



World Justice
Project

WJP  FOCUS NOTES

Data-Driven Justice Must Start with People's Needs, Not Case Counts

Data-Driven Justice Must Start with People's Needs, Not Case Counts

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Decision makers should respond to people's justice needs by shifting measurement toward justice outcomes that reflect user experience, trust, and fair resolution rather than relying primarily on institutional metrics.

Justice systems today face a practical challenge: large volumes of justice data exist, but they are often fragmented, underused, and not structured to inform decisions about how to meet people's legal needs. As a result, decision makers lack a clear picture of where services fall short and how to prioritize reforms.

Against this backdrop, the global justice gap remains staggering, with approximately 1.5 billion people currently facing justice problems they cannot resolve.¹ Traditionally, justice systems have measured success through the prism of institutional efficiency: case clearance rates, budget allocations, and docket speeds. But measuring a justice system exclusively by its court filings is like measuring a public health system solely by its hospital bed occupancy; it tells you everything about the capacity of the building and nothing about the health of the community. In the justice sector, these metrics often ignore key aspects of people's experiences of justice, as well as the "silent" majority—those who never reach the doors of a courthouse because they lack information, find the system too complex, or do not trust the actors involved.

¹ World Justice Project, 2019. *Measuring the Justice Gap: A People-Centered Assessment of Unmet Justice Needs Around the World*. Washington, DC: World Justice Project.

A Disconnect Between Institutions and Lived Experience

Current measurement models frequently focus on what institutions do rather than whether people's legal problems are actually resolved. This creates a skewed narrative where a high case clearance rate can coexist with a population that feels unheard and unfairly treated. Truly closing the justice gap requires a fundamental shift in how data is used: looking beyond statistics about court activity to whether people are able to find help, navigate the system, and resolve their legal problems fairly. This means using available data about these experiences to guide how justice services are designed, delivered, and improved.

Three practical challenges illustrate why this shift is needed:

- **Limited Ability to Target Reform:** Without indicators that reflect people's actual needs, decision makers cannot easily identify where services fail to meet them.
- **Blind Spots in Service Delivery:** When used in isolation, institutional data only captures those who access formal services, but not those who abandon their problems or seek alternative pathways to resolve them.
- **Weaker Insight into People's Experience:** How people are treated when seeking justice—whether they feel heard, respected, and treated fairly—often matters as much as the outcome of their case.

Using the Justice Journey Framework to Measure what Matters

WJP's approach measures the justice journey: the full experience of a person experiencing a legal problem, from the first moment they seek information to the final resolution. In practice, this means focusing on *outcome* indicators that matter for people:

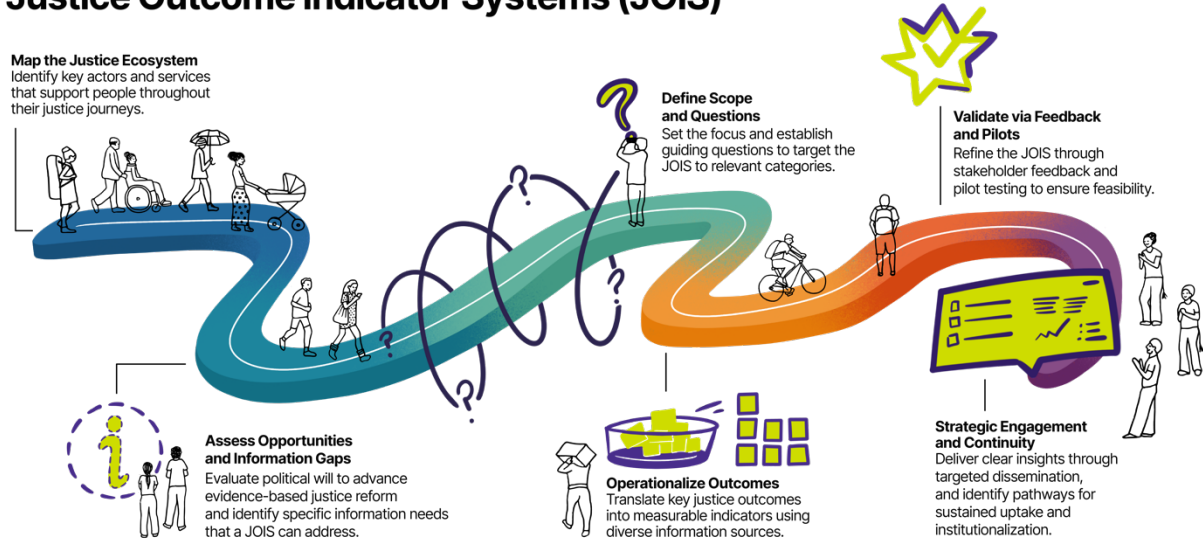
- how people understand their rights and seek help;
- whether people can access dispute resolution services;
- whether the justice actors are perceived as trustworthy;
- whether processes are experienced as fair;
- whether problems are prevented when possible, addressed early, or allowed to escalate;
- and whether problems are ultimately resolved.

In many contexts, relevant data to assess these outcomes already exists but is fragmented and underused. Strengthening measurement requires organizing and using existing data more effectively, alongside targeted efforts to fill key data gaps. Using this approach, WJP works with local partners to develop Justice Outcome Indicator Systems that help decision makers use data to understand how people experience justice in practice.

Justice Outcome Indicator Systems build on and adapt common people-centered indicators, co-developed by WJP and international partners.² These indicators are designed to be adapted to local contexts using available data sources, while supporting learning across jurisdictions.

² The co-development of standardized people-centred justice outcome indicators was carried out in collaboration with the Hague Institute for Innovation of Law, the Justice Action Coalition, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

WJP's methodology for Justice Outcome Indicator Systems (JOIS)



WJP's methodology supports this approach in practice by:

- mapping how people navigate justice problems across different actors and services;
- defining how outcome indicators can be measured using available data;
- organizing and combining existing data sources, while identifying data gaps; and
- integrating data into systems that can inform policy decisions and track progress.

The key innovation lies in helping decision makers measure what matters for people, by connecting outcome indicators to existing data sources while identifying where additional data is needed.

This approach is guided by four practical principles:

1. Start from decision makers' information needs, to ensure relevance, focus, and ownership.
2. Reflect the full justice ecosystem, recognizing the diversity of justice providers and pathways people use.
3. Use existing data efficiently, by combining available sources and identifying key gaps.
4. Ground indicators in practice, by validating them with justice actors and existing data to ensure they are usable and policy-relevant.

Leveraging Data Ecosystems for Policy Change

WJP has tested this approach in practice, working alongside justice system decision makers on the ground. In the Dominican Republic, WJP worked with the judiciary³ to organize and analyze existing data—including administrative records, legal needs surveys, and other sources—to better understand how people experience justice and where gaps remain.

Rather than creating new data systems, the exercise focused on identifying ways to use available data to build a coherent **justice data ecosystem**, which reveals patterns in how legal problems arise, how people seek help, and which groups are least likely to reach effective resolution. The goal of this “whole ecosystem” approach is to help decision makers identify priority areas for reform and to align services more closely with people’s needs. It also supports practitioners to understand how different actors contribute to outcomes, including formal, customary, or community-based providers.

By applying the Justice Outcome Indicator System approach, decision makers can:

- identify gaps in service delivery,
- prioritize reforms, and
- improve how justice systems respond to people’s needs.

We invite decision makers to connect with WJP to explore how to better use existing data to close justice gaps and strengthen trust, and to build people-centered justice data ecosystems together.

³ The collaboration received support from the United Nations Development Program, the Justice Action Coalition, and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ).