS TO USE TECHNOLOGY



- Yes, I would definitely use them
- Yes, I might consider using them
- No, I would prefer traditional methods (lawyer, court)
- I am not sure
- No, I don't use technology
- Do not know or do not want to answer

n = 1805

Question asked: Imagine you experienced a legal problem, such as a neighbour dispute, consumer problem, or disagreement with your employer. Would you be willing to use technology or online tools, such as websites or mobile apps, to help you resolve such a legal problem?

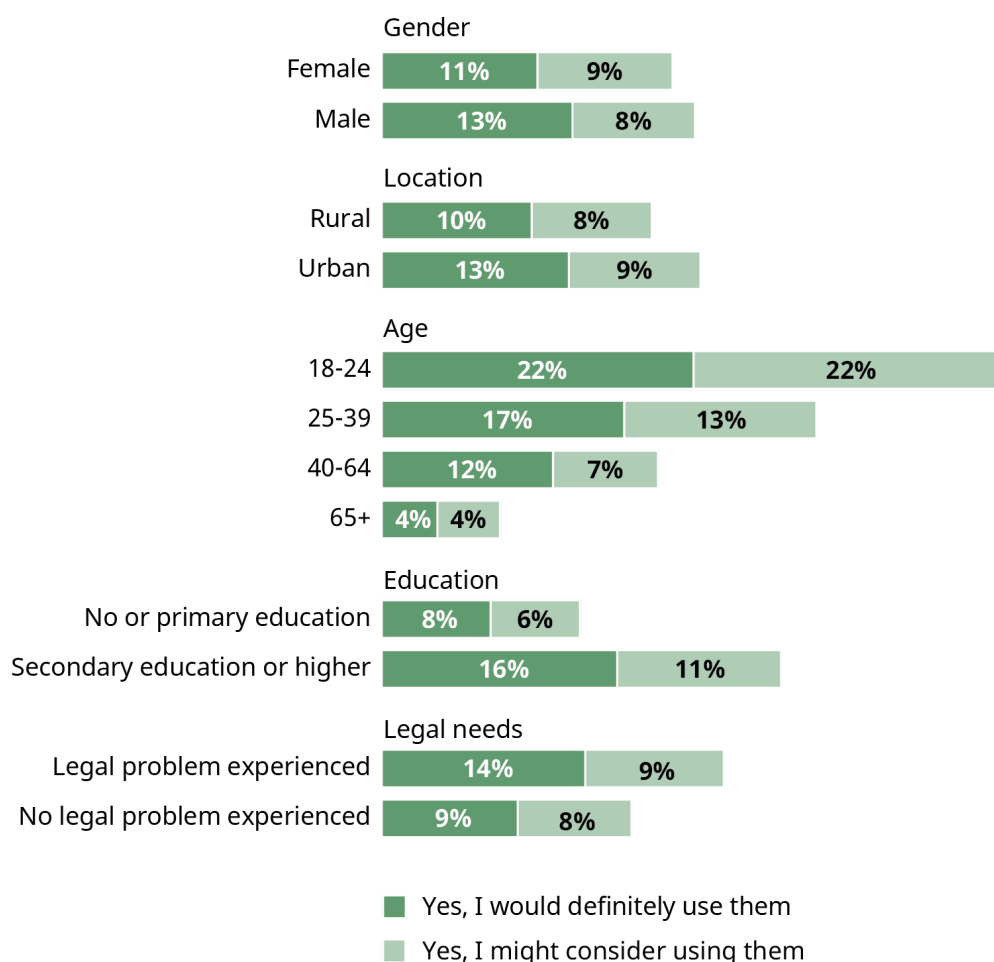


The willingness to use technology to resolve legal problems differs between demographic groups. There are no major differences between men and women or people in rural and urban areas. However, there are major differences when it comes to age and education level. Not surprisingly, young people and people with a higher education level are significantly more likely to consider using technology to resolve a legal problem.

Interestingly, people are also more likely to consider technological options when they have actually experienced a legal problem (23% versus 17%), and this difference cannot be explained by the other demographic differences. It is possible that these people are more aware of the challenges of finding resolutions through the traditional justice system and are therefore more open to considering alternative options.

WILLINGNESS TO USE TECHNOLOGY

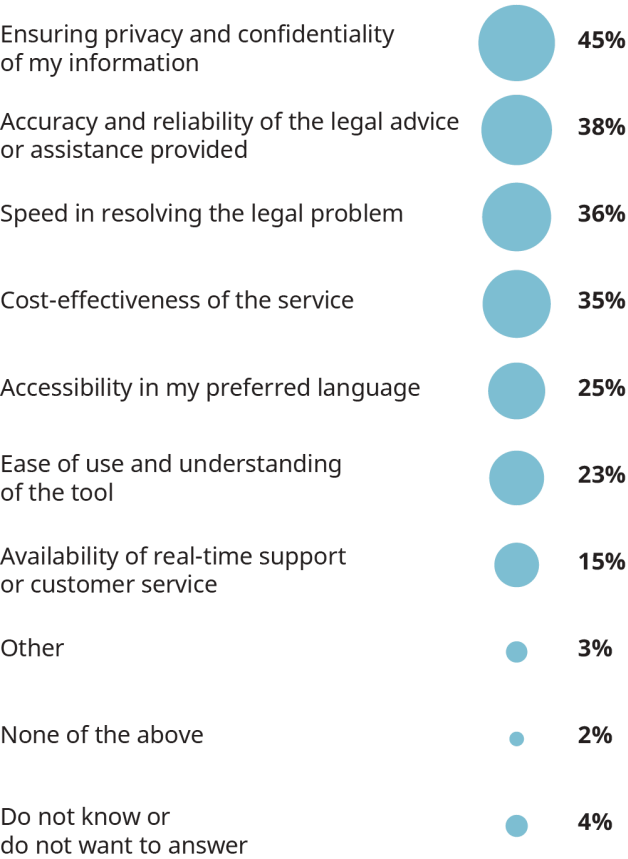
demographic differences



We asked people who are willing to use technology or online tools what would be the most important characteristics of such tools. Almost half of the respondents answered that ensuring privacy and confidentiality of their information would be a key concern, followed by the quality of the service provided. In line with the major concerns around the justice system highlighted above, speed and cost-effectiveness are other important characteristics that such tools should provide. An online dispute resolution tool could make use of these answers to ensure its intended audience is indeed willing to give it a try.



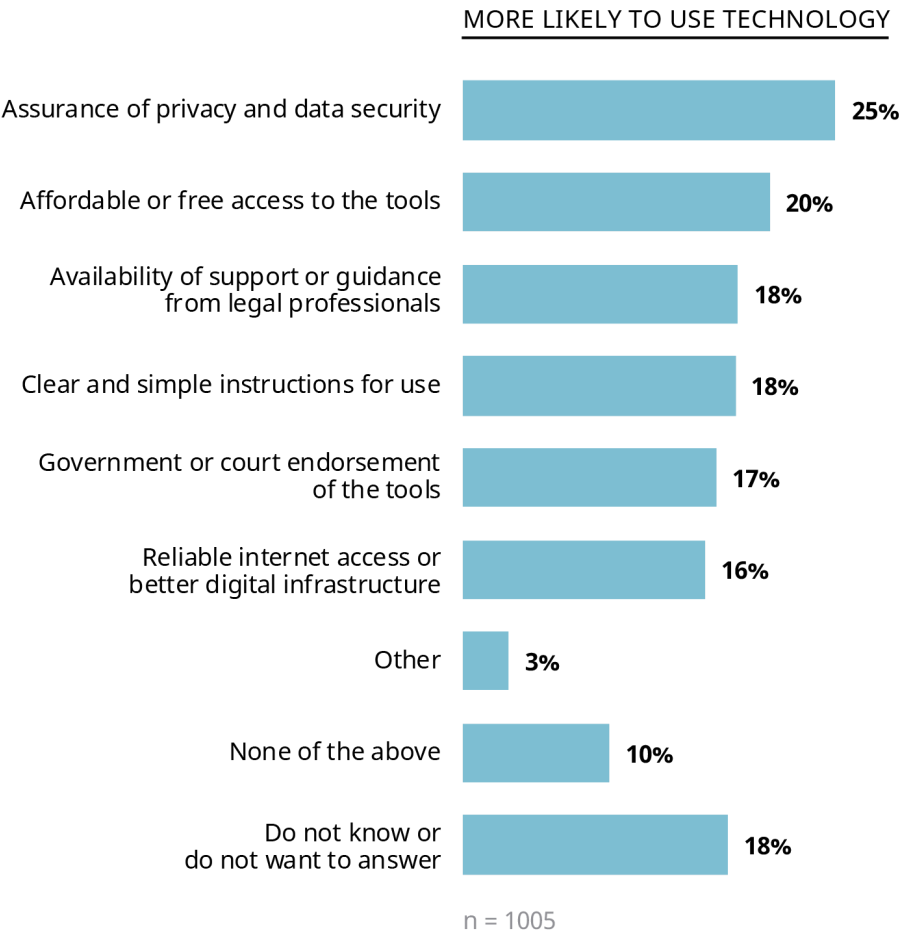
MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF LEGAL TECHNOLOGY



