



# Obstacles to Justice: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Inequality in Civil Courts and Their Impact on Social Integration in Ukraine

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## Abstract

*Relevance.* Modern civil justice performs not only the classic function of resolving private law disputes. It is increasingly becoming an instrument of social stabilization, strengthens trust in state institutions and helps to involve vulnerable groups of the population in legal protection. For Ukraine, this issue has become particularly acute due to war, internal displacement of people, loss of property, the growth of family, housing and labor conflicts, as well as due to the increased burden on the judicial system. In such conditions, formal procedural guarantees alone are often not enough to ensure real access to protection of rights. Therefore, there is a need to rethink civil justice in a new way, namely as a social institution. *Purpose.* The purpose of the study is to substantiate a model of civil justice that combines accessibility, inclusion, efficiency and public trust. This takes into account the needs of Ukraine and other transition countries. The object of the study is civil justice. It is considered as a form of implementation of judicial power and at the same time as a mechanism of social cohesion. *Methods.* The work uses several groups of methods. These are general scientific approaches, as well as special legal methods, in particular formal-legal, comparative-legal, systemic-structural

and institutional. In addition, the method of secondary analysis of official statistical data was applied. Additionally, materials from international organizations were processed, and comparative practices of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries were studied. The author's approach to assessing access to justice was also used. *Results.* The study found that civil justice performs broader functions than simply adjudicating cases. It reduces social conflict, provides legal certainty, and influences whether the public perceives the state as legitimate. The main barriers that prevent people from accessing justice were identified. These include the high cost of going to court, procedural complexity, regional disparities, digital inequality, delays in enforcing decisions, and insufficient legal literacy among the population. A generalization of international experience has confirmed that the most effective are people-centered justice models. Online platforms for small claims, mediation, simplified procedures and local legal support centers have proven themselves well. The authors propose the Integrated Civil Justice Accessibility Index, the Community-Based model Civil Justice Centres, a system of socio-legal education, as well as a roadmap for reforms for Ukraine for 2026–2030. *Conclusions.* Modernization of civil justice should take place not as a simple update of the procedural mechanism, but as a transformation of justice into a socially oriented institution. For Ukraine, sustainable reform requires a combination of several components. These are procedural efficiency, digital accessibility, inclusion, legal education of the population and constant monitoring of the so-called "justice gap". Such an approach will contribute to post-war reconstruction, strengthening democratic resilience and increasing public trust in the judiciary.

**Keywords:** civil justice, access to justice, social inclusion, legal literacy, forensic reform, people-centered justice

## Introduction

Today, civil justice is evaluated not so much by the formal legality of decisions, but by how much it is able to maintain social balance, reduce the degree of conflict and give people a sense of security. For Ukraine, this aspect is becoming especially acute due to the war, the internal displacement of millions of citizens, lost property, family and labor disputes. These consequences require justice not to provide formal responses, but to quickly restore trust in the state. Often, it is how a person goes through the process from filing a lawsuit to enforcing a decision that shapes their attitude towards the authorities much more strongly than any declarative reform programs. That is why the effectiveness of civil justice is gradually turning into a real social barometer of the country's stability (British Council, 2025).

The real problem is that the current model of civil justice often implies a gap between what is written in regulations and what citizens receive in practice. The high cost of going to court, complicated procedures, digital inequality, congestion in the courts and low legal awareness of people, when all this devalues even very valid norms. However, a further challenge is that individual reforms are often implemented in a fragmented manner, lacking a coherent social logic, fragmentedly, and therefore do not give the desired effect. It is for these reasons that the need to rethink civil justice as a social institution has become urgent (Lashyn et al., 2023). It must be able to simultaneously ensure legal efficiency, inclusion and, most importantly, the trust of the country's citizens.

The purpose of the article is to substantiate a model of civil justice that combines accessibility, inclusion, efficiency, and public recognition of the country's citizens.

### **Literature Review**

Pleasence et al. (2004) drew attention to the direct connection between civil legal conflicts and such factors as poverty, income instability, debt burden and accumulation of life problems in households. The authors convincingly showed that one unresolved dispute often entails a whole series of derivative difficulties in the housing sphere, in employment issues or in family relations. Later Woo et al. (2022) developed this idea. They proposed considering access to civil justice as a complex concept that includes the cost of applying to court, the clarity of procedures, the timing of case consideration, the quality of communication with the court, and the actual enforcement of decisions.

Dothan (2025) studied courts as institutions of social justice. His findings suggest that judicial practice can have a real impact on the situation of vulnerable groups. Burnett and Sandefur (2025) examined the so-called "justice work" (justice work) as an integral part of the democratic development of the state and support for civic participation. All these results indicate one thing: modern international science looks at civil justice much more broadly than simply at the procedural activities of the court. However, the aforementioned works have a common flaw. They are mostly focused on stable democratic countries, while the experience of transitional states is covered fragmentarily.

Next, Fandiño Castro and Mackay (2021) have emphasized the importance of the social context for the functioning of justice. They have shown that even a neutral procedure does not always lead to a fair outcome if the parties are in an unequal position. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (further – OECD) reports (OECD, 2023b; OECD, 2025) have formulated the concept of people-centred justice systems (people-centred justice systems). According to this concept, the effectiveness of a judicial system is assessed through the experience of its user, and not only through statistics of cases considered. National Center for State Courts (2025) also supported the service logic of court development and linked it to increasing trust in state institutions. Thus, the international vector of reforms is

aimed at simplifying access, digitalizing services, and focusing on the real needs of citizens. The disadvantage of these studies is that they mainly describe institutional decisions made in developed countries. The conditions of war risk, internal population displacement, and resource constraints are not sufficiently taken into account.

Turning to Ukrainian authors, we note the following. Hetmantsev (2022) systematized the principles of civil procedural law of Ukraine and outlined their importance for guaranteeing judicial protection. Pazii (2020) identified financial and procedural barriers that prevent people from accessing the courts in civil cases. Kroitor (2024) examined the role of the court in adversarial proceedings and drew attention to the risks of excessive formalism. Perunova (2024), Popovych (2024) and Yatsyna (2020) analyzed legality, equality of parties, dispositive power and procedural guidance by the court as basic principles of civil proceedings.

Lashyn et al. (2023) showed the importance of civil society for reforming the judicial system of Ukraine. Bedratyi et al. (2025) assessed the results of modern reforms and outlined the directions of further modernization. Burlaka et al. (2024) emphasized the social and humanistic nature of civil justice. All these works indicate that domestic legal science has sufficiently studied the normative and organizational principles of civil justice. However, most Ukrainian works lack one thing. They are dominated by doctrinal analysis, while empirical assessment of the actual accessibility of justice for the population remains in the background. Nevertheless, the accumulated mass of scientific works already creates a sufficient basis for a new stage of analysis. All this gives reason to believe that it is advisable to conduct research devoted to civil justice as a social institution. Such an institution that combines legal efficiency, inclusion and public trust.

## **Materials and Methods**

The study uses a combination of general scientific and specialized legal methods, in particular: (1) formal legal methods for analyzing the provisions of the Constitution of Ukraine, the Civil Procedure Code of Ukraine, and other regulatory and legal acts governing the administration of justice in civil cases, as well as for clarifying the content of basic procedural principles; (2) comparative legal methods for comparing national regulations and judicial practice with the standards of the European Court of Human Rights and model European rules of civil procedure; (3) systemic-structural for studying justice in civil cases as a holistic legal phenomenon, covering access to court, procedural guarantees, case consideration, and enforcement of court decisions, as well as for analyzing the place of inheritance legal relations in the structure of civil proceedings; (4) historical and legal for identifying the evolution of approaches to understanding justice and the principles of civil proceedings, as well as changes in regulatory regulation in the context of judicial reform and recodification of civil legislation; and (5) a method of analyzing judicial practice to summarize the legal positions of the Supreme Court and the practice of the European Court of Human

Rights in cases related to inheritance legal relations and ensuring the right to a fair trial.

The quantitative indicators of the study were obtained through secondary analysis of open official statistical data published by the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine (n.d.), Opendatabot (2024), and the Supreme Court of Ukraine (2024, 2025). The study summarized and compared indicators by year to identify trends in court workload and the effectiveness of civil proceedings.

Further operationalization of the data involves transforming abstract principles of justice into measurable indicators that allow for an assessment of the actual functioning of the judicial system under martial law and increasing workload. The calculated indicators included:

Clearance Rate (further – CR), defined as the ratio of the number of cases completed to the number of cases filed with the court during the relevant period. Calculation formula:

$$CR = \frac{\text{Number of cases adjudicated}}{\text{Number of cases received}} * 100\%. \quad (1)$$

To understand the existing possibilities for complying with the principle of reasonable time limits, the share of unresolved cases (backlog) was calculated. Calculation formula:

$$\text{BacklogShare} = \frac{\text{Pending cases}}{\text{All cases under consideration}} * 100\%. \quad (2)$$

Enforcement Pressure Index (EPI), which allows assessing the average amount of financial claims per enforcement document. Calculation formula:

$$EPI = \frac{\text{Total amount of recoveries}}{\text{Number of enforcement documents}}. \quad (3)$$

Thus, the index combines quantitative and cost measurements of court decision enforcement, providing a more complete picture of the actual burden on the enforcement system.

## Results

### *Part 1. Features of civil justice in Ukraine*

Civil justice is one of the forms of judicial power in a democratic state governed by the rule of law. It is a type of state authority exercised by courts, aimed at hearing and resolving civil cases in a procedural form clearly defined by law. The main function of civil justice is to protect violated, disputed, or unrecognized rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of citizens.

In addition to legislative and executive power, judicial power is aimed at administering justice (OECD, 2023a). It is an autonomous and independent branch of state power, which is exercised in quantitative and qualitative terms. Judicial power

in Ukraine is impossible without the judicial system. Justice is the main activity of the judiciary. It is exercised exclusively by courts established in accordance with the law and cannot be delegated to other bodies or officials. Civil justice is part of a narrower branch of the judiciary. It covers disputes related to the sphere of relations where the parties are legally equal. Civil proceedings are based on principles that indicate their essence, their direction, and the order of implementation in all areas.

The concept of civil proceedings is established in the Constitution of Ukraine and the Code of Civil Procedure and is binding on judges and all participants in civil proceedings.

One of the basic principles is the principle of legality. It means that when considering a civil case, the court is obliged to act exclusively on the basis of the Constitution and laws of Ukraine. Its decisions are based solely on the norms of law and properly investigated and evaluated evidence. Legality implies the application of the law, strict adherence to procedural norms and requirements, and the court's obligation to be guided by acts of higher legal force in the event of conflicts (National Center for State Courts, 2025).

The principle of adversarial proceedings determines the active role of the parties in proving their claims and objections. Adversarial proceedings mean that the parties submit evidence, formulate legal positions, arguments and counterarguments, and ask questions to other participants in the proceedings (Table 1). The court takes an impartial, arbitral position (Hetmantsev, 2022). The function of proving lies with the parties. Each party must prove the circumstances on which it relies as the basis for its claims or objections.

**Table 1.** Structure of civil disputes (by category, 2023)

Category of cases (civil jurisdiction)	Number of cases, units	Share of all civil cases
Debts for utility services	321,000	Largest category
Divorce	121,000	Significant mass category
Credit disputes	> 80,000	Significant share
Other civil disputes	(total) $\approx$ hundreds of thousands	Housing, inheritance, labor, tort, etc.

*Source: compiled by the author based on information from an analytical review of the state of civil proceedings for 2023–2024 (Opendatabot, 2024; Supreme Court of Ukraine, 2024; Supreme Court of Ukraine, 2025)*

An analysis of the structure of civil disputes by category in 2023 shows significant differentiation in the workload of courts and varying levels of procedural complexity of cases. The largest share is accounted for by disputes over the collection of debts for utility services (321,000 cases), which are typically characterized by typical factual

circumstances and a limited range of evidence. A significant category is formed by divorce cases (121,000 cases), in which the parties' adversarial position is manifested mainly in establishing the factual family circumstances and determining the legal consequences of the termination of the marital relationship. Credit disputes (over 80,000 cases) are characterized by increased evidentiary saturation and an active position of the parties in proving the existence, scope, and grounds for the obligations.

