

EU Justice Scoreboard 2019: results show the continuing need to protect judicial independence

It provides national authorities with information to help them improve their justice systems. The results are mixed and show relative improvements with regard to the efficiency of justice systems and the quality of justice. At the same time, the Scoreboard shows there are growing challenges with regard to the perception of judicial independence.

Věra **Jourová**, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said: *“The 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard comes at a time when challenges to the rule of law are mounting in some places in Europe. I am pleased to see that many countries continue to improve their judiciary. Sadly, some others are reversing the positive trends. There are still too many EU citizens who don’t see their justice systems as independent and who are waiting too long for justice to be served. ”*

The seventh edition of the EU Justice Scoreboard continues to develop the different indicators and deepens its focus on judicial independence as a key element to uphold the rule of law in Member States.

One of the new elements of the 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard is that it provides an overview of disciplinary regimes regarding judges in national justice systems and safeguards in place to prevent political control of judicial decisions. The Scoreboard also presents the management of powers over national prosecution services justice systems, including the appointment and dismissal of prosecutors, which are key indicators for the independence of a prosecution service.

The key findings of the 2019 edition include:

- **Some positive trends on the efficiency of justice systems:** The Scoreboard shows that over eight years (2010-2017) positive developments can be observed in most of the Member States identified in the European Semester as facing specific challenges. Since 2010, in nearly all of those Member States, the length of first instance court proceedings has decreased or at least remained stable. Moreover, first instance proceedings in money laundering court cases take up to a year on average. However, in some Member States facing challenges in this area, proceedings can still take two or more years.
- **Challenges as regards perception of judicial independence are growing:** According to a Eurobarometer survey published today, in two-thirds of Member States, the perception of judicial independence has improved, as compared to 2016. However, compared to last year, the public’s perception of independence has decreased in about three-fifths of all Member States^[1]. Possible political interference or pressure is the

main reason for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges. For national prosecution services, the Scoreboard shows that there is a tendency in some Member States to concentrate management powers, such as evaluation, promotion, transfer of prosecutors, in the hands of a single authority.

- **Quality of justice:** overall, in 2017, general government expenditure on law courts remained stable across the EU. To improve the quality of judgments (based on data from European judicial networks) most courts provide specific training to judges on the structure and style of reasoning and drafting of judgments. In some Member States, court users can ask for clarifications of court decisions. Compared to previous years, online access to court judgments has improved, especially as regards the publication of judgments of the highest instance: 19 Member States now publish all civil/commercial and administrative judgments.

Next steps

The findings of the 2019 Scoreboard were already taken into account for the country-specific assessment carried out within the 2019 European Semester. The findings will also feed into the preparation of the Commission proposals for the 2019 country-specific recommendations.

These policy recommendations are discussed amongst Member States in the Council. EU leaders endorse them in June before the Council adopts them in July. Governments then incorporate the recommendations into their reform plans and national budgets for the following year.

Background

Launched in 2013, the EU Justice Scoreboard is one of the tools in the [EU's rule of law toolbox](#) used by the Commission to monitor justice reforms undertaken by Member States and feeds into the [European Semester](#). The annual EU Justice Scoreboard assesses the independence, quality and efficiency of national justice systems. This comparative tool is complemented by country-specific assessments, presented in the Country Reports, which enable a deeper analysis based on the national legal and institutional context.

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 accessibility, such as legal aid and court fees, training, monitoring of court activities, budget, human resources and standards on the quality of judgments.
- **Independence:** indicators on the perceived judicial independence among the general public and companies, on safeguards relating to judges and on safeguards relating to the functioning of national prosecution services.

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 the functioning of national justice systems. When serious challenges are identified in individual country reports, the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, adopts targeted country-specific recommendations.

For More Information

[EU Justice Scoreboard 2019](#)

[Summary of the 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard: Factsheet](#)

[Annotated graphs with full figures](#)

[Questions and Answers](#)

[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 2019 Country Reports](#)

[Communication on further strengthening the Rule of Law within the Union](#)

Factsheet [EU's rule of law toolbox](#)

[1] AT, NL, DE, LU, BE, EE, EL, CZ, PT, HU, RO, PL, ES, BG, SK, HR