

# Questions and Answers on the 2017 EU Justice Scoreboard

## **What is the EU Justice Scoreboard?**

The EU Justice Scoreboard is an information tool aiming at assisting the EU and Member States to achieve more effective justice. It does this by providing objective, reliable and comparable data on the quality, independence and efficiency of the justice systems in all Member States.

The Scoreboard contributes to identifying potential shortcomings, improvements and good practices. It shows trends in the functioning of national justice systems over time. It does not present an overall single ranking, but an overview of how all the justice systems function. This is based on various indicators that are of common interest to all the Member States.

The Scoreboard does not promote any particular type of justice system and puts all Member States on an equal footing. Whatever the model of the national justice system– or the legal tradition in which it is anchored – timeliness, independence, affordability and user-friendly access are some of the essential features of an effective justice system.

## **Why are national justice systems important for the EU?**

Effective justice systems play a crucial role in upholding the rule of law and the EU's fundamental values. They are also crucial for ensuring that individuals and businesses can fully enjoy their rights, for strengthening mutual trust, and for building a business and investment-friendly environment in the single market. This is why improving the effectiveness of national justice systems is one of the priorities of the [European Semester](#) – the EU's annual cycle of economic policy coordination. The EU Justice Scoreboard helps Member States to achieve this priority.

## **What are the main novelties of this fifth edition?**

The 2017 edition looks into new aspects of the functioning of justice systems, in particular from the viewpoints of citizens and businesses:

The Scoreboard examines:

- which channels consumers use to file complaints against companies (e.g. courts, out of court methods);
- how legal aid and court fees impact access to justice and the length of court proceedings;
- how many consumers have used the online dispute resolution (ODR) platform since it became operational in 2016.

The Scoreboard also presents:

- the outcome of a survey on how lawyers communicate with courts and how they use ICT;
- the outcome of a survey on how citizens and companies perceive the independence of judges;
- an analysis of the existing safeguards for judicial independence relating to the status of judges: from their appointment, evaluation and possible transfer without consent, to their potential dismissal.

For the first time, the Scoreboard provides an overview of the functioning of national justice systems when applying EU anti-money laundering legislation. It also examines the length of proceedings for provisional measures to prevent imminent infringement before the final resolution of the case.

Finally the Scoreboard looks into standards aiming to improve court management and the information given to parties about the progress achieved on their file.

### **What are the main findings of the 2017 EU Justice Scoreboard?**

- **Shorter civil and commercial court proceedings:** including in a number of Member States whose justice systems are facing challenges. This improvement is clearer over the five-year period than in the short-term.
- **Analysis of consumer protection enforcement:** The length of administrative proceedings and judicial review in this field varies a lot depending on the country. The Scoreboard shows that many consumer issues can be solved directly by consumer authorities and don't go to courts.
- **Analysis of the fight against money laundering:** first data in this area shows a large variation in case length – from less than half a year to almost three years- for proceedings dealing with anti-money laundering offenses.
- **Limited access to justice for poorer citizens:** the Scoreboard shows that in some Member States, citizens whose income is below the poverty threshold do not receive any legal aid in some types of disputes.
- **Use of ICT tools still limited in some countries:** while it's widely used for communication between courts and lawyers in half of the Member States, the use of ICT for electronic signature is very limited in over half the EU countries. New data on how lawyers use ICT when communicating with courts again underlines the importance of electronic communication for well-functioning justice systems.
- **Improved or stable perception of judicial independence among the general public:** this is the case in more than two-thirds of Member States, [compared to 2016](#). The trend is the same for businesses' perception since 2010. Among the reasons for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges, the interference or pressure from government and politicians was the most stated reason. The 2017 edition also presents data on the safeguards in place in the different Member States to guarantee the judicial independence of judges.
- **Quality standards:** Most Member States have standards fixing time limits or timeframes to avoid lengthy judicial proceedings. However, such standards are not in place in certain Member States with less efficient justice systems.

## **What is the European Semester?**

The European Commission has set up a yearly cycle of economic policy coordination called the European Semester. Each year the European Commission undertakes a detailed analysis of EU Member States' programmes of economic and structural reforms and provides them with recommendations for the next 12-18 months.