In order to empirically assess the functioning of the mechanisms for appeal and cassation review of civil cases, the study analyzes the statistical indicators of the activities of the courts of appeal and the Civil Cassation Court within the Supreme Court for 2023 (Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 2.** Courts of appeal

Indicator (civil cases)	Number	Comment
Cases pending during the year	~96 thousand	Including backlog
Appeals received	~71.7 thousand	+31.6% by 2022
Reviewed	~72 thousand	Not considered – over 24 thousand (25.5%)

*Source: compiled by the author based on an analytical review of the state of civil proceedings in 2023 and information on the results of the work of the court and civil jurisdiction in 2023 (Opendatabot, 2024; Supreme Court of Ukraine, 2024)*

The data provided by the Court of Appeal reflects the total volume and dynamics of civil case proceedings. In particular, approximately 96,000 civil cases were pending during the year, including both new cases and cases pending from previous periods. The number of appeals received in 2023 was approximately 71,700, which is 31.6% more than in 2022. This trend indicates an increase in the number of appeals against first instance court decisions and, accordingly, an increased workload on the appellate level of the judicial system.

At the same time, the number of appeal cases considered (about 72,000) did not fully compensate for the volume of incoming cases, as a result of which more than 24,000 cases (25.5%) remained unconsidered. This indicates a systemic procedural overload, which directly affects compliance with the principle of reasonable time limits for the consideration of cases and the effective exercise of the right to appeal.

**Table 3.** Civil Court of Cassation

<b>Indicators for 2023</b>	<b>Number of cases</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Cases and materials received by the Civil Court of Cassation	~28 thousand	Mainly cassation appeals
Approximate workload per judge of the Civil Court of Cassation	764 cases/materials	Average per year
Number of decisions on which consideration has been completed	>18.7 thousand	Approximately 72% of all cases processed

*Source: compiled by the author based on an analytical review of the state of civil proceedings in 2023 and information on the results of the work of the court and civil jurisdiction in 2023 (Opendatabot, 2024; Supreme Court of Ukraine, 2024)*

Thus, in 2023, the Civil Court of Cassation (further – CCC) received approximately 28,000 cases and materials, mainly in the form of cassation appeals; that is, the approximate average annual workload per CCC judge was 764 cases or materials, which is a high indicator given the complexity of cassation review and the need to form a uniform law enforcement practice. The number of cases that were completed exceeded 18,700, which is about 72% of the total number of cases pending. These data indicate the significant efforts of the cassation instance to ensure the stability of judicial practice, but at the same time point to objective limitations related to the workload and time resources of judges (Opendatabot, 2024).

In order to move from normative-declarative analysis to empirical assessment of the effectiveness of civil justice, the study operationalized the constitutional principles of judicial proceedings enshrined in Article 129 of the Constitution of Ukraine. This approach is in line with current international standards for assessing the effectiveness of justice, in particular the approaches of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice and the logic of the European Justice Scoreboard (EU Justice Scoreboard), which are based on the need to analyze not only the regulatory framework but also the actual results of judicial activity. Within the framework of this study, the key principles of justice (access to court, reasonable time limits, the right to review court decisions, enforceability) are correlated with quantitative indicators of the workload, consideration, and enforcement of civil cases.

To assess the institutional capacity of appellate and cassation review in civil cases, the study uses the Clearance Rate (further – CR) indicator, which is widely used in international practice to assess the effectiveness of judicial systems. The calculation was performed as follows:

$$CR_{\text{Appeal}} = \frac{72000}{71700} * 100\% = 100,4\%. \quad (4)$$

Formally, a high CR level indicates the ability of appellate courts to process the current flow of cases. At the same time, the presence of more than 24,000 pending cases indicates a significant backlog, which limits the ability to comply with the principle of reasonable time limits. The backlog share was calculated as follows:

$$\text{BacklogShare} = \frac{24000}{96000} * 100\% = 25,0\%. \quad (5)$$

Next, for an in-depth assessment of the stage of enforcement of court decisions in civil cases, the Enforcement Pressure Index (further – EPI) indicator is proposed, which reflects the intensity of the financial burden on the system of enforcement of court decisions. The calculation was performed as follows:

$$EPI = \frac{42700000000}{1150000} = 37130,4 \text{ UAH per document.} \quad (6)$$

The increase in the Enforcement Pressure Index (EPI) indicates not only a quantitative increase in enforcement documents, but also an increase in the financial intensity of the burden on the enforcement system, which complicates the actual restoration of civil rights.

