

Riga Roundtable, 21-23 September 2022

Concept Note

Justice systems and trust in democratic institutions

While the world is emerging unevenly from the COVID-19 pandemic, countries are confronting with new and emerging crises, including the rising cost of living, shortages in energy and food supply as well as supply chain vulnerabilities, also exacerbated by the growing geopolitical polarization, changing international context and strengthening concerns over climate change. These challenges risk further increasing inequalities, exacerbating polarization and divides among people and reinforcing feelings of injustice and discontent. This puts pressure on governments to enhance their efforts to reinforce the social contract and strengthen democracy and the rule of law, which have already been experiencing significant declines.

The importance of building trust and countering mistrust between people and the institutions that serve them, including across legal and justice sectors, was already acknowledged during the Global Dialogue of Justice Leaders on 6 December 2021, also in line with the **Our Common Agenda** report of the **UN Secretary General and the Sustainable Development Goal 16**. In this context, **Justice Leaders** endorsed an agenda (the '**Riga Justice Agenda**') to transform justice systems in support of a vibrant social contract. The Riga Agenda emphasised that:

1. In order to strengthen society's bonds, enable democracies to deliver on their people's expectations, and to re-establish trust between people and governments, **countries should work towards transforming justice systems by putting people at the centre.**
2. This **transformation of justice systems needs to be grounded in empirical data on people's justice needs**, how they experience these needs, the pathways they follow, and what works to resolve and prevent such justice problems.
3. **Countries should embed the open government principles of transparency, participation and accountability into justice policy design and delivery** as part of justice system transformation.
4. **Countries should ensure work occurs collaboratively at local national and international levels, as well as with civil society and other stakeholders**, to learn from each other and to measure progress towards achieving justice for all and accountability.

In this context, the upcoming OECD Global Policy Roundtable on Equal Access to Justice, which will be hosted by the Government of Latvia on 21-23 September 2022 in Riga, will aim to advance this dialogue and provide a forum for exchange to support countries' efforts to:

- a) Increase the justice system's focus on the needs of **all** of the people, and thus increasing the engagement of the people with the justice system and supporting the re-imagining of the rule of law,
- b) Enhance the trust in, and accountability of, the justice system and government, and thus contributing to a renewed and vibrant social contract and stronger democracies, and
- c) Facilitate the development of integrated and interdisciplinary justice responses to present and future global challenges.

In particular, the Roundtable will aim to facilitate the implementation of the OECD Framework and Good Practice Principles on People-centred Justice and will be structured around the following themes:

- **Reinforcing democracy and rule of law through people-centred justice.** This High Level session will aim to reflect upon the role of the justice system in providing responsive justice as its contribution to better engagement, the enhancement of trust and the reinforcement of democracy. It will also allow to reflect on the ways to enhance people-centricity of the rule of law more broadly.

- **Designing and implementing people-centred justice.** This session will focus on what evidence, data, knowledge and tools needed to ground justice system transformation in people-centred approaches. In particular, the discussion will focus on the ways, good practices, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the OECD People-centred Justice Framework and Good Practice Principles.
- **Measurement and data strategies for people-centred justice.** These sessions will explore strategies and opportunities to advance collection and use of legal and justice service data, strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems and to establish data and knowledge ecosystems to support people-centred justice. They will also provide an opportunity to discuss opportunities and challenges in identifying what works best to meet legal needs of people and businesses.
- **Enhancing responsiveness of justice systems via digital transformation.** This session will aim to reflect on challenges and opportunities for digital transformation of justice systems, including online dispute resolution, with a view to making justice more accessible and responsive.
- **Empowering people and governments for people-centred justice.** This discussion will discuss concrete strategies and good practice examples to support the successful implementation of people-centred justice, including required capabilities and skills, appropriate governance frameworks and regulatory environments.
- **Towards justice for all.** Implementing people-centred justice often requires the targeted and dedicated focus on groups who are likely to face specific vulnerability to legal problems, potential discrimination or can be less able to address legal issues on their own, such as children, indigenous and minority communities. These sessions will aim to discuss lessons learned and opportunities for governments to help respond to their needs, remove explicit or implicit biases from institutional practices and decision-making and bring justice closer to all people.
- **Justice and business environment.** This session will explore the connection between meaningful access to justice, small business and economic development, inclusive growth and ultimately trust in government. It will also explore the elements of a policy framework to support businesses through access to justice.
- **Responsive and effective justice systems for a changing world.** Governments everywhere are confronted with a changing world and face challenges in responding whilst meeting their population's expectations. This calls for justice systems to strengthen their capacities and responsiveness to deal with new global challenges, including demands for environmental justice, and transnational justice issues (such as global tax regimes). These sessions will aim to discuss emerging lessons learned and needs of justice systems to effectively respond to global challenges.