



HiiL Knowledge and Research

Innovating Employment Justice in Tunisia: A People-centred Justice Design Case Study 2025



منصة عالم الشغل

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المخصص للاطلاع على الأحكام القانونية المنظمة للعلاقات
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رأية المزيد

ف المنصة إلى تقديم استشارات مهنية مستقلة، مع ضمان حماية
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Executive Summary

Using the case study approach, we examine the development and impact of the Employment Justice Platform (EJP) in Tunisia, a web-based tool designed to improve employment justice for individuals and businesses. The EJP addresses key pain points in Tunisia's employment justice system, such as complexity, low legal awareness, power imbalances, long delays, unaffordable costs, and a lack of user-centricity.

The solution, developed through Hiil's People-centred Justice programme and the Justice Innovation Lab, provides accessible information, guides users through solutions, and facilitates mediation via the Labour Inspectorate. This approach aims to resolve disputes efficiently and reasonably outside of court, promoting settlement over litigation.

The EJP is a tangible example of people-centred justice, built on data, human-centred design, and a collaborative process involving diverse stakeholders from both public and private sectors. It fosters a shift in the justice sector's culture towards user-centricity and aims to increase trust in public institutions.

Anticipated benefits include reduced costs for users, quicker resolutions, decreased stress, and a lighter workload for courts. The platform is also designed for scalability, with the Ministry of Social Affairs and its Employment Inspectorate yet to take ownership. The success of the EJP demonstrates the potential for People-centred justice to address systemic issues and create a more accessible and effective justice system in Tunisia.

The process and results of the Employment Justice Platform represent a move towards transforming the justice system's purpose and culture to prioritise users. Delivering legal and justice services tailored to user needs and interests exemplifies People-centred justice, offering both improved access to justice in Tunisia and valuable insights to justice innovators in the country and globally.

Introduction

Despite the lower wages and longer hours compared to other jobs in the area in Hajeb Layoun, Kairouan, Mariem Trabelsi¹ (44) was grateful to have a job. For over 6 years, her demanding and tiring factory job helped her family put meals on the table. Unemployment and low pay have plagued Tunisian society for decades. In combination with other factors, the livelihood struggles of many triggered the Arab Spring in 2011. It began in Tunis and spread rapidly throughout the region.

Things changed overnight for Mariem in April 2017. Her boss told her that production was running low and the factory must “stop for a while”. After a few long days of silence and anticipation, Mariem returned to the site and heard rumours that the factory was still operational. She was not allowed to go to her workplace and was asked to sign papers instead. She was given the outstanding wages in cash and was told that the documents concerned this payment.

Mariem was wrong. Together with a couple of other female co-workers, she was dismissed immediately. It turned out that the paper she signed waives her rights to compensation in case of unilateral dismissal. She and the others in her situation were unaware of that.

What followed was a long and tormenting legal process in which Mariem never found success or satisfaction. First, she was told that she needed the services of a lawyer.

*“My family is poor; we cannot hire a lawyer.
We cannot spare that money even if we had it.”*

After realising she was cheated into signing a compensation waiver, she went to a local court. But this was a short-lived journey: “They told me at the court to hire a lawyer. You know it costs money to hire a lawyer. I gave up.” Mariem tried to meet with the employer and negotiate a mutually beneficial agreement. “Yes, I tried to talk to the employer, but he turned a deaf ear to me. He ordered the guards to ban us from entering”.

In desperation, Mariem sought alternative means to receive compensation for her dismissal. She went to the mayor of her town, although mayors typically have no authority in such situations.

¹ The names in this chapter have been changed to protect the privacy of the respondents.

It is unsurprising that justice does not work for employees in Tunisia. We also spoke to Fatma Ben Salah (53), who told us she was fired after working in a factory for 24 years. She took active steps and filed a lawsuit in court, which resulted in an award of 12,000 dinars in compensation. After 12 years, she is hopeless that she will ever get any money from the employer. Fatma wished she had achieved some sort of settlement instead of going through the lengthy and rough legal process.

A 57-year-old Sami Ben Abdallah shared his horrifying employment justice story with us. Like many others in Tunisia, when he was dismissed after working for 31 years in harsh conditions, he discovered that the employer had not paid social security. Sami filed a lawsuit against the employer, but the case has been “in the hands of the judge” for several years. In the meantime, Sami is practically disabled and jobless. He describes himself as “very poor” and “starving”.

Employment is a combustible topic in Tunisia, where, according to OECD, in 2018, 85% of the unemployed were younger than 35 years². Mass protests broke out in 2016, and demonstrators took to the streets of major cities, including the capital, Tunis, to protest against the lack of meaningful job opportunities for young people. One police officer was killed and dozens more were injured in the ensuing clashes. A police station in the southern town of Guebeli was set on fire.

In 2022, a national strike of public sector workers demanding an increase in salaries and a freeze on privatisation plans closed airports, public transport, ports, and government offices³. In 2023, public transport workers went on strike due to delays in salary payments and the non-payment of end-of-year bonuses⁴. Protests driven by workers' discontent are widespread.

The importance of employment justice is visible not only in the individual stories. In 2022, HiiL conducted a Justice Needs and Satisfaction (JNS) survey, a study of the legal challenges in daily life. It found that many people face these problems, with one Tunisian expert observing, “Everyone has a [legal] problem, personally or in the family”⁵. The JNS data confirms the standard view that justice issues are widespread and often remain unresolved.