n = 375

Question asked: What would you consider most important when using technology or an online tool to help resolve a legal problem?

People who indicated they would prefer not to use technology or online tools to resolve a legal problem were asked what factors would make it more likely they would consider using technology. Here, privacy and data security are also the most common answers, followed by affordability. Ease of use and availability of support are also relatively common answers.



Question asked: Which of the following would make you more willing to use technology or online tools to resolve a legal problem?

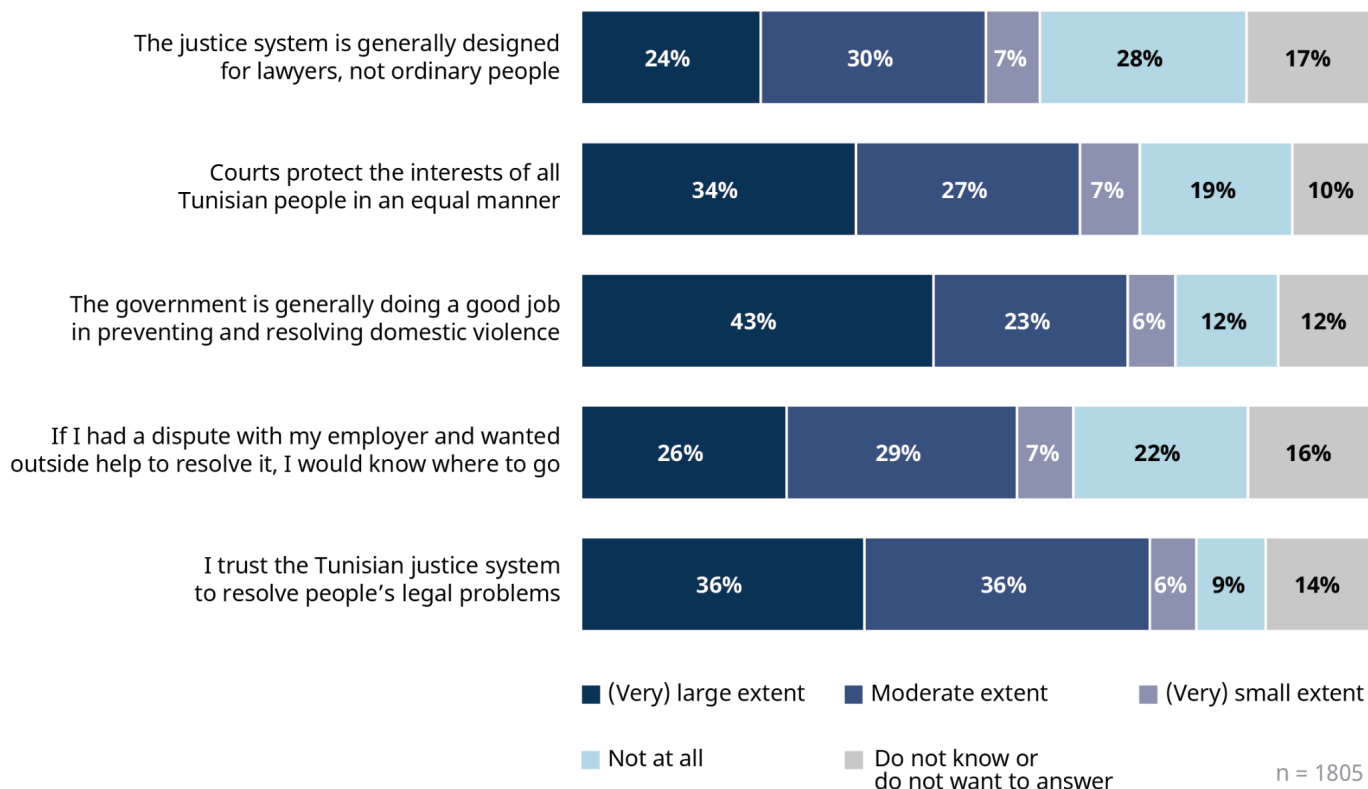


Despite using them rarely for their legal problems, Tunisians trust the formal courts