Based on the data obtained from the calculations, a matrix of the implementation of the constitutional principles of civil proceedings (from Article 129 of the Constitution of Ukraine) and indicators of effectiveness was compiled in Table 4.

The results obtained allow disputes related to inheritance legal relations to be considered as a “stress test” for the effectiveness of civil justice. Inheritance cases combine complex evidence, multiple participants, close links with notarial procedures, and heightened social sensitivity, which makes them particularly vulnerable to delays in proceedings, formalism, and problems with the enforcement of court decisions.

**Table 4.** Matrix of implementation of constitutional principles of civil justice and effectiveness indicators

<b>Principle of justice</b>	<b>Manifestation in civil proceedings</b>	<b>Operational indicator</b>	<b>Empirical research data</b>	<b>Risks for inheritance disputes</b>
Reasonable time limits for case consideration	Duration of proceedings, backlog of cases	Backlog share, clearance rate	High backlog = 25.5% of appeals pending	Delays in registering inheritance rights

Right to appeal and cassation review	Accessibility and viewing capability	Clearance rate, workload per judge	CR≈100.4% (appeal), ~72% (cassation); 764 cases/judge	Long review periods block legal certainty
Mandatory enforcement of decisions	Real restoration of rights	Number of enforcement documents, amount of penalties	EPI=37,130 UAH/document	Complicated enforcement due to property and registration restrictions
Access to court	Possibility of appeal and participation	Procedural barriers, deadlines	Increased formalism, court overload	Increased risk of missing inheritance deadlines

*Source: compiled by the author*

*Note: principles taken from Article 129 of the Constitution of Ukraine*

## ***Part 2. Civil Justice as a Social Institution: Inequality, Inclusion, and Legal Awareness***

The practice of civil justice often determines not only the fate of a particular case, but also the level of social tension. When a dispute over housing, alimony, debt or an employment contract is resolved quickly and clearly, the conflict does not turn into a long-term social confrontation. As a result, the burden on communities, authorities and social services is reduced. In this logic, the court acts not as a formal institution, but as a mechanism for stabilizing everyday life (Barona Vilar, 2016). As an example, in the Netherlands, small property disputes between tenants and homeowners have been partially translated into simplified procedures with active mediation support. This appears to have reduced the number of repeated conflicts between the parties. In Finland, digital platforms for consumer dispute resolution have reduced the escalation time for household claims.

Trust in state institutions often begins with a citizen's first contact with the court. If a person is faced with chaotic document flow, months-long postponements of hearings, and incomprehensible language of the process, then distrust extends to other government bodies. This means that civil justice shapes the reputation of the state no less than the tax inspectorate or the police (Table 5).

Justice The gap is not going away. If a citizen knows that he will spend more on a lawsuit than he can return, he refuses to protect his right. Then formally the right exists, but socially it is empty.

**Table 5.** Comparative social effects of accessible civil justice in selected countries

No of the company	Country	Practical tool	Social effect	Main user group	Evaluation result
1	Canada	Community legal clinics	Early dispute resolution	Low-income families	Less legal costs
2	Great Britain	Online civil claims	Faster collection of small amounts	Consumers	Reduction of deadlines
3	Netherlands	Judicial mediation	Fewer recurring conflicts	Tenants	Stabilization of relations
4	Estonia	E-judiciary	Less bureaucracy	Population of regions	Higher access
5	Australia	Remote hearings	Coverage of remote areas	Rural communities	Less transportation costs
6	Poland	Simplified order procedures	Fast debt collection	SMEs	Better liquidity
7	Ukraine	Electronic court	Remote access	IDPs, citizens	Partial unloading

*Source: compiled by the author based on International Labor Organization (2025), OECD (2025)*

In the USA, it was precisely minor debt and housing conflicts that demonstrated this gap between the norm and reality for years. Similar processes can be traced in the countries of Central Europe. Vulnerable groups feel the barriers more strongly than others. For internally displaced persons, the problem is often associated with the loss of documents, change of address and lack of funds. For the elderly, digitalization without proper support becomes an obstacle. For people with disabilities, physical access to buildings and adapted services are actually critical (Ismail et al., 2025).