17% of the people who reported legal issues said that they had to deal with employment-related problems. After disputes with neighbours, debt, social welfare, and benefits, employment is the fourth most frequent legal problem for Tunisian people. Disputes in the workplace have a considerable impact on people. Employment disputes are assessed as more serious than all other legal problems.

2 https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-economic-surveys-tunisia-2022_7f9459cf-en.html

3 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/16/tunisia-ugtt-stages-nationwide-strike-over-wages-and-cuts>

4 <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/transport-strike-in-tunisia-adds-to-pressure-on-president>

5 <https://www.hiil.org/research/justice-needs-and-satisfaction-in-tunisia/>

Not only are employment problems severe and impactful, but they are also challenging to resolve. Compared to other legal issues, employment disputes are very rarely resolved. Almost 90% of the employment issues are described as abandoned or still in the process of resolution.

Another JNS in Tunisia from 2017 offers additional insights about how individuals facing employment issues experienced and perceived their attempts to find justice. The study revealed that people with employment disputes were significantly more inclined to seek information: 54% did so, compared to only 22% of those with other types of problems. However, most Tunisians with legal issues primarily sought information from their personal networks, such as colleagues, friends, and family. These informal sources often lack expertise in complex areas, such as employment law. Less than 10% of those with employment problems consulted a lawyer. In 2016, 10% of individuals seeking information about employment issues turned to the internet, which was more than three times the rate for other types of problems.

Most employees facing employment disputes initially attempt to resolve the issue directly with their employer. For comparison, lawyers are three times less likely to be involved in the process. Only 9% of people with employment problems reported that a lawyer was involved in resolving the matter.

The 2017 Hiil JNS further highlights the challenges people encounter with employment justice. Compared to resolving other legal issues, navigating employment disputes is significantly harder. People reported feeling unable to explain their situation thoroughly. Additionally, they believed that even if they could share their story, their opinions would be disregarded and would not impact the outcome.

Those involved in employment disputes felt they were treated differently from others. They had fewer opportunities to correct inaccurate information during the process. As a result, employees generally perceived the process as unfair and were less satisfied with the final outcome.

Methodology

In-depth interviews, observations and desk research are the three primary methods used to conduct the case study. 12 qualitative interviews were conducted with stakeholders and experts in Tunisia. The participants were HiiL experts, public officials, and experts. All of the participants were involved in the diverse activities of designing, prototyping, validating and scaling up the Employment Justice Platform. We also observed experts during a workshop in Tunis in May 2025 and analysed the relevant project documentation.



World of Work platform working session. August 2024

Pain points of employment justice in Tunisia

Before we proceed to describe the Employment Justice Platform solution, we will further identify the key pain points in employment justice in Tunisia. Practitioners, decision-makers and experts reflect on the challenges of employment justice in Tunisia. Below is a summary of the main issues:

Complexity. People are intimidated by the prospect of dealing with employment legal issues. Employment justice is a complex, highly technical, and constantly evolving field of justice. There is a perception that there are too many rules and policies related to employment disagreements. "Employment law in Tunisia has many specificities. It's really special in regard to the legislation because we don't have only the code of employment. We also have conventions. These conventions are between the syndicates of the employers and the syndicate of the employees, and each economic sector may have a specific convention", Legal expert. Due to its complexity and low profitability, few lawyers practice it. The substantive and procedural rules are complex and technical in nature. Laypeople have little chance of understanding and dealing with them. Nevertheless, in employment disputes, parties are allowed to file lawsuits without a lawyer and to represent themselves in the proceedings. A legal expert pointed out that the intention of this piece of legislation was good, but also created challenges for self-represented litigants in employment courts, "because the regular citizen doesn't have the required legal knowledge about all aspects of their employees' rights", Legal expert

"The common theme in all those experiences is that people feel threatened, they feel they cannot understand the law, the legal documents, and they need to be supported by a professional"

– Legal designer

Low legal awareness. Employees often lack legal literacy and are unaware of their rights. Even straightforward aspects such as wages, rest, and safety measures are poorly understood. Legal texts are not always available or easy to find online. Legal documents are usually poorly written or difficult for laypeople to comprehend.

Labour law is a particularly byzantine area of law where not only workers but also experienced lawyers get lost. Very few people are aware of the existence of the Labour Inspectorate, its powers, and responsibilities. We were told that even experienced entrepreneurs who participated in the Stakeholders' Dialogues and the Justice Innovation Lab had not heard of the Labour Inspectorate, despite their frequent dealings with employment law. Legal texts and case law are not always readily available or easily accessible online. Even when available, such information is often opaque and incomprehensible to people without a legal background. Even experienced lawyers who do not specialise in employment law can get lost in its byzantine rules and procedures. People seek information, but usually receive it from sources which are not qualified.

Is it a legal problem or not? Many employees are unable to identify the legal aspects of their employment problems, which may impact their future choices and actions. Many people, feeling they are in a precarious situation, don't go to lawyers or the institutions of the justice system. Many are afraid to go to court. They remain quiet, quit their job, and hence weaken or lose their rights. There is a widespread belief that the employer is in a stronger position, has connections (e.g., knows judges and other influential stakeholders), and that the employee will lose even before the process begins. This leads people to give up before starting to resolve the problem. Abandoning the situation and seeking a new job is the usual coping strategy.

Power imbalances. There is a considerable power imbalance in the employee-employer relationship. By definition, the employee is in a weaker position.

Long delays. Employment justice procedures are agonisingly slow. The demand for legal and justice services in employment law situations considerably surpasses the supply.

Unaffordable costs. Legal services are expensive, and it's not worth it to pursue employment claims because, in the end, the anticipated benefits will outweigh the costs. It is not only the "out-of-pocket" costs. People are also concerned about the hidden "opportunity" costs, the many expenses associated with litigation, as well as the intangible costs of stress, dogma, shaming, negative emotions and suffering.

Not "seeing" the user. Employment justice procedures are not designed with the users in mind. People often feel unheard, as the processes are cumbersome, lengthy, and intimidating. Parties in employment justice procedures do not feel heard, do not believe that their positions and interests are considered in the outcomes and doubt the impartiality of judicial and administrative bodies. In the justice system, and specifically in its employment justice aspects, there is a lack of a culture of people-centricity. Public institutions are focused on themselves and do not "see" the users.



Photo: Emily Marie Wilson / Shutterstock

High levels of stress. Being a party in an employment dispute is a very stressful experience. It is about livelihood. Each step is stressful for someone without information. Waiting for long periods or being told to come back again and again adds to the stress.

Barriers to justice. Objective and subjective barriers hinder people's access to qualified sources of information, advice and dispute resolution. Many people in Tunisia simply do nothing and treat employment justice problems as "bad luck". Justice is considered expensive, inaccessible and slow. People believe that powerful employers have an advantage in justice proceedings, and it's not worth it to invest a lot of effort.

Limited legal aid. Legal aid, funded by the state or by civil society organisations, is challenging to obtain. Seeking legal aid requires presenting documents demonstrating indigency. This is particularly difficult for those involved in the informal economy. Legal assistance coverage increases, but it still falls far short of meeting the demand for legal and justice services.

The intervention:

Employment Justice Platform

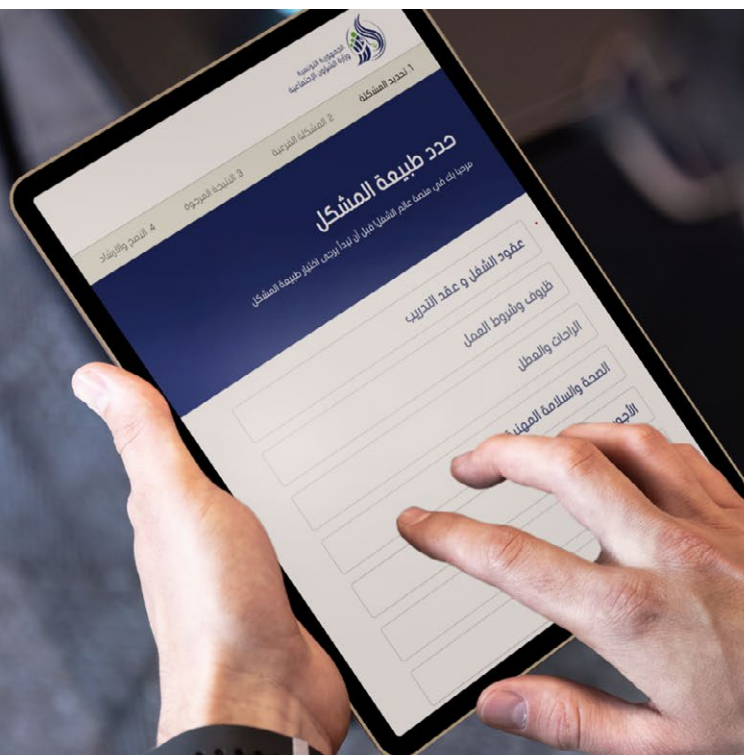
Employment justice is a palpable problem for the people, businesses and institutions of Tunisia. Many people have legal problems rooted in the employee-employer relationships, and the available paths to justice are complex and ineffective.

Employment justice is also an opportunity. Improvements in the justice system's ability to resolve disagreements could add tremendous value.

Within the framework of HiiL's People-centred Justice programme in Tunisia, we prioritised employment justice as an intervention area. The intention was audacious – to make employment justice procedures and processes work better for their users. In the words of a HiiL colleague, “People-centered justice starts with a person and ends with that person”, HiiL expert.

After a series of evidence-gathering, engagement with diverse actors, design, prototyping, and validation, the project yielded a concrete product – the Employment Justice Platform. The platform is a web-based tool intended to improve and enhance the users' experience with employment justice. The Employment Justice Platform was developed through the Justice Innovation Lab process. As of June 2025, the platform is being handed over to and integrated into the Ministry of Social Affairs' servers in Tunisia, where it will be owned and used by the ministry and the Labour Inspectorate.

In the next section, we briefly outline the tool's functionality and then discuss the people-centric nature of the approach and its results.



What does the Employment Justice Platform do?

The Employment Justice Platform is a user-focused digital tool designed to provide accessible information about employment law, guide users through potential solutions, and facilitate mediation via the Labour Inspectorate, with the ultimate goal of resolving employment disputes more efficiently and reasonably outside of the court system.

The EJP is designed primarily to assist employees and employers. First, it provides information on both the substantive and procedural aspects of employment law. Second, the platform informs the parties about their rights and duties. Thirdly, it helps resolve legal problems by referring the parties to the appropriate branch of the Labour Inspectorate. The Labour Inspectorate is a public authority within the organisational structure of the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs. It plays a crucial role in overseeing and enforcing labour laws and regulations within the country. The inspectorate is responsible for monitoring and verifying that employers comply with all legal, regulatory, and contractual provisions related to employment relations. It also conducts inquiries and monitors the application of the substantive employment rules.

Regarding access to justice and dispute resolution, the primary responsibility of the Labour Inspectorate is to assist parties in resolving labour disputes. The inspectorate can reconcile the parties in labour disputes, acting as a neutral party to facilitate communication and find amicable solutions between employers and employees.