The European Semester cycle starts when the Commission adopts its Annual Growth Survey, usually towards the end of the year. This sets out EU priorities for the coming year to boost growth and job creation.

In the 2017 [Annual Growth Survey](#), the Commission calls on the Member States to "Member States need to step up their efforts to implement the necessary reforms aimed at removing obstacles to investment that were identified in the context of the European Semester. (...)In particular, efficient and transparent public administration and effective justice systems are necessary to support economic growth and deliver high quality services for firms and citizens.

## **How does the EU Justice Scoreboard contribute to the European Semester?**

The Scoreboard provides information on the functioning of justice systems and helps assess the impact of justice reforms. If the Scoreboard reveals poor performance, this always requires a deeper analysis of the reasons for this. This country-specific assessment is carried out in the context of the European Semester process through bilateral dialogue with the authorities and stakeholders concerned.

The country-specific assessment takes into account the particularities of the legal system and the context of the concerned Member State. It may eventually lead the Commission to propose that the Council adopts Country-Specific Recommendations on the improvement of national justice systems.

## **How can effective justice systems support growth?**

Effective justice systems play a key role in establishing confidence throughout the business cycle. When judicial systems guarantee the enforcement of rights, creditors are more likely to lend, firms are dissuaded from opportunistic behaviour, transaction costs are reduced, and innovative businesses are more likely to invest.

The positive impact of national justice systems on the economy is underlined in literature and research, including from the [European Central Bank](#), [International Monetary Fund](#), [OECD](#), [World Economic Forum](#) and [World Bank](#).

## **How does the 2017 EU Justice Scoreboard examine the effectiveness of justice?**

The Scoreboard uses indicators that examine the three main features of an effective justice system: efficiency, quality and independence.

### **Efficiency**

The indicators related to the efficiency of proceedings include: the length

of judicial proceedings (disposition time); the clearance rate (the ratio of the number of resolved cases over the number of incoming cases); and the number of pending cases. The Scoreboard also presents the average length of proceedings in specific fields when EU law is involved.

## **Quality**

Easy access to justice, adequate resources, effective assessment tools and appropriate standards are key factors that contribute to the quality of justice systems. The Scoreboard uses various indicators covering these factors: such as indicators for the electronic submission of claims, communication between the courts and parties, the training of judges, financial resources, and ICT case management systems and standards.

## **Independence**

The Scoreboard examines the perception of judicial independence among the general public and companies. It also presents information on legal safeguards in Member States for certain situations where judicial independence could be at risk.

## **What is the methodology of the EU Justice Scoreboard?**

The Scoreboard uses various sources of information. Large parts of the quantitative data are provided by the [Council of Europe Commission for the Evaluation of the Efficiency of Justice \(CEPEJ\)](#) with which the Commission has concluded a contract to carry out a specific annual study. These data range from 2010 to 2014, and have been provided by Member States according to CEPEJ's methodology. The study also provides detailed comments and country-specific information sheets that give more contextual information and should be read together with the figures.

The other sources of data are the group of contact persons on national justice systems, the [European Network of Councils for the Judiciary \(ENCJ\)](#), the [Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the EU](#), [Association of the Councils of State and Supreme Administrative Jurisdictions of the EU \(ACA\)](#), the [European Competition Network](#), the [Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe \(CCBE\)](#), the [Communications Committee](#), the [European Observatory on infringements of intellectual property rights](#), the [Consumer Protection Cooperation Network](#), [Eurostat](#), the [European Judicial Training Network \(EJTN\)](#), the [World Bank](#) and the [World Economic Forum](#).

## **Why is some data missing?**

Although data are still lacking for certain Member States, the data gap continues to decrease, particularly for indicators the efficiency of justice systems. The remaining difficulties in gathering data are often due to insufficient statistical capacity or to the fact that the national categories for which data are collected do not exactly correspond to the ones used for the Scoreboard. In very few cases, the data gap is due to the lack of willingness of certain national authorities to contribute. The Commission will continue to encourage Member States to further reduce this data gap.

## **What is the relation between the EU Justice Scoreboard and the Commission EU Rule of Law Framework adopted in 2014?**

These two tools are separate from each other as they serve different purposes.

The EU Justice Scoreboard provides yearly, reliable and comparable data on the efficiency, quality and independence of national justice systems. This can be used to support recommendations made to the Member States in the context of the European Semester.