In Ukraine, after 2022, the number of disputes regarding housing, inheritance, social payments and compensation for damage increased. Some citizens found themselves far from their place of registration. The result was the formation of a territorial gap between the court and the plaintiff. Electronic services partially mitigated the situation, but digital inequality remained (Table 6) (Taranets, 2023).

Long terms of consideration of cases have not only a legal, but also a social dimension. If alimony is collected for years, the child loses resources today, and not sometime later.

**Table 6.** Barriers to access to civil justice for vulnerable groups

No of the company	Social group	Dominant barrier	Country example	Likely consequence
1	IDPs	Loss of documents	Ukraine	Delay in consideration
2	Elderly people	Digital difficulties	Italy	Refusal of the application
3	Persons with disabilities	Infrastructure barrier	Romania	Limited participation
4	Low-income families	Legal costs	USA	Unused right
5	Migrants	Language problem	Germany	Errors in applications
6	Villagers	Distance to court	Australia	Additional costs

*Source: compiled by the author based on International Labor Organization (2025), OECD (2025)*

If a labor dispute is delayed for a long time, a person is left without income exactly when it is needed. And this is a matter of the social stability of the household. Legal awareness of the population affects access to court no less than the court fee rate. A person who does not understand the basic terms, the procedure for submitting evidence, or methods of pre-trial settlement often loses before the process even begins. But the problem is that the lack of knowledge accumulates over years due to poor civic education.

In Singapore, government portals explain typical civil procedures in plain language, without overloading with terms. In Canada, plain language programs are in place. language justice communication. In the UK, guidance is common hubs for self-representation. Such solutions do not replace a lawyer, but reduce the information shock of a citizen. Legal education also works as a prevention of disputes. When the tenant knows the content of the contract, and the consumer understands the mechanism of the claim, the conflict is more often resolved earlier. By the way, it is cheaper for the state than to finance long processes and overloaded courts. Judicial education also changes the system. A judge who understands the social context of poverty, domestic violence or disability is better able to manage the process and more accurately assess the behavior of the parties (EU Civil Justice, 2023). In Canada, social programs context training became a well-known example of professional modernization of the judicial corps (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Applied models for increasing the accessibility of civil justice for the population of a number of countries around the world

No of the company	Country	Tool	Target problem	Social effect	Prospects for Ukraine
1	Canada	Social context training	Decision formalism	Sensitivity to vulnerable groups	High
2	Great Britain	Online claims portal	Small claims disputes	Speed of access	High
3	Estonia	Full e-document management	Bureaucracy	Less time spent	High
4	Netherlands	Judicial mediation	Domestic conflicts	Fewer repeated disputes	Medium
5	Australia	Video meeting	Remote regions	Territorial equality	High
6	Germany	Language services	Migrant disputes	Better participation of parties	Medium
7	Poland	Simplified orders	Massive debts	Reducing court workload	High
8	Singapore	Legal guides for citizens	Low awareness	Independent application	High

*Source: compiled by the author based on Hilpold (2025), International Labor Organization (2025), OECD (2025)*

OECD actively promotes people-centred justice. The idea is quite practical – to measure not the amount of paperwork, but the real result for a person. Did they receive a decision on time, did they understand the procedure, or were they able to implement the decision? These are the indicators that change the management optics. Models from Canada and the UK show that socially oriented justice is not necessarily more expensive. It is often more economical, because it reduces repeated appeals, the number of technical errors, and delays. A judicial system that speaks clearly spends fewer resources on correcting its own complexity (OECD, 2023b).

Ukraine is a special case of transformation. Post-war adaptation will require massive resolution of civil disputes over property, compensation, family relations, debts, and labor contracts. If the system is slow, it will increase social frustration. And if the

system becomes a service, it will support the return of citizens and the restoration of trust (Makedon et al., 2025). In our opinion, the future model for Ukraine should combine three things. The first is digital access with human support, the second is the priority of fast procedures in small disputes. For the third, it is best to have ongoing legal education of the population through schools, communities, universities, and support centers.