Before going to court, employees and employers can engage the Labour Inspectorate in an effort to resolve the dispute quickly and fairly for both parties. However, not many people or businesses are aware of the Labour Inspectorate, its responsibilities, and powers. Hence, in many disputes, the opportunity to craft a mutually beneficial resolution is simply missed.

“So if an employee enters this platform, he knows what his rights are, he knows that there is a possibility of a settlement, and he may decide how to go to court. And this would be good for the employee, good for the employer and good for the courts”

– Legal expert

The Employment Justice Platform fills this gap in legal awareness by offering an intuitive, question-and-answer-based system to guide individuals and businesses through their specific situations and questions. The system provides general information on employment matters. Ultimately, users of the system can contact the relevant office of the Employment Inspectorate for further assistance.

The backend of the Employment Justice Platform furnishes the Labour Inspectorate with additional management and analytical tools.

THE DESIGN PROCESS

HiIL addressed the issue with a combination of four interventions: bottom-up Justice Needs and Satisfaction data, Stakeholder dialogues, Employment Justice Guidelines, and a Justice Innovation Lab. It was the Tunisian participants who developed the idea and turned it into a prototype. Stakeholders discussed and analysed the needs and what must be done. Participants from the public authorities, such as the Employment Inspectorate and the participating lawyers, developed the content – scenarios of problems, questions and pathways.



What makes the Employment Justice Platform a people-centred justice solution?

Partnership-based process

Many participants in the Stakeholders' dialogues, the development of evidence-based Guidelines, and the Justice Innovation Lab have noted the collaborative process that succeeded in bringing together multiple and diverse stakeholders. "The good thing about this project is that it involved everyone. It involved judges, lawyers, professors, and social workers [Employment Inspectorate, which is part of the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs], which is important because one of the specificities of employment law is that the employee can try to solve the issue with support of the Employment Inspectorate before going to court", Legal expert.

"You can't look at employment disputes from a single point of view. The point of view of the employee, the point of view of the social inspector, the point of view of the judge, the lawyer, or even the point of view of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The fact that we involved everyone made us address the issue in a better way... We had many entrepreneurs from various fields – administrative, services, tourism, etc. That helped us have a clearer and broader look at the problems and the different problems we may have in the specific sectors"

– Legal expert

"For me, it's important to find better solutions for how we do law, how we practice it with all stakeholders, lawyers, judges, administrations, and courts"

– Legal designer



World of Work platform working session. July 2024

“It was very interesting to have at the same table different stakeholders and we worked together to design a prototype of a solution”

– Legal designer

The partnership with the public actor, the Ministry of Social Affairs, evolved throughout the project. “The Ministry of Social Affairs were with us from the beginning of the process. At the beginning, they didn't know the concept of People-centred justice. But when we discussed, they were supportive. They always added their knowledge to that concept and how they see things. They were present with us in the Stakeholders dialogues, the Justice Innovation Lab and other events”, HiiL manager. Another HiiL expert added: “And then we worked with the committee of experts, where we presented everything. The committee of experts themselves helped us in learning even more about the topics, and we started working on the guidelines so that we can have the recommendations and the best practices afterwards”.

Besides the public participants, there were participants from the private sector. UX designers, legal designers, young lawyers, etc. They added a new set of perceptions, skills and abilities to the project and particularly to the Justice Innovation Lab.

Incremental realignment of the justice sector's purpose and culture

By design, the Justice Innovation Lab and the entire process addressed a key challenge of the justice sector: its conservatism and internally focused culture and purpose. Engagement of different actors was key to achieving that goal. “Everyone who came as stakeholders at the end were supporters. By the end, everyone committed to one thing that is to support the output of the lab and they understood that the labour inspection would be the potential partner for this and would be the potential beneficiary for this and they helped the idea to come to life”, HiiL manager.

“The way different actors perceive the user is very different. The private sector has a more business-oriented mindset; they're quicker, they're faster, and they respond to you, even in the smallest details. NGOs and the private sector are faster and they're more efficient in that sense. The public sector is not user-centric. They have lots of bureaucratic obstacles or other obstacles in their minds to keep them from acting on an issue rapidly. For me, I need people to act and respond rapidly to understand or report in an efficient yet prompt manner. So I think this is one of the major issues”

– HiiL manager

Introducing user-centricity

Aspects of this mentality have evolved throughout the JIL. “If you're working in the justice sector and you are not user or citizen-focused, you cannot be successful. You will just come for a certain amount of time and then you will go or you will fail in your mission”, HiiL manager.

The JIL method was praised for its clarity and consistency. “What I like about the JIL is that it has a good and clear methodology. In that sense, when we apply something that is clear, we get clear results. How it is built helps to get the results that we want, which are supposed to be there”, HiiL manager. Consistency and predictability are essential, and the JIL experience gave confidence to its participants.

Justice innovation is new for public actors. “If you implement with innovators, they will find that's not something entirely new. But with the government, it's something new. It's interesting for them”, HiiL manager. Interestingly, innovation is of interest to public actors. They are attracted to it.

The interactive approach engaged participants, fostering a sense of ownership. A HiiL colleague used the presence in JIL sessions as a practical metric to gauge the level of engagement. “They [participants in JIL session] didn't usually miss sessions”, HiiL manager.