The EU Rule of Law Framework ([IP/14/237](#)) allows the Commission to enter into a political dialogue with the Member State concerned. The aim of the political dialogue is to prevent an emerging systemic threat to the rule of law from further escalating.

## **Will the EU Justice Scoreboard replace the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism?**

No, the EU Justice Scoreboard and the [Cooperation and Verification Mechanism \(CVM\)](#) pursue different objectives and have different scopes.

The Cooperation and Verification mechanism is specific to Bulgaria and Romania. When they joined the EU on 1 January 2007, Romania and Bulgaria still had progress to make in the fields of judicial reform, as well as the fight against corruption and – in the case of Bulgaria – organised crime. To smooth the entry of both countries into the EU and, at the same time, safeguard the workings of its policies and institutions, the EU decided to establish a special “cooperation and verification mechanism” to help them address these outstanding shortcomings.

The Justice Scoreboard is a comparative tool which covers all Member States. Its main focus is on civil, commercial and administrative justice. It aims to present trends in the functioning of national justice systems over time. It is not a binding mechanism. It is intended to help identify issues that deserve particular attention.

**For further information**

[IP/17/890](#)

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## **[EU Justice Scoreboard 2017: justice systems becoming more effective, but](#)**

## challenges remain

Its aim is to assist national authorities to improve the effectiveness of their justice systems. Compared to previous editions, the [2017 Scoreboard](#) looks into new aspects of the functioning of justice systems, for example, how easily consumers can access justice and which channels they use to submit complaints against companies. For the first time, it also shows the length of criminal court proceedings relating to money laundering offences.

*"The 5th edition of the EU Justice Scoreboard confirms that effective justice systems are essential to build trust in a business and investment-friendly environment in the single market" said Věra Jourová, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. "I encourage Member States to ensure that any justice reform respects the rule of law and judicial independence. This is key for citizens and businesses to fully enjoy their rights. An independent and well-functioning justice system is a fundamental pillar of every democracy."*

Key findings of the 2017 edition include:

- **Shorter civil and commercial court proceedings:** including in a number of Member States whose justice systems are facing challenges. This improvement is clearer over the five-year period than in the short-term.
- **Analysis of consumer protection enforcement:** Member States are responsible for the enforcement of EU consumer law. The Scoreboard shows that the length of administrative proceedings and judicial review in this field varies a lot depending on the country. It also shows that many consumer issues are solved directly by consumer authorities and they don't need to go to courts.
- **Analysis of the fight against money laundering:** As required by the 4<sup>th</sup> Anti-Money Laundering directive, Member States have provided for the first time data in this area. It shows a large variation in case length – from less than half a year to almost three years- for proceedings dealing with anti-money laundering offenses.
- **Limited access to justice for poorer citizens:** the Scoreboard shows that in some Member States, citizens whose income is below the poverty threshold do not receive any legal aid in some types of disputes.
- **Use of ICT tools still limited in some countries:** while it's widely used for communication between courts and lawyers in half of the Member States, the use of ICT for electronic signature is very limited in over half the EU countries. New data on how lawyers use ICT when communicating with courts again underlines the importance of electronic communication for well-functioning justice systems.
- **Improved or stable perception of judicial independence among the general public:** this is the case in more than two-thirds of Member States, [compared to 2016](#). The trend is the same for businesses' perception since

2010. Among the reasons for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges, the interference or pressure from government and politicians was the most stated reason. The 2017 edition also presents data on the safeguards in place in the different Member States to guarantee the judicial independence of judges. This reflects the strong importance of rule of law for the EU.

- **Quality standards:** Most Member States have standards fixing time limits or timeframes to avoid lengthy judicial proceedings. However, such standards are not in place in certain Member States with less efficient justice systems.

## Next steps

The findings of the 2017 Scoreboard are being taken into account for the ongoing country-specific assessment carried out within the 2017 European Semester process. The country reports for Member States were published on 22 February 2017 and include findings on the justice systems of a number Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia) (see [IP/17/308](#)).

## Background

The Scoreboard mainly focuses on litigious civil and commercial cases as well as administrative cases in order to assist Member States in their efforts to pave the way for a more investment, business and citizen-friendly environment. The Scoreboard focuses on the three main elements of an effective justice system:

- **Efficiency:** indicators on the length of proceedings, clearance rate and number of pending cases.
- **Quality:** indicators on legal aid, court fees, training, monitoring of court activities, budget, and human resources.
- **Independence:** indicators on the perceived judicial independence among companies and the general public, and on safeguards relating to judges.

Improving the effectiveness of national justice systems is a well-established priority of the European semester – the EU's annual cycle of economic policy coordination. The EU Justice Scoreboard helps Member States to achieve this by providing an annual comparative overview of functioning of national justice systems. This overview is complemented by country-specific assessments carried out through bilateral dialogue with the national authorities and stakeholders concerned. This assessment may lead to country-specific recommendations on the improvement of national justice systems. In the 2016 European semester, based on a proposal from the Commission, the Council addressed country specific recommendations to six Member States in this area (Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal and Slovakia).

The Scoreboard uses different sources of information. Main sources of data are provided by the Council of Europe Commission for the Evaluation of the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ). Other sources of data include European networks such as the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary and the



Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the EU, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) and various committees in specific areas of EU legislation.

#### **For more information**

Justice Scoreboard 2017 [full report](#)

Summary of the Justice Scoreboard: [Factsheet](#)

[Q&A](#)

[Annotated graphs](#) with full figures

[Eurobarometer](#) on 'Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among the general public'

[Eurobarometer](#) on 'Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among companies'

[European Semester](#)

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## **Statement on the latest developments in Venezuela**

Ongoing escalation of tensions and violent confrontations during last days are only increasing divisions in Venezuela. But violence and use of force will not resolve the current crisis.

Heavily sanctioning the opposition – most recently an opposition politician Henrique Capriles Radonski who was banned from political life for 15 years – does not help to lower the unrest and the tensions in the country.

The Venezuelan people has the right to peacefully demonstrate and to see the political conflict immediately solved.

The European Union calls on all parties to find common ground and end the violence.

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# Reporting irregularities that may affect medicines

10/04/2017

## **EMA Board adopts new policy on handling information on alleged improprieties from external sources**

The European Medicines Agency's (EMA) Management Board has adopted a new [policy on how EMA handles allegations of improprieties received from external parties](#). These improprieties may include allegations of departures from standards of good practices that could have an impact on the evaluation and supervision of medicines.

The goal is to create an environment where individuals from outside the Agency feel confident to raise their concerns on improprieties in their area of work. The policy helps EMA assess these reports and co-ordinate any further investigation in a structured way, while protecting the confidentiality of the reporter.

Since 2013, EMA has received a total of 43 reports that relate, for example, to the manufacturing of medicines or the conduct of clinical trials. Although no formal policy has existed until now, all reports were dealt with in line with the principles included in the new policy.

A dedicated email inbox, [reporting@ema.europa.eu](mailto:reporting@ema.europa.eu), has been created. Individuals external to EMA can raise their concerns by sending a message or providing information to this address. They can also send a letter to the Agency. Their identity will be kept confidential.

If the allegations concern a centrally authorised medicine, EMA will coordinate the investigation. If there are any concerns that the improprieties may affect the balance of benefits and risks of the medicine, EMA's scientific committees may consider regulatory action.

If the allegations concern a nationally authorised medicine, EMA may, on a case-by-case basis, refer the matter to the national medicines agency in the EU Member State where the concerned medicine is authorised.

If there is a suspicion that fraud is involved, EMA will transmit the report to the [European Anti-Fraud Office](#) (OLAF) in accordance with the existing arrangements between the two institutions.

The policy was adopted by the Management Board at its March meeting and came into effect on 17 March 2017. It was prepared in consultation with the European Commission and OLAF.

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## **Statement by Federica Mogherini on the attacks on Coptic Churches in Egypt**

In one of the Holiest days for the Christians all over the world, the Coptic churches in the Egyptian cities of Tanta and Alexandria have been attacked. Many innocent civilians have been killed or injured.

The European Union expresses its sincere condolences to the friends and families of the victims. Our thoughts are with them.

Those responsible for the attacks must be held accountable. Worshippers, no matter what their belief is, should always be free to pray in peace.

The European Union stands in solidarity with the Egyptian government and people in the fight against terrorism.