When it comes to people's perceptions of the Tunisian justice system and trust in the various actors that make up the system, the study shows a somewhat mixed picture. More than half of all Tunisians agree at least to some extent that the system is designed more for lawyers than for ordinary people. A relatively large number of people also indicate they would not know where to turn for help if they needed support in resolving a dispute with their employer.

At the same time, and with some differences between the individual questions, around two out of three people agree at least to some extent that courts protect the interests of all Tunisians in an equal manner, that the government is generally doing a good job in addressing domestic violence, and that they trust the Tunisian justice system to resolve people's legal problems.

JUSTICE SYSTEM PERCEPTIONS

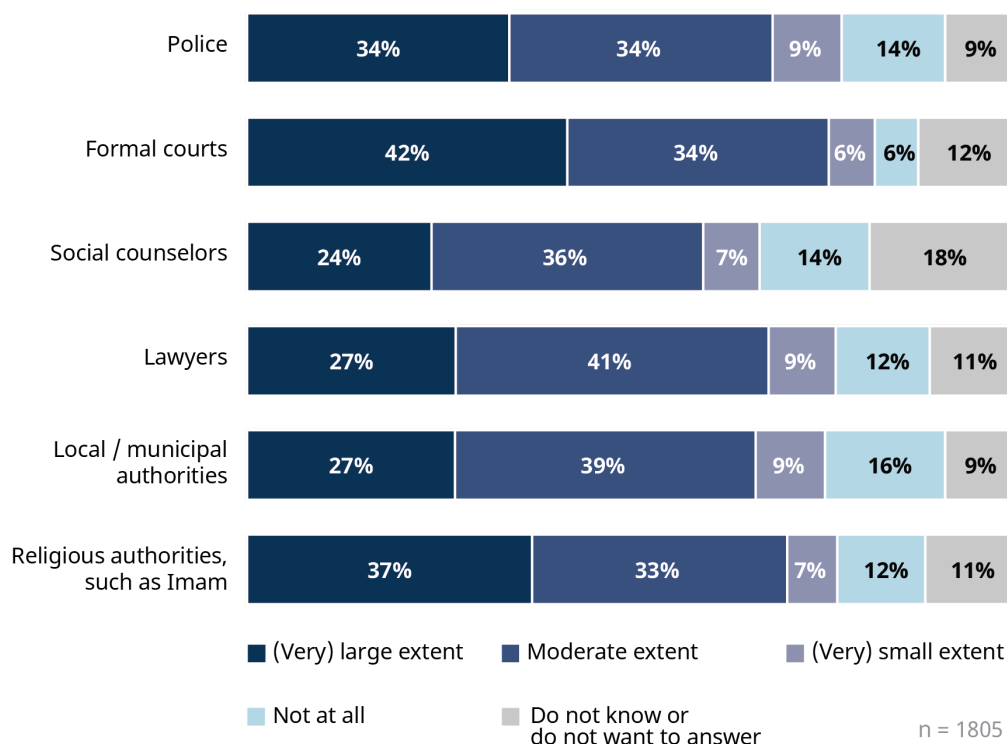


Question asked: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

When it comes to levels of trust in individual actors to help people resolve their legal problems, courts are trusted the most, followed by religious authorities, and the police. Social counselors, lawyers, and local authorities are less positively evaluated.

In the first report of the current study project, we explored how positive people were about the actors they turned to for help with their legal problems. These answers are mostly similar to the more general perceptions measured here, with a few key exceptions. People are much more positive about lawyers when they use one. In contrast, those who sought help from the police or formal courts reported less positive experiences compared to general perceptions.

TRUST IN JUSTICE ACTORS



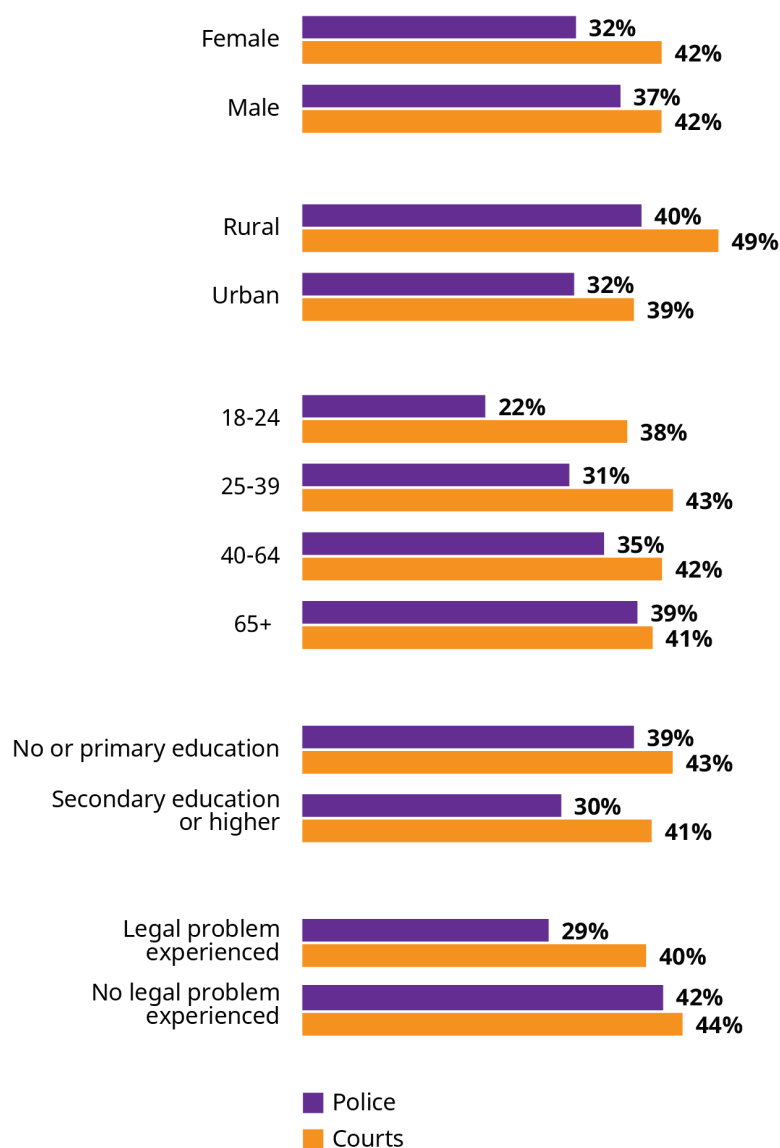
Question asked: To what extent do you trust each of the following in Tunisia to help people resolve their legal problems or haven't heard enough about them to say?



As the two most prominent institutions within the formal justice system, we looked at how demographic groups differ in their levels of trust of both actors. Differences between men and women are minimal, but people in rural areas express greater trust in both actors than people in urban areas. Related to this (since people in urban areas are more likely to be higher educated), levels of trust are higher among people with a lower education level.

Levels of trust increase as people get older, especially when it comes to the police. Young people express the lowest level of trust in the police of any demographic group. Interestingly, trust is higher among people who have not experienced any legal problem in the past three years. This difference is particularly large when it comes to the police. This suggests that people actually lose trust in some of these actors when they have tried to get their help, reflecting a difference between an abstract level of trust in institutions and specific satisfaction with direct experiences and practical outcomes.

TRUST TO (VERY) LARGE EXTENT
demographic differences



Conclusions and recommendations

This three-year longitudinal study provides a people-centred perspective on Tunisians' legal problems and justice journeys over time, through their personal experiences and perceptions. The resulting data reveals a significant justice gap, with many problems taking years to resolve and even more being completely abandoned. The study's insights provide guidance on where justice leaders should focus their efforts to address this gap, emphasising the need for a more people-centred and data-driven approach.

While there are some positive insights, the status quo needs to be improved. A transformation which places people at the centre of the justice system is required as continuing with the status quo will not be enough to meet the needs of the millions of people facing unresolved justice problems. This transformation includes gathering data on legal needs, pinpointing successful interventions, developing and scaling innovative solutions, cultivating an enabling environment for progress and ensuring accountability. These elements have been tested and implemented in various countries, including Tunisia, where Hiil has supported justice transformation and justice innovation labs, developed a best practice guideline for employment problems, and has co-designed the digital Employment Justice Platform.