The diversity of the participants worked well. Entrepreneurs, experts, and public officials do not often meet to discuss the design issues of employment justice. This was a new experience, but it was perceived as positive. “There is that nice atmosphere that brings added value to the activity itself because we couldn't do one activity with one perspective. We needed all the perspectives”, HiiL manager. The openness to different perspectives led to the emergence of a shared understanding of the challenges and their solutions. This facilitated the willingness and ability to work together. Part of the experience is the difference between user-centricity perspectives and practice. Private sector and civil society organisations are pretty distinct from the public sector.

“I think the way that they perceive the users is very different. The private sector has a more business-oriented mind, they're quicker, faster, and respond in detail. NGOs and the private sector are faster and they're more efficient in that sense. The public sector is not user-centric. They have lots of bureaucratic obstacles on their minds to keep them from acting on an issue rapidly”

– HiiL expert

There was a positive dynamic during the JIL, from sceptical towards engaged participants. Two things helped to convert sceptics. First, it was “the idea coming to life.” A participant reflects: “They did not believe at first. And then when they started seeing prototyping, they believed this was a real-life project that could help citizens afterwards.” Second, there was the dynamic of working with others. The dynamic made the participants more supportive and believe more in the outcome of the employment justice exercise.

Diverse perspectives were present in the JIL process. Lawyers, labour inspectors, and trade unions presented their own perspectives, as well as the views of the individuals with whom they worked.

The JIL team did a comprehensive mapping of the existing procedures and processes.

A tangible people-centred justice output

The tangibility of the product softened some of the initial scepticism of the participants. The prototype of the Employment Justice Platform can be sort of “touched and filled”. “When they started seeing the results of the prototyping [stage], they believed that this is a real-life project that will benefit the citizens afterwards”, HiiL manager. This is very important in the field of people-centered justice where many ideas compete. However, there is still not enough solid practice to back up these ideas.

Workshop on employment justice. April 2025



Benefits for the users

The impact of more and better resolutions

The anticipated impact is direct and indirect. “There will be an impact on people because in Tunisia labour cases take a lot of time to be solved. In the meantime, the employee is suffering, the employer is facing a problem, such as recruiting or finding an alternative that costs money. More resolved problems will result in a more stable society. I'm talking about the long run, a more stable society, more economic gains, and more trust in the economic sector for investors”, HiiL Manager.

Another individual-level impact is lowering the costs of justice. “When people have a problem, they go to the labour inspection, and they wait for hours to have an appointment. It costs money, especially for women with kids. This helps to find a solution and sometimes saves all the lawyers' costs”, HiiL Manager.

Furthermore, experts recognise indirect impacts from the Employment Justice Platform. “There is an indirect impact on people and their families and surroundings because when someone is having a problem, all people who are surrounding this person are affected. You see, when you solve the problem, it also has an impact, an indirect impact on others”, HiiL expert.

Information is organised as the users would expect to find and use it

The Employment Justice Platform is a tangible improvement that makes justice journeys for employees and employers easier, faster, more efficient and fairer. This is how the Platform makes employment justice in Tunisia more centred on the needs and expectations of the users.

The team worked firmly from the robust data. “For me, [justice design] should originate from an assessment of needs. So you will have to say what is needed in that country, or in that space or in that institution. What are the challenges, what are the obstacles there, the red flags, anything that is missing?”, HiiL expert. The team used both qualitative and quantitative data about justice problems related to employment. “We had a positioning paper. So we understood what the employment justice landscape is in Tunisia, which stakeholders are working on the topic, and what topics are in there? What are the key areas of priority for work on employment justice in Tunisia? And that was internally. And then we recruited a researcher to get even deeper into the topic and to get the literature review behind employment justice. So we kind of narrowed it down even more”, HiiL expert.

“Within the Justice Innovation Lab, we had workshops. In these workshops, we had case studies of real cases or imaginary cases that we had to contemplate and evaluate. We tried to have different case studies from different areas of work”

– Legal expert

During the Justice Innovation Lab, HiiL employed a human-centred design approach to develop a solution that responds to the problem.

“We designed a solution for the users. There were many qualified and skilled people in that workshop. Both from the public and private sectors. We discovered new ways of thinking about designing justice services. We thought as designers and entrepreneurs. I learned a lot from this workshop”

– Innovator, Participant in the JIL

“In my experience, if we want to create a product, a document, any human-centric design product or solution, we need to put the end-user at the centre of this whole process”

– Legal designer

Currently, information on the legal regulation of employment and associated legal issues is dispersed across various locations. It is difficult even for practising lawyers to find their way along primary and secondary legislation.

“Now we have a lot of texts that we can find everywhere. They are not all of them collected in one place. The solution of HiiL gathers the important information in one place”

– Attorney

“Even though theoretically employment law cases don't require a lawyer, in reality, without the intervention of a lawyer, the employee will surely make a mistake. He won't know the legal procedures and the respective rights that he can invoke”

– Legal expert

Delays and uncertainties around time are a major issue for everyone related to employment justice in Tunisia.

“Solving employment cases takes a lot of time to reach a judgment. Years, years, years”

– Attorney

Even when employment disputes are adjudicated by a court of law, there is a problem with the enforcement of judgments. It is not an exception that former employees, after years of legal process, find themselves with a favourable judgement, but the employer does not exist anymore.

Employees and employers will be more likely to know about the Employment Inspectorate and its functions. “This platform will make labour inspection well-known to people”, Attorney.