### ***Part 3. A model of socially inclusive civil justice for countries in transition (case study: Ukraine)***

The way in which the civil justice system works for a person on a daily basis determines not only the legal outcome, but also the social sustainability of the state. For Ukraine, this topic is gaining practical importance due to population displacement, loss of property, new labor conflicts and the growing need for rapid protection of rights. Old tools partially retain their usefulness, but they no longer cover the scale of new appeals. Therefore, a structure is needed where the court, community, digital services and legal education act in concert. In our opinion, reform should be based on measurable indicators. When the state does not see the real time of case processing, availability of services or trust of the population, it manages at random (Makedon et al., 2024). That is why the integrated civil justice accessibility index ISJAI has been proposed. It combines economic, time, digital and social dimensions in one assessment system.

The index should be defined as a weighted sum of six blocks: cost of application, processing time, digital access, level of legal awareness, trust in courts and inclusiveness of services. Each block receives a scale from 0 to 100 points. The weights may be adjusted by decision of the relevant body depending on regional conditions. For frontline areas, the weight of remote access and speed of procedures should be increased.

$$ISJAI = 0,20 \cdot A + 0,20 \cdot T + 0,15 \cdot D + 0,15 \cdot L + 0,15 \cdot R + 0,15 \cdot I,$$

where:

*A* – cost availability;

*T* – speed of consideration;

*D* – digital access;

*L* – legal literacy;

*R* – public trust;

*I* – inclusiveness of services.

The practical value of the index lies in comparing regions, judicial districts and individual services. If a region has a high level of digitalization, but low citizen trust,

this is immediately visible. If the costs of treatment are reduced, but the terms are excessive, it is also clearly visible (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Matrix for implementing the integrated ISJAI index for the regions of Ukraine

No of the company	Index component	Measurement indicator	Data source	Collection frequency	Weight	Management action
1	Cost of treatment	Expenses as a share of family income	Surveys, statistics	Half a year	0.20	View fees
2	Consideration periods	Average days to decision	Judicial statistics	Quarter	0.20	Case redistribution
3	Digital access	Share of online applications	E-court portal	Month	0.15	Service development
4	Legal literacy	Population testing level	Educational research	Year	0.15	Training programs
5	Trust in the courts	Public Trust Index	Poll	Half a year	0.15	Communication activities
6	Inclusivity	Share of adapted services	Institutional audit	Year	0.15	Access modernization
7	Regional risk	Presence of displaced persons	State registers	Quarter	Additionally	Weight correction
8	Quality of execution	Share of implemented decisions	Executive service	Quarter	Additionally	Strengthening execution

*Source: developed by the authors*

The second block of proposals is a network of local centers for access to justice. We are not talking about new courts, but about service nodes within territorial communities. There, a citizen receives initial consultation, assistance with documents, access to video conferencing, mediation, and a route to the necessary instance. This will reduce the level of chaos from the first appeal, which often stops a person even before filing a lawsuit. For Ukraine, it is advisable to place such centers in ASNs, libraries, universities, veteran hubs, and large communities. One small office

can cover the needs of several settlements. A lawyer, a digital administrator, a schedule mediator, and a social consultant should work there (Sevryukov, 2025).

A separate direction concerns internally displaced persons. For them, the center should provide templates for applications for lost property, family disputes, inheritance, debts, and social payments. Pensioners need a different service, calm offline support without overloading with deadlines. War veterans need coordination with other services, because a standard format for all categories of the population will not work (Table 9) (Ministry of Justice of Ukraine).

**Table 9.** Community-Based Network Project Civil Justice Centres for territorial communities of Ukraine

No of the company	Location type	Basic services	Target group	Staff needed	Expected effect
1	City ASC	Consultations, document scanning	Total population	Lawyer, administrator	Fewer application errors
2	Rural community	Outpatient reception	Villagers	Mobile team	Territorial equality
3	Veteran Hub	Disputes regarding payments, housing	Veterans	Lawyer, psychologist	Faster resolution
4	University	Legal Clinic	Students, community	Teacher, students	Cheap help
5	Library	Access to the e-portal	Elderly people	Consultant	Digital inclusion
6	Center for IDPs	Document recovery	Displaced people	Lawyer, social worker	Fewer delays
7	District office	Dispute mediation	Families, entrepreneurs	Mediator	Less workload