This final chapter provides six key recommendations for Tunisian policymakers, justice providers, and legal innovators to ensure justice is accessible for all.

Continue collecting people-centred justice data on a regular basis

People-centred justice data, such as the insights into people's legal needs and justice journeys, is imperative for understanding the justice gap and improving the availability of high-quality justice services. This includes different data collection methods, such as one-time surveys, longitudinal studies, and in-depth examinations. One-time surveys can inform immediate policy adjustments and resource allocation, longitudinal studies can guide the development of long-term strategies and the evaluation of systemic reforms, and in-depth examinations can provide critical insights for addressing specific problem categories or demographic groups. A regular data collection model could involve a combination of approaches: periodic national surveys to capture broad trends, complemented by targeted longitudinal studies focusing on specific vulnerable groups or pressing legal issues. Establishing a sustainable mechanism for such ongoing data collection will empower Tunisian decision-makers to proactively address evolving justice needs.

Prioritise access to quality, affordable, and timely justice services

The data from this study reveal that problems in Tunisia often end up being abandoned. Improving the accessibility of justice services and making sure they provide quality, timely support for people to achieve the outcomes they need is key to decreasing the justice gap. Prioritising accessible justice services which can provide effective resolutions in a timely manner is necessary. A lack of faith in the ability to achieve positive outcomes and the perceived cost and slowness of justice services act as significant barriers to accessing justice. Therefore, improving the quality, cost, and accessibility of justice services may also improve people's willingness to turn to the justice system for help resolving their problems.

Understand and support direct negotiation as a key resolution pathway

The three year study gives us deeper insight into what people do when a problem does not resolve quickly and what they would prefer. A strong tendency exists to resolve disputes directly with the other party, without any outside help. Tunisians also express a strong preference for this kind of resolution strategy. Unfortunately, problems resolved through direct negotiation tend to resurface more often. Therefore, this may not be an ideal solution for people, even if it does achieve resolution. Given that these resolutions tend to resurface, and the frequency with which direct negotiation is being turned to, there is a need to better understand these resolution

pathways and provide structured support – enabling this pathway to address underlying issues and achieve formally recognised resolutions. This should be in addition to providing more accessible, quality services so that people have other effective options available to them.

Create an enabling environment for innovative justice providers

Three years of data on the legal problems of Tunisians shows that a majority of problems end up unresolved. The problems that do get resolved are only rarely resolved by the formal justice system. These findings illustrate a gap of available services to help address these legal problems and the need for new and innovative justice providers that can help fill this gap. Other justice providers are needed to complement the options that are currently available to the Tunisian people. By ensuring that the regulatory environment for legal services is conducive to justice innovations, the Tunisian authorities can make an important step towards narrowing the justice gap. Such innovations do not need to compete with the formal justice system, but would rather complement them, with strong potential for collaboration between private actors and the public sector.

Experiment with technological innovations, but be aware of users' needs and concerns

While there are many ways to improve and renew the delivery of justice, technological innovation is particularly promising. Online platforms, smartphone applications, and more recently artificial intelligence have been used in a range of different countries and contexts to help make justice more accessible and affordable. In Tunisia there is also a market for such innovations, especially among younger people and those with higher education levels. Innovative services should take these different preferences into account and focus especially on addressing some of the key characteristics people identify as important: ensuring privacy and confidentiality of their information, quality of the service provided, and speedy and cost-effective resolutions.

Express a national commitment to people-centred justice

The significant access to justice challenges and the widening justice gap present considerable challenges in Tunisia, however, there are many opportunities for positive change. Comprehensive system-wide changes can present their own challenges to achieve, yet they are essential to tackle the justice gap on a large scale and the societal and economic advantages would outweigh the costs. A global movement towards people-centred justice is gaining traction as more and more countries are adopting policies and services that prioritise the needs of the people. Tunisia has joined this movement in its efforts to improve access to justice in the country. It is important to maintain such commitment and continue transforming the justice system into one that is more inclusive and effective in serving the Tunisian people.



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Dedicated to people-centred justice

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