Different voices were heard in the Justice Innovation Lab. Involvement of experts with diverse skills and backgrounds, not only legal, helped with that. “My role in the Justice Innovation Lab was to facilitate these interactions between those different profiles to go straight to the main objective of the whole session. That was how we could bring user-friendly justice methods to the end users.” Innovator, participant in the JIL

The platform will bring together employment law and will make it more comprehensible by organising in Q&A format. “Legal texts are everywhere. The platform will collect all the labour law in one place”. A key objective is to achieve a mutually satisfying and beneficial settlement between the parties. “The platform gives the employer and the employee a chance to have a conversation and maybe have a settlement before going to court”, Legal expert.

It is 2025, and we asked the experts how the Employment Justice Platform relates to AI technologies, particularly chatbots and assistants powered by generative AI and Large Language Models. We were told that the Platform has two critical advantages. First, it is deduced by experts’ opinions and is more reliable. Second, the fact that the platform originates from a public authority adds an extra layer of credibility and trustworthiness. We were told that in Tunisia, information and advice coming from state authorities carries more weight than information from non-public sources. “The Platform will be because first it's owned by the government and people, when they see that it's owned by the government, they would use it. People in Tunisia trust the government so they will use it.” Raja, or as another expert put it, “People trust information that is from the government. But if you give me the same site made by a private company, a startup, I will tell you to check how trustworthy the provider is”, HiiL expert.

Simplified procedures

The human-centred design approach of the Justice Innovation Lab places the justice users at the centre. This is the opposite of the institution-led design, where the process evolves around the needs and interests of the institutional actors. HiiL's approach is focused on the outcome. HiiL's methodology is outcome-focused, using evidence to achieve fair and lasting solutions rather than simply addressing the issues faced by courts or public authorities. In contrast to traditional, rigid approaches to justice, we begin from the user's perspective, leveraging data and innovation to empower them.

First, we start from the legal needs data. In Tunisia, a lot of problems (not only employment-related) remain unsolved, and people do not have access to lawyers and courts. At the next step, we nuanced this information.

In Tunisia, parties in employment disputes can file lawsuits without a lawyer. This provision aims to improve access to justice by ensuring that employees can reach courts without extra expenses. In practice, the procedures are so complex that unrepresented litigants have very few chances. The complexities are everywhere - from finding the courtroom where the hearing takes place, knowing what and when to say or navigating the complex rules of evidence. Many employees go to court unrepresented.

Losing a job and income puts the employee in a vulnerable position, and many simply cannot afford the legal costs of proper advice and representation. It is challenging to be an under-advised and non-represented litigant in the Tunisian employment courts. "If you don't have a lawyer or good experts to help you, you might be lost in this labyrinth." Attorney.

"Why are there so many cases? Because there are a lot of cases to be examined by the judge, and it will take him or her a lot of time, because in some of the cases, not all documents are present, and the judge must find and review them. And sometimes also it's a question of evidence because in Tunisia, not all relations between the employer and employee are official and based on a written contract. This evidence gathering causes a lot of adjournments, which in turn lead to many and long delays."

– Attorney

Employment law is a complex area of law, and laypeople often struggle to understand it. It is not difficult for a non-professional, non-repeat player, as most employees are, to make mistakes that significantly undermine their interests and rights. "A party can easily make legal mistakes, because they don't know what the law says." Attorney.

"Our specific problem in the legal context is making the law clear and understandable for laypeople, like my grandmother. This clarity would empower her to practice and protect her rights, whether she's reading a contract or trying to understand the process of a litigation case. Ultimately, it helps her understand the law more clearly."

- Legal designer

Legal aid is an option, but it is not available to most who need legal information and advice.

Complex procedures evoke fear in many people. Fear is a powerful emotion, and many people prefer to give up the rights and entitlements that employment law gives them. Concerns about the complex "procedural labyrinth of procedures" are augmented by the stronger economic and legal position of employers. It is not difficult to see how people think like this "I will lose because I don't have the knowledge, money, relations, and everything else that this big company has. So when I go alone, I will waste my time. It will be better if I just search for another work to have income, and for the rest, I will forget. Bad luck." Attorney

The Employment Justice Platform is not a mere investment in a justice institution or a blueprint for another one. It is a practical solution that empowers both parties with information and support from a powerful third party in the employment dispute - the Employment Inspectorate. When the platform scales, it will help courts, judges and lawyers by mitigating the pressure on Tunisian courts by taking away part of the docket and ensure fair resolution outside of the court rooms.

A key aspect of the people-centricity is that the prototype will be constantly monitored for improvements. Feedback loops are part of the design. "We have 25 inspections in Tunisia. Now, they collect this type of information on paper. With the platform, information will be collected digitally. Inspectorates will request the statistics in the Content Management System", HiiL expert.

Benefits for the justice system

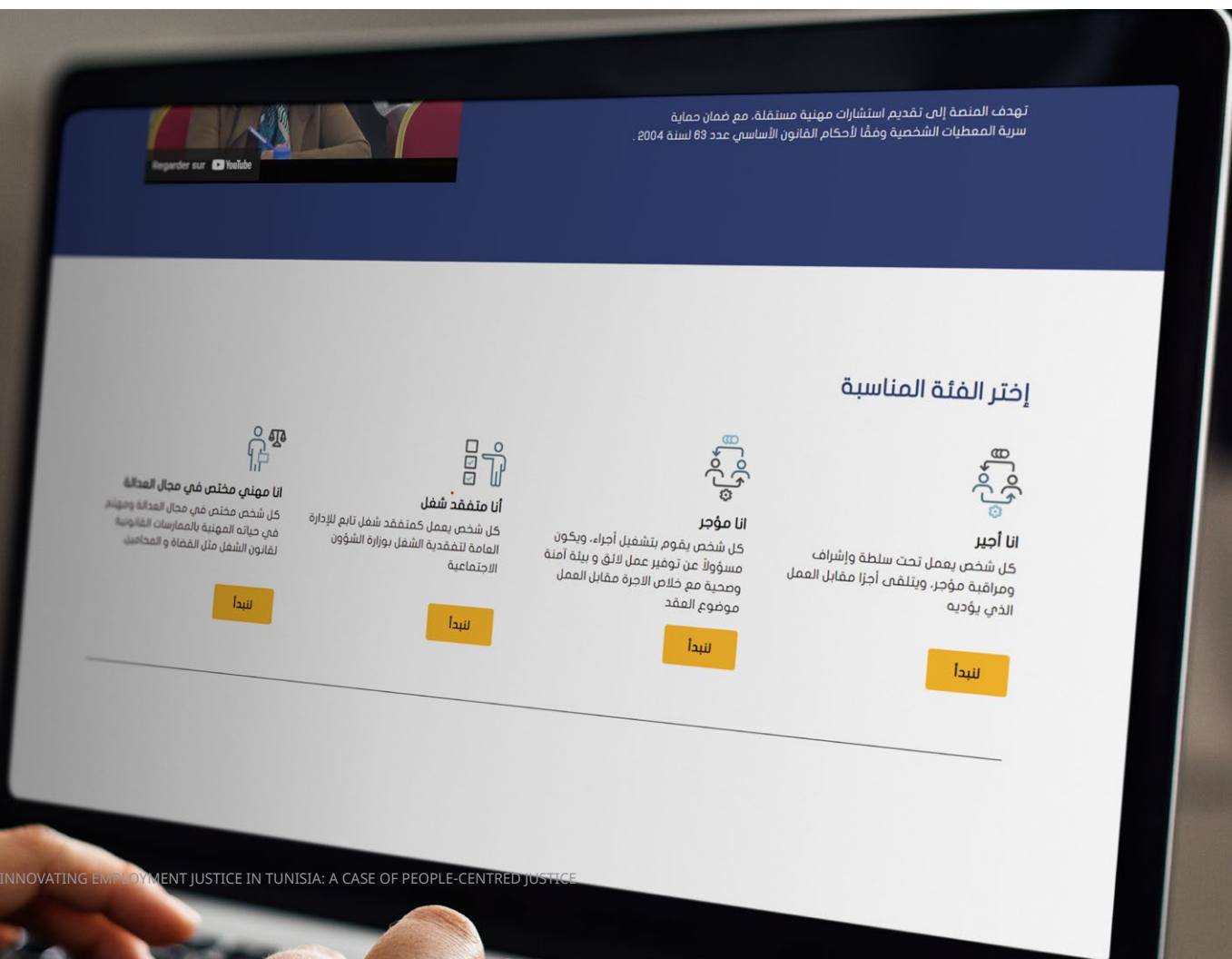
Institutional benefits

Employment disputes account for a considerable proportion of the Tunisian courts' docket. This contributes to delays, overwork and stress of magistrates and judicial staff. By resolving more disputes through mediation facilitated by the platform, fewer cases will end up in court, while receiving fair resolutions and outcomes.

A well-functioning Employment Justice System working at scale will decrease the workload of employment courts. Such development will be welcomed by judges who are pressed by the increasing docket and insufficient resources. "I don't think the judges would have a problem with such a platform. I think they would look at it from a pragmatic point of view. It will make their life easier", Legal expert.

The platform will make the work of the Labour Inspectorate easier and more efficient by providing them with more informed employees and potentially reducing the number of walk-ins for simple queries.

The platform helps the Labour Inspectorate transition from paper-based processes to using new technology and providing modernised services.



Facilitating amicable problem resolution and settlement

By design, the resolution of employment disputes in Tunisia must take place incrementally. The philosophy is that bilateral or assisted negotiation is a better solution for most employment disputes. The design goes as follows: once the Labour Inspection is notified about a specific case of dispute, it invites the employer to attend a meeting with the employee. Facilitated by the inspectors, the parties try to resolve the problem amicably before going to court. They will produce an official record of the meeting, which documents the settlement. This settlement document outlines the key details regarding the employee and the employer, and establishes deadlines for resolving the issue. If the problem is not resolved by the deadline, it will be submitted to adjudication. The Labour Inspection's role is to advise and facilitate a resolution between the two parties. If the problem is resolved at the Labour Inspectorate level, it will not go to court. In the words of our respondents, "This is a crucial role, and it can allow the employee to continue their employment, maintaining social equilibrium and social insurance", Attorney.

A negotiated settlement has many advantages over an adjudicated solution. While we won't delve into every detail, we will highlight the primary benefits. First, it's a faster and less costly way of resolving the issue. Second, the settlement takes place privately, thereby avoiding public humiliation and addressing privacy concerns. It is considerably less stressful than adversarial adjudication. Thirdly, the settlement revolves around the interests and needs of the parties, rather than focusing on positions. It could be moulded as flexibly as the situation and the parties need. Lastly, the settlement is written in clear terms and is enforceable.

Another advantage of the Employment Justice Platform is that it is tech-driven, but the technology is just assisting the parties.



Photo: RecCameraStock / Shutterstock

Increase trust and bridge the gaps between people and public institutions

In Tunisia, trust in the justice system and its institutions is low. Many problems remain without fair resolution. Employment issues are susceptible to being unresolved. Hiil's JNS from 2024 found that only 12% of all legal problems are considered as resolved or partially resolved.⁶ Many people are petrified by the prospect of taking an issue to court. Few people are aware of the role of the Labour Inspectorate.

The Employment Justice Platform seeks to bridge the gap and increase the resolution of employment disputes in Tunisia. An increase in the resolution of the employment problems will raise the satisfaction of the parties – employees and employers. When these improvements are sustainable, the effect will trickle down to broader groups of employees and employers. The Labour Inspectorate will become more known and respected. Ultimately, one of the expected impacts of the Employment Justice Platform is an increased trust in the Tunisian justice institutions, particularly those dealing with employment justice.

⁶ <https://dashboard.hiil.org/data-by-country/tunisia-justice-needs-2024/>

Potential for scaling up

Scalability is a critical feature of the Employment Justice Platform. HiiL and the participants in the Justice Innovation Lab integrated the solution into the existing policy and regulatory framework. In that way, the solution is self-enforcing. Moreover, the solution is based on a win-win-win arrangement. The parties will avoid costly, time-consuming, stressful and unpredictable litigation. The judicial system will be relieved from a massive body of high-frequency/low-value filings. The Labour Inspectorate and its principal, the Ministry of Social Affairs, benefit from a more effective execution of its role and functions.

Scalability is inherent to the solution. The same process, interface and infrastructure can be quickly scaled up across Tunisia and cover all regional offices of the Labour Inspectorate. Moreover, there is a potential to replicate the platform fully or partially in other areas of resolving legal problems through the engagement of public authorities.

“The plan is to fully integrate it within the Ministry servers, so that it becomes fully owned by the Ministry and the labour inspectors. [] The platform will become fully operational, used by Tunisian people, justice practitioners for information and labour inspectors for their internal work”, HiiL expert. HiiL trained labour inspectors from all regions of Tunisia on how to use the Employment Justice Platform. Those who were trained will further pass their knowledge to other inspectors. Hence, the skills and abilities to use the platform will reach the entire body of labour inspectors in Tunisia. “Each inspector will translate and transmit this knowledge to other colleagues”, Attorney.

“So, having the umbrella and the ownership of the ministry should be enough because they have their own communication system. So they will communicate around it. We will also, of course, but it's their own product. And usually in Tunisia, the ministry leases a product, a digital product. It's a success”

– HiiL expert

As of June 2025, the platform is being migrated to the Ministry of Social Affairs' servers. Success in the future is contingent on training labour inspectors, regular updates of the content, and sustained efforts to raise the awareness of the general public in the role and functions of the Labour Inspectorate in resolving employment disputes.

Conclusions

We started this case study with the story of Mariem, the 44-year-old woman from Kairouan who lost her job in 2017. Mariem tried to receive justice but quickly hit the wall of inaccessible institutions, complex substantive rules, aggravated by slow, ineffective and costly justice procedures. She gave up, frustrated and disillusioned that the justice system cares about people like herself.

How would it be different when the Employment Justice Platform is operational and is scaled up across Tunisia? We understand this is merely an initial step towards justice that is people-centred, yet every significant journey begins with one. Some people, like Mariem, Fatma, and Sami, will figure out that the first step is to engage the Labour Inspectorate. From the website, she would know her rights and options, and if needed, would make an appointment to see a labour inspector. The labour inspector will intervene in the dispute, engaging the employer to stage a fair, inclusive, and equal procedure in which the parties are heard, respected, and valued. In most cases, the dispute will be resolved in a mutually beneficial and fair way at that stage. In case an agreement could not be reached, the dispute will be referred to the court. The difference is that only a fraction of the disputes will go to adjudication, and the parties will be much better prepared.

Beyond its dispute resolution impact, the Employment Justice Platform is a success in showcasing people-centred justice in Tunisia. The project involved the key stakeholders and encouraged them to design a tool which seeks to deliver justice from the perspective of the users. Despite the complicated political situation, the project team skilfully managed to garner support for a people-centered design which puts the users and fair outcomes at the centre. This happened through a careful strategy based on data, collaboration, innovation and problem-solving. The social, political, economic, legal and technological aspects of the problem were carefully considered in light of the need to address the large gaps in employment justice with a solution that works and is based on a sustainable model.

Related to that, we observe a system-level change. The genuine engagement of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Labour Inspectorate demonstrates a commitment to making justice work for the users. The example has been set, and the people involved evaluate it as a success. Beyond the concrete outputs and outcomes, the project sets a pattern for people-centred justice in Tunisia. We have to be realists – the justice gaps will not be rectified overnight. The success is mainly in the fact that diverse stakeholders from various structures of the justice system agreed on the issue and that the problems need to be addressed by placing the interests of the users at the centre. Hence, the participants engaged in a meaningful process and experienced what it means to design a justice process with the user in mind. What follows next is scaling up, outcome-based measurement and using the experience and momentum to address another justice problem.

A participant aptly reflects on how initial sceptics turned into believers: “The main factor is that the participants saw an idea coming to life. They did not believe at first. They did not believe it was possible. And then when they started seeing prototyping, they believed that this was a real project that could help citizens”, Participant in Justice Innovation Lab.

The project represents a significant and promising development for cultivating a more people-centred justice system in Tunisia. We can say that the seeds of people-centred justice have been sown in the purpose and culture of the employment justice system in Tunisia. Continuing these efforts is crucial to demonstrating achievable success and tangible benefits. Realising the full potential of the Employment Justice Platform's win-win-win design is essential to foster further thinking and action towards people-centred justice.

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THE AUTHOR

Martin Gramatikov

Knowledge and Research Director



Dedicated to people-centred justice

The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law

+31 70 762 0700

info@hiil.org

www.hiil.org