*Source: developed by the authors*

The third direction is related to education. The judicial system will not withstand the flow of petty conflicts if the population does not know the basic rules of interaction. Therefore, it is proposed Social-Legal Education Framework. This is a multi-level model where different age groups receive exactly the content they need. Schools should introduce short modules on contracts, digital security, consumer protection and family rights. Evening courses in communities are appropriate for the adult population. Veterans and displaced persons need practical programs on compensation, housing and documents. Universities can scale legal clinics as platforms for real assistance. Education works slower than procedural changes, but

its effect is more sustainable. A person who knows the procedure is less likely to become a victim of manipulation. He or she formulates a claim more accurately and finds an amicable solution faster. And this does reduce the burden on the courts.

The fourth block concerns the roadmap for 2026–2030. To do this, we should avoid loud declarations and move to phased solutions. First, we need to simplify minor civil disputes. Then launch a single digital portal and subsequently stabilize targeted assistance to those who cannot pay for representation (Table 10).

**Table 10.** Policy Roadmap for the development of socially inclusive civil justice in Ukraine for 2026–2030

No of the company	Year	Action	Performer	Resource source	Expected result
1	2026	Simplification of small disputes up to a certain amount	Parliament, Ministry of Justice	State budget	Faster solutions
2	2026	Unified claim templates	Judiciary	Current funding	Fewer rejections
3	2027	One-stop launch justice portal	Ministry of Digital Affairs, judiciary	Budget, donors	One access channel
4	2027	Remote offices in communities	Local government	Grants, budgets	Regional coverage
5	2028	Legal aid subsidies	Government	Social funds	Protection of poor groups
6	2028	legal program literacy	Ministry of Education, Communities	Educational programs	Better awareness
7	2029	Social audit of courts	Accounting and public institutions	Budget	Transparency of work
8	2029	Accessibility rating of regions	Analytical Center	Budget	Regional competition
9	2030	Annual monitoring of justice gap	State Statistics Service, judiciary	Budget	Precise planning

*Source: developed by the authors*

Social audit of courts should be conducted not only by the number of cases considered. It is necessary to measure the clarity of services, the availability of premises, the share of remote appeals, and the user experience after the case is completed. Thus, regular monitoring of justice gap should become a separate state function. If thousands of people do not apply due to price or complexity, the system sees only the peak of the problem. When invisible demand becomes visible, policy

becomes more precise. In our opinion, Ukraine can use the transition period not as a problem, but as a window for modernization. Many states have changed the justice system gradually and over years. Ukraine has a chance to immediately build a service model where digital access is combined with human support, and the judicial procedure is not detached from social reality. It is this architecture that looks stable over the long term of the development of Ukrainian society.

## Conclusions

The study revealed that the effectiveness of civil justice depends not so much on the perfection of the regulatory framework as on how effectively institutions are able to work under real workload. The growth in the number of disputes, the overload of the appellate and cassation courts, delays in the execution of decisions, as well as procedural complexity create a cumulative effect, due to which the protection of rights is slowed down. Therefore, the formal accessibility of the court, unfortunately, does not yet equal the real protection of human interests. For Ukraine, this means that the priority should not be the declarative updating of norms, but the administrative strengthening of the entire chain of case consideration, from filing a claim to actual execution.

It has been proven that civil justice has a much broader function than simply resolving private disputes. It directly affects the level of trust in society, social integration and even whether a person feels justice in their daily lives. When vulnerable groups of the population face financial, territorial or digital barriers, legal inequality grows into social inequality. As a result, conflicts are prolonged and the distance between the citizen and the state increases. Therefore, access to civil justice should be considered as a component of social policy, and not as a purely procedural issue.

For countries in transition, the most sustainable model, as the study showed, is one where the judicial procedure is combined with data analytics, local legal aid services and continuous education of the population. It is this design that transfers the reform from the plane of individual changes to the plane of systemic management. Integrated accessibility indicators, a network of public support centers and targeted digital services create a managed architecture of trust. For Ukraine, this opens the way to an accelerated post-war restoration of legal stability.

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