



Advancing Judicial Excellence Through Competitiveness: A Framework for Future-Ready Courts

The Authors

Alia Abdulla AlMheiri
Director of Strategy and Excellence Department
aaalmheiri@dc.gov.ae

Maha Ajil Alsuwaidi
Excellence Section Head
maalsuwaidi@dc.gov.ae

Cesar P. Moukarzel
Associate Partner, Global Lead of Citizens' Services
Sia
cesar.moukarzel@sia-partners.com

Farah K. Al-Assal
Senior Manager, Regional Lead of Citizens' Service Excellence
Sia
farah.lassal@sia-partners.com

Ahmad Hamzeh
Consultant
Sia
ahmad.hamzeh@sia-partners.com

Co-Author:

Mohammad F. A. Nsour
Ph.D. Lawyer and Law Professor
nsour@nsourlaw.com

Contributor:

Pamela Casey
Ph.D. Vice President, Research & Design,
NCSC - The National Center for State Courts
pcasey@ncsc.org

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His Highness Sheikh
Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum
UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai



His Highness Sheikh

Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum

Crown Prince of Dubai, President of the Executive Council of Dubai



His Highness Sheikh

Maktoum Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum

Deputy Ruler of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance



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A word from

H.E. Dr. Saif Ghanem Al Suwaidi

Director General of Dubai Courts.

In line with the vision of our wise leadership to make Dubai a global model for justice, Dubai Courts remains committed to pioneering excellence and innovation within the judicial system. We believe that positive competitiveness is a key driver for institutional advancement and for enhancing the overall quality of justice.

Dubai Courts has adopted a proactive approach in embedding a culture of excellence founded on continuous improvement, transparency, and the empowerment of national talent, in alignment with the Dubai Government's aspirations to build an agile and fully digital judicial ecosystem that delivers swift, fair, and efficient justice, thereby strengthening Dubai's regional and global competitiveness.

Enhancing judicial excellence through competitiveness is not merely about awards or rankings; it represents a daily commitment to the values of justice, efficiency, and innovation, and a living embodiment of our institutional principles that aim to deliver integrated judicial services, foster public trust, and exemplify leadership in all dimensions.

With this spirit, we continue to advance our initiatives and development projects to align with future transformations and to keep the court user at the heart of our judicial system, reflecting our mission to deliver pioneering justice that contributes to community happiness and national prosperity.



List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Meaning
JCF	Judicial Competitiveness Framework
ICCE	International Framework for Court Excellence'
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
CEPEJ	European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNCITRAL	United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
WJP	World Justice Project
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NCSC	The National Center for State Courts



Introduction

0.1 Context and Strategic Need

Judicial systems worldwide are experiencing growing pressure to deliver outcomes that extend beyond procedural compliance, evolving into institutions that foster trust, transparency, and national competitiveness.¹ Today's judiciaries are widely acknowledged as critical to sustainable development, democratic stability, and public confidence, especially in the face of growing socio-economic and digital complexity.²

The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index (2024) underscores a concerning trend: overall rule of law continues to decline in a majority of countries, highlighting the urgency for systemic reform and resilience-building in courts.³ Meanwhile, research shows that judicial performance, such as trial duration, depends heavily on investments in digital transformation, case management systems, and robust governance structures.⁴

Conventional performance metrics, such as clearance rates or disposition time, remain important, yet they capture only part of judicial effectiveness. They fail to address critical dimensions such as citizen confidence, accessibility, societal impact, and digital readiness.⁵ The rise of new technologies, including digital case management, artificial intelligence, and online dispute resolution, is reshaping how justice is delivered, requiring systems to adapt swiftly to retain relevance and credibility.⁶ Collectively, these insights underscore the pressing need for courts to embrace innovation, efficiency, and adaptability to remain competitive and trusted in an increasingly dynamic global landscape.

To meet these evolving demands, there is a clear need for a comprehensive, maturity-based framework that integrates institutional performance, innovation capacity, and governance alignment. Such a framework enables courts to position themselves not only as efficient institutions but also as drivers of legitimacy, social trust, and sustainable development.⁷

0.2 Purpose of the Paper

This paper introduces the Judicial Competitiveness Framework (JCF), developed to support judicial institutions in assessing their performance holistically and identifying pathways for continuous improvement.⁸ The framework is designed to provide a practical, evidence-based model that judicial leaders can adapt to different institutional contexts and stages of development.

Rather than proposing an entirely new model, the JCF consolidates and expands upon established frameworks such as the ICCE, CEPEJ, OECD People-Centred Justice, and World Bank JUPITER programs. Its contribution lies in integrating these into a unified, maturity-based model that responds to the demands of a rapidly changing and hyper-connected world.

Drawing on the case of Dubai Courts, the paper highlights how the framework has been applied in practice, offering both insights and lessons. The aim is not to prescribe a single model, but to share a flexible tool that jurisdictions can adapt to their own legal, cultural, and governance environments.

0.3 Significance for the Global Judicial Community

The challenges highlighted in this paper extend far beyond the UAE. Courts worldwide are facing similar issues related to equitable access to justice, operational efficiency, accelerating technological disruption, and the loss of public trust.⁹ The JCF is designed to respond to these global pressures and challenges by:

Redefining performance measurement

By moving beyond narrow metrics such as clearance rates to introduce a comprehensive, data-driven evaluation of judicial effectiveness, agility, and societal impact.

Empowering leadership with actionable insight

By offering a diagnostic platform that enables judicial leaders to pinpoint reform priorities, benchmark against global best practices, and drive innovation with precision.

Positioning courts as catalysts of governance and economic competitiveness

By transforming justice institutions from simple service providers into strategic drivers of national resilience and public trust.





Section 1

Rethinking Judicial Excellence: Towards People-Centered Justice¹⁰

1.1 Global Drivers of Change

Courts around the world are navigating an era of profound transformation driven by powerful global megatrends. Rapid digitalization, globalization of disputes, increased citizen expectations, and complex cross-border legal challenges are reshaping both the delivery and perception of justice. The OECD (2021) underscores the urgency for justice institutions to evolve toward more people-centred, accessible services, while the World Bank's JUPITER Framework sets new benchmarks for judicial performance, emphasizing access, efficiency, and quality as the new standards of judicial performance.¹¹

This shift aligns with the global momentum toward “people-centered justice,” which prioritizes user experience, accessibility, trust in institutions, and inclusive justice outcomes. International frameworks, including the OECD's People-Centred Justice Guidelines (2021) and UN SDG 16, emphasize that judicial success today is measured not only by clearance rates but also by public confidence, procedural fairness, and service quality.

As justice systems continue to modernize, courts are rethinking how they design and deliver services to ensure that justice is not only delivered but also perceived as fair, transparent, and equitable. Many jurisdictions are integrating performance-based management systems, strengthening governance models, and embracing technology to make justice more adaptive and sustainable. This evolution underscores the role of resilient and forward-looking judicial systems as a cornerstone of sustainable governance and institutional competitiveness.

1.2 Beyond Clearance Rates: Justice as a Service

For decades, judicial performance was assessed largely through traditional metrics such as case clearance rates, trial duration, and backlog reduction. While these remain important, they offer only a narrow view of justice delivery and fail to capture the entire experiences of citizens. Courts are no longer perceived as isolated legal institutions, but as public service institutions entrusted with safeguarding rights, protecting the vulnerable, and enabling social and economic development.

A service-oriented perspective emphasizes citizen experience, accessibility, and societal outcomes as central elements of judicial effectiveness. As the OECD (2021) notes, justice systems must deliver not only “procedural fairness” but also

contribute to broader policy outcomes, including trust in government and social cohesion.¹² Similarly, the WJP Rule of Law Index (2023) highlights that perceptions of fairness, equality, and responsiveness are often stronger determinants of public confidence than technical measures of efficiency.

1.3 From Dispersed Efforts to Integrated Strategy

Judicial institutions often struggle with fragmented performance frameworks, emphasizing operational outputs, such as caseload processing, while overlooking the broader strategic outcomes that define institutional legitimacy and societal impact. This narrow focus often leads to inefficiencies, duplicated efforts, and weak alignment with national policy priorities.

Global best practices highlight the value of integrated performance models that link day-to-day operations with strategic objectives and long-term trust in justice systems. The World Bank’s JUPITER Framework (2025) provides a timely example, benchmarking judicial systems across three interconnected pillars: access, efficiency, and quality.¹³

1.4 Institutional Trust and Transparency

Public trust remains the cornerstone of judicial legitimacy. Without widespread confidence in the fairness, independence, and transparency of courts, even the most efficient judicial systems risk being perceived as unjust or disconnected from societal needs. Today, transparency in decision-making, open access to judicial data, and active public engagement are recognized as integral components of judicial excellence.¹⁴

The UNODC underscores the pivotal role of the judiciary in stabilizing the balance of power and enhancing public confidence in government institutions, which is essential for advancing justice sector reforms and reinforcing governance legitimacy.¹⁵ Likewise, the CEPEJ Evaluation Report (2022) highlights how judicial transparency and user-oriented performance monitoring are key to building long-term credibility across European systems.¹⁶



1.5 Innovation and Technological Adaptation

Judicial excellence in the 21st century cannot be separated from the capacity of judicial institutions to innovate and adapt to technological change. Modern courts are expected not only to uphold justice but also to continuously evolve their operations and services to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. This transformation increasingly relies on the integration of electronic filing systems, online dispute resolution (ODR) platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), and data-driven case management solutions, enabling courts to deliver justice that is more accessible, efficient, and citizen-centric. With respect to the use of artificial intelligence specifically, the integration of AI into the judicial sector represents a pivotal step toward enhancing efficiency, consistency, and accessibility of justice. AI-powered tools such as predictive case management systems, automated document review, and natural-language search engines can significantly reduce case backlogs, accelerate decision-making, and optimize resource allocation.

However, their adoption must be consistent. In other words, any deployment of AI in adjudication must preserve the right to a fair hearing, ensure transparency in decision-making, and safeguard against delegating core judicial functions to algorithms in a way that undermines human oversight. The constitutional commitment to equality before the law also requires that AI systems be designed to avoid bias, provide explainable outcomes, and remain subject to appeal and review by human judges. Properly implemented, AI can strengthen public trust in the judiciary by delivering faster and more consistent outcomes, provided that its use is framed within a regulatory model that respects the constitutional principles of independence, accountability, and procedural fairness.

According to the CEPEJ (2022), technological readiness is now one of the most significant determinants of judicial efficiency and accessibility. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this reality, as courts worldwide relied on digital platforms to maintain service continuity while broadening public access. Beyond efficiency gains, innovation and technological adaptation are essential to ensure that judicial institutions remain resilient, future-ready, and capable of addressing emerging risks such as cybercrime, cross-border disputes, and increasing caseload complexity.

1.6 Shaping the Future of Judicial Excellence

The future of judicial excellence is being defined by courts that move beyond the traditional paradigm of dispute resolution toward anticipatory, inclusive, and participatory models of justice delivery. Around the world, justice institutions are guided by a vision that places the individual, society, and sustainable development at the centre of governance. This evolution reflects a broader commitment to people-centred justice, where the legitimacy of judicial systems is measured not only by procedural efficiency but also by public trust, fairness, and user satisfaction.

This transformation is most evident in the growing emphasis on engagement with the public through focus sessions, innovation laboratories, and collaborative design platforms where citizens, professionals, and service users collectively shape the evolution of judicial services. These mechanisms are not symbolic exercises in consultation but structured frameworks for co-creation and evidence-based reform. They demonstrate that the credibility of justice is inseparable from the satisfaction, trust, and empowerment of its users.

At the conceptual core of this evolution lies the principle of preventive justice, which transcends the reactive function of adjudication and positions the judiciary as an active guarantor of social equilibrium. Preventive justice signifies the capacity of judicial systems to foresee, pre-empt, and neutralize the sources of conflict before they mature into litigation. This reorientation from reaction to prevention incorporates several key mechanisms including the promotion of public legal literacy, the simplification of statutory frameworks, the

institutionalization of mediation and early settlement mechanisms, and the intelligent use of digital and predictive technologies capable of identifying latent systemic pressures.

These instruments express a jurisprudential philosophy that could become a characteristic of a city's approach to governance, one that reconciles technological modernity with legal tradition and balances efficiency with equity. Preventive justice, in this context, is not a procedural complement but a strategic pillar of judicial excellence. It recognizes that the highest form of justice lies not merely in rapid adjudication but in the minimization of conflict, the preservation of social harmony, and the reinforcement of trust between citizens and institutions.





Section 2

The Judicial Competitiveness Framework (JCF)

2.1 Purpose and Value Proposition

The JCF was developed by Sia as a comprehensive model to measure and enhance judicial performance across multiple dimensions. Unlike traditional assessments focused narrowly on efficiency or backlog reduction, the JCF integrates core judicial functions with enabling capacities, providing a holistic perspective on institutional competitiveness.

The framework's value lies in its ability to balance operational performance with institutional resilience. It evaluates not only how courts deliver justice today but also their capacity to adapt, innovate, and sustain public trust in a rapidly evolving judicial environment. This approach aligns with international best practices: the OECD (2021) emphasizes the importance of people-centered justice systems to strengthen societal trust,¹⁷ the World Bank's JUPITER program benchmarks courts against access, efficiency, and quality,¹⁸ and the International Consortium for Court Excellence (ICCE), through its International Framework for Court Excellence,¹⁹ embodies a holistic approach to court performance, emphasizing institutional resilience and ongoing adaptation. It outlines critical values such as fairness, impartiality, integrity, accessibility, transparency, equality, and independence, guiding courts toward resilient governance, not just efficiency.

The JCF builds upon and operationalizes the insights of existing global frameworks into a unified maturity model. It offers courts a practical path from diagnostic assessment to strategic reform. By translating international benchmarks into measurable indicators, the JCF enables judicial leaders to evaluate, strengthen, and sustain institutional resilience over time.

2.2 Framework Development Approach

The JCF was developed through a structured design process that combined global benchmarking with local institutional analysis. A comparative study of leading frameworks, including OECD justice reviews, CEPEJ evaluation models, the ICCE Framework for Court Excellence, and the World Bank's JUPITER program was undertaken with relevant elements systematically adapted to the judicial and governance context of the UAE. Additional dimensions were introduced to capture local priorities and address elements not fully reflected in international references. This co-creation ensured that the framework is both globally benchmarked and locally responsive.

The framework was initially conceptualized through global benchmarking and then validated and refined through its application in Dubai Courts, ensuring reciprocal learning between design and practice.

2.3 Benchmarking Foundations

The JCF is built upon established international references that provided both methodological guidance and comparative standards, while also embedding national priorities specific to the UAE judicial system as follows:

OECD

It supports people-centred justice and alignment with broader governance objectives.²⁰ The OECD Framework and Good Practice Principles for People-Centred Justice (2021) offers governments a comprehensive approach to reform justice systems so they are more responsive, accessible, and citizens' needs focused.

Rooted in the commitments of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on access to justice for all and aligned with the OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative, the Framework seeks to build public trust in institutions and reinforce democratic governance. It highlights the importance of inter-agency cooperation, accountability, and long-term sustainability to ensure justice systems delivery of meaningful outcomes for society.

The Framework depends on a people-centred purpose and has four core pillars. The first spotlights designing and delivering services that are tailored to the real justice needs of different groups in society, including vulnerable populations, ensuring accessibility and usability. The second tackles governance and infrastructure, highlighting the role of government and justice actors in driving whole-of-government engagement, simplifying processes, and harnessing technology and data to improve service delivery.

The third pillar underscores empowerment, the importance of raising legal literacy, engaging citizens

in co-designing justice services, and strengthening the capacities of justice professionals. The fourth is about planning, monitoring, and accountability, emphasizing the use of robust data to inform evidence-based decision making and track and evaluate justice outcomes over time. In parallel, the OECD Good Practice Principles complement the Framework by setting out guiding principles under each pillar to promote consistent and effective implementation. Together, the Framework and Principles offer countries a roadmap to build justice systems that not only protect rights and resolve disputes but also strengthen democratic resilience by putting people-centred approaches at the heart of justice delivery.

CEPEJ

It emphasizes efficiency, quality, and the adoption of ICT in European judicial systems.²¹ It evaluates key indicators such as court efficiency, access to justice, and judicial budgets, offering insights into trends and challenges facing member states. CEPEJ's findings highlight disparities in judicial performance, emphasizing the need for reforms to improve fairness and efficiency, while being a critical tool for policymakers and legal practitioners as of its release in 2024.

ICCE

It offers integrated measures of quality and performance across courts. This framework, designed to promote excellence in judicial administration, outlines seven areas of focus including court leadership, service delivery and public trust, drawing on best practices from various jurisdictions. The third edition reflects updated standards and case studies, offering courts a practical tool to assess and improve their operations, making it an essential resource for judicial reform as of its inception in 2020.



World Bank JUPITER (2025)

It highlights access, efficiency, and quality as universal pillars of justice. This tool identifies strengths and weaknesses through data-driven analysis, offering actionable insights for reforms in areas like court efficiency and access to justice, as demonstrated in assessments for countries such as Liberia and South Sudan where it highlights inequalities and supports targeted capacity-building to foster equitable legal systems.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of International Judicial Excellence Frameworks

Framework	Focus Areas	Distinctive Features	Relevance to JCF
OECD People-Centred Justice (2021)	Access, inclusion, data-driven policy	User focus, governance integration	Basis for people-centred dimension
CEPEJ Evaluation Model	Efficiency, quality, ICT	Quantitative benchmarking	Source for efficiency & digital readiness
ICCE Framework for Court Excellence	Leadership, integrity, service quality	Maturity levels, seven areas of excellence	Template for holistic court assessment
World Bank JUPITER	Access, efficiency, quality	Data analytics, reform diagnostics	Reference for global comparability

UAE Priorities

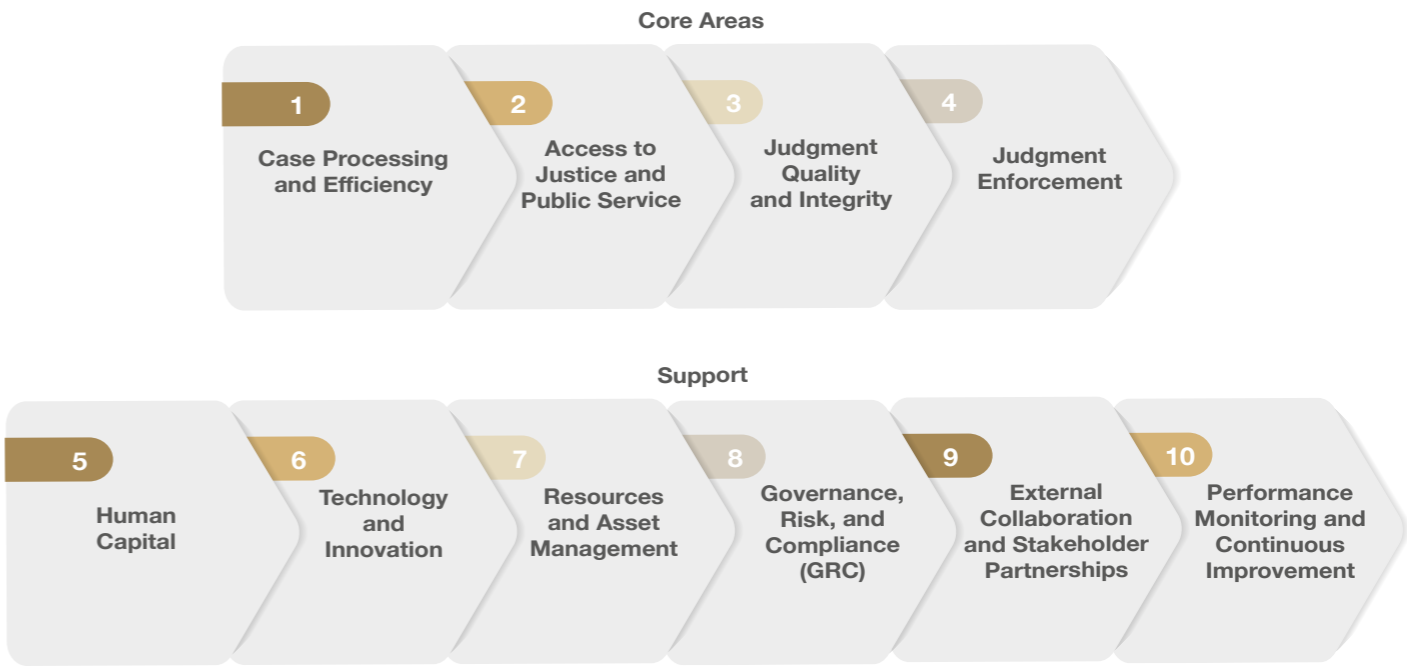
It ensures alignment with the country’s vision for judicial excellence, digital transformation, citizen trust, and global competitiveness. The UAE’s judiciary reforms are tightly aligned with the strategic long-term goals outlined in “We the UAE 2031” and “UAE Centennial 2071”, both of which emphasize governance excellence, innovation, and societal trust. Under “We the UAE 2031”, the Ministry of Justice aims to develop a “flexible judicial system that entrenches justice for a safe society and a competitive economy,” by enhancing the speed, efficiency, and transparency of courts utilizing modern digital systems.²² Similarly, the Centennial 2071 Plan envisions a future-focused government

that anticipates change, embraces digital innovation, and strengthens institutions in order to deliver justice and uphold the rule of law.²³ These frameworks mandate that judicial institutions in the UAE not only process cases more efficiently but also ensure access to courts, fairness, human rights protection, and public confidence, positioning justice as a pillar of national competitiveness and social cohesion.

By consolidating insights from these international benchmarks and integrating UAE-specific priorities, the JCF establishes a coherent maturity model that both aligns local reform initiatives with global standards and addresses the distinct needs of the national judicial environment.

2.4 Functional Categories and Performance Criteria

The JCF is structured around ten competitiveness pillars that combine internationally recognized dimensions of judicial excellence with locally adapted priorities to ensure contextual relevance. Each functional area within the JCF can serve as an independent policy or research module, allowing courts to adopt specific pillars progressively according to institutional priorities.



Core Judicial Functions

- 1. Case Processing and Efficiency** by drawing on CEPEJ efficiency standards covering preparation time, timeliness of judgments, appeals handling, and Amicable Dispute Resolution effectiveness,²⁴ while adapted to suit local initiatives towards expediting case resolution and improving procedural efficiency.
- 2. Access to Justice and Public Service** by reflecting OECD recommendations on inclusive and user-oriented justice,²⁵ complemented by local reforms promoting digital accessibility, multilingual services, and citizen-centric channels.

- 3. Judgment Quality and Integrity** as in accordance with ICCE’s emphasis on independence, transparency, and integrity of decisions,²⁶ reinforced through locally relevant measures designed to strengthen judicial credibility and public trust.
- 4. Judgment Enforcement** by reinforcing UNODC’s focus on enforceability as a cornerstone of the rule of law,²⁷ supported by local priorities to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and streamline execution processes.

Supporting Enablers

5. Human Capital according to international guidance on judicial capacity, succession planning, and well-being,²⁸ with adaptation to local workforce development strategies emphasizing specialization and future skills.

6. Technology and Innovation by reflecting CEPEJ findings on ICT adoption as a driver of accessibility and resilience,²⁹ in alignment with national digital transformation priorities and local smart government initiatives.

7. Resources and Asset Management In line with World Bank recommendations on financial and infrastructure efficiency,³⁰ adapted to local approaches that emphasize sustainability and optimal use of judicial facilities and resources.

8. Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) **Supported** by ICCE and UNODC principles on governance, accountability, and security,

strengthened with locally developed practices for institutional resilience and compliance.

9. External Collaboration and Partnerships **Consistency** with OECD guidance on cross-sector collaboration for justice reform, contextualized to local efforts to build global partnerships and strengthen institutional collaboration.

10. Performance Monitoring and Continuous Improvement Reflecting ICCE’s Global Measures of Court Performance and continuous improvement models, integrated with locally defined indicators that promote excellence and competitiveness.

Each pillar is subsequently detailed into evaluation criteria that provide measurable outcomes for structured assessment. Together, they create a balanced and internationally benchmarked framework.

Level 1: Basic

Courts operate with fragmented and reactive practices, lacking formal systems or consistency. Processes depend on individual discretion, with minimal use of data or performance monitoring. Delays, backlogs, and low public trust are common at this stage.

Level 2: Good

Initial systems and processes are introduced, showing partial implementation and first signs of structured improvement. While progress is visible, practices are still developing and not yet fully standardized.

Level 3: Consistent

Processes and policies become standardized across departments, supported by regular

performance monitoring. Core functions meet baseline efficiency and fairness requirements, while digital tools and training are more widely adopted.

Level 4: Unique

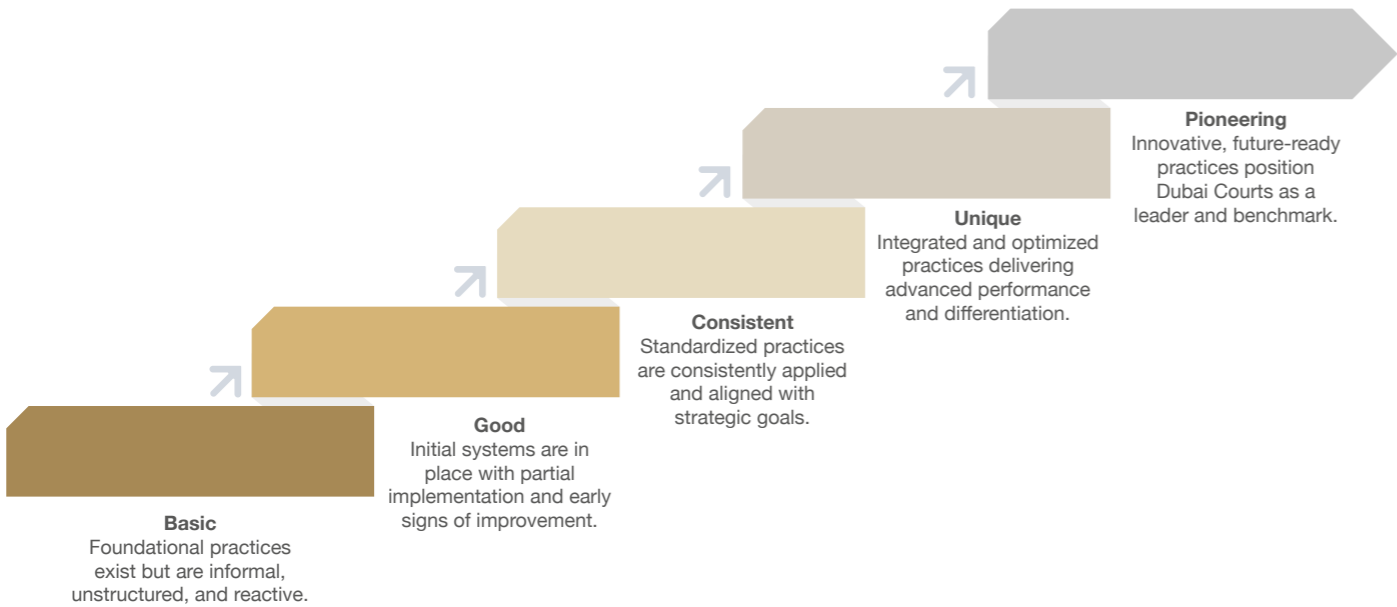
Processes become fully integrated and optimized, delivering advanced performance and differentiation. At this level, the organization leverages best practices to achieve efficiency and measurable impact, setting itself apart from average performers.

Level 5: Pioneering

The organization adopts innovative, future-ready practices that set it up as a leader and point of reference in the field. This stage reflects excellence, foresight, and sustainability, positioning the institution at the forefront of global competitiveness.

2.5 Maturity Levels

The framework applies a five-level maturity model to capture institutional progress across the pillars:



The framework uses a five-level maturity model to track the institutional development through its pillars. Employing maturity levels aligns with widely recognized international practice. For example, OECD governance reviews use staged models to evaluate progress in areas such as regulatory governance and digital government.³¹ Similarly, the International Framework for Court Excellence sets out progressive levels of institutional maturity in key areas of performance.³² The current framework specifically adapts to the judicial context yet remains drawn from these global references to maintain consistency with established best practices.

2.6 Adaptability and Customization

The JCF is a flexible tool capable of adapting to different legal traditions and institutional contexts. Its pillars set out universal dimensions of judicial competitiveness, while its criteria and maturity pathways are structured to allow for local adaptation. This approach reflects widely recognized international best practices in context-sensitive judicial reform, ensuring both global comparability and local relevance. Although rooted in the UAE context, the JCF’s modular design allows any jurisdiction to adapt it by mapping its national priorities to the ten pillars and maturity levels. For instance, courts in emerging economies could begin with foundational pillars such as access to justice and governance, while advanced systems might focus on innovation and continuous improvement.



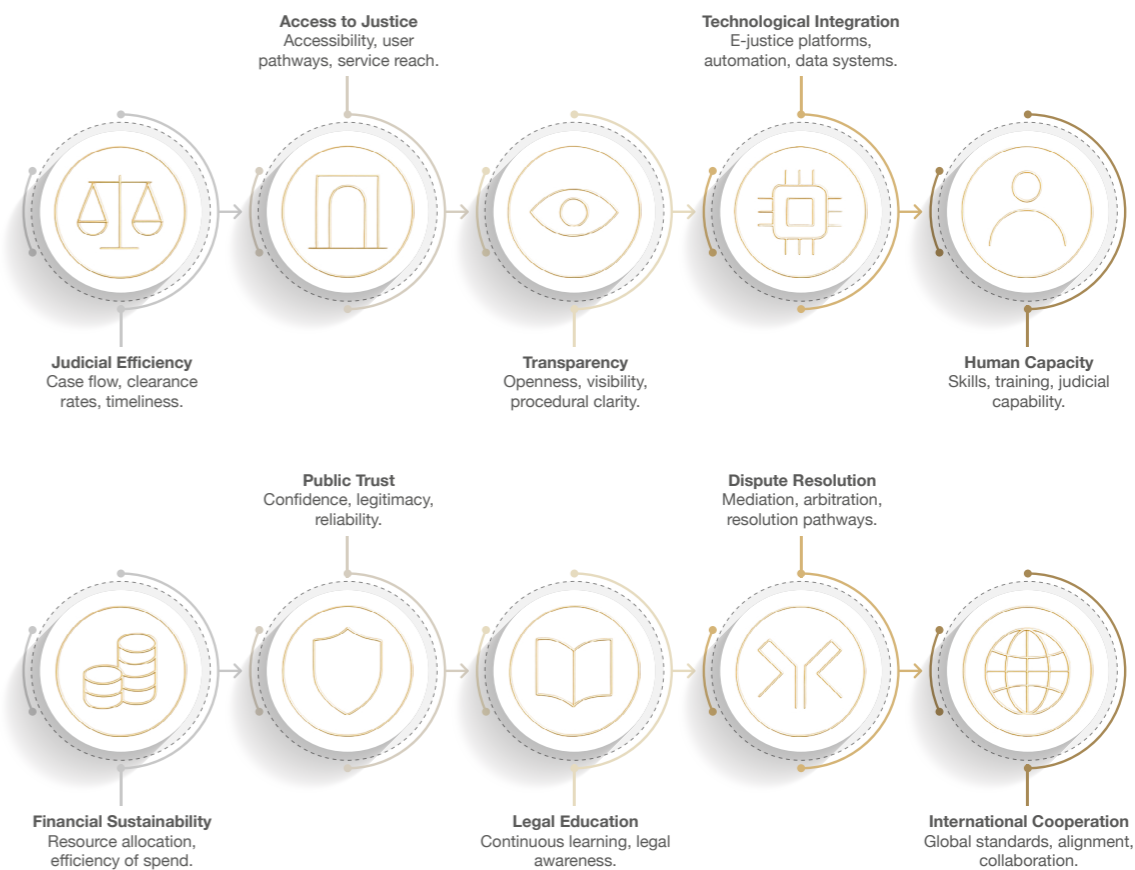
Section 3

Application in Practice - The Case of Dubai Courts

3.1 Method of Application

The Dubai Courts case study provided the first empirical validation of the JCF, applying the framework’s principles to assess and strengthen institutional performance. The JCF was implemented in Dubai Courts, ensuring methodological rigor and alignment with international standards, while also integrating national and emirate-level priorities. Quantitative data were drawn from Dubai Courts’ annual performance reports (2020–2025) and validated through stakeholder interviews and workshops, following CEPEJ methodological standards.

Its application followed a structured process:



1. Criteria Localization

International references from OECD, CEPEJ, ICCE, and the World Bank's JUPITER framework were systematically contextualized to Dubai's judicial environment, incorporating UAE policy priorities such as digital transformation, service excellence, and global competitiveness. This process aligned with UAE policy priorities such as digital transformation, service excellence, and global competitiveness. The adaptation was harmonized with local regulations, including Federal Decree-Law No. 42 of 2022 on Civil Procedures, ensuring that international best practices were integrated into Dubai's unique socio-legal framework.

2. Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through performance reports, documentation reviews, and interviews with key stakeholders. Stakeholders included judges, court administrators, legal practitioners, and members of the Dubai Judicial Council. This dual-method approach provided both empirical data and contextual nuance, in line with CEPEJ standards and Dubai Courts' reporting practices.

3. Self-Assessment and Validation

Leadership teams and staff assessed practices against JCF criteria, with validation workshops led by independent experts. Validation workshops, led by independent experts and comparative law specialists, reinforced objectivity. Peer reviews and benchmarking exercises based on ICCE methodologies ensured credibility and evidence-based assessment.

4. Gap Analysis

Areas of strength and opportunities were mapped across the ten competitiveness pillars, namely: judicial efficiency, access to justice, transparency, technological integration, human capacity, financial sustainability, public trust, legal education, dispute resolution, and international cooperation. Strengths such as e-justice platforms and clearance rates were contrasted with gaps like insufficient training in emerging areas.

5. Strategic Insights

Findings were consolidated into actionable recommendations designed to guide judicial reform and modernization, while reinforcing Dubai's position as a leader in innovative and people-centred justice. These recommendations, grounded in the gap analysis and aligned with UAE policy objectives, include the expansion of digital adjudication platforms, the enhancement of judicial training programs in international arbitration (e.g. ICC and UNCITRAL frameworks), and the institutionalization of public engagement initiatives to bolster trust in the judiciary. By leveraging insights from the OECD's people-centred justice principles and the World Bank's JUPITER framework, the recommendations aim to position Dubai as a vanguard of innovative and people-centred justice. This strategic approach not only addresses current deficiencies but also solidifies Dubai's stature as a global hub for legal excellence, as envisioned in the UAE Vision 2031.



3.2 Institutional Engagement

The success of the assessment was supported by active institutional engagement, which are:

- **Leadership Commitment**, as senior judicial leaders provided endorsement and guidance to the process.
- **Stakeholder Participation**, as judges, administrators, and departments shared data and insights.
- **Collaborative Culture**, as the participatory design reinforced ownership and encouraged alignment across the Courts.

3.3 Outcomes and Benefits

The application of the JCF delivered several important outcomes for Dubai Courts. For the first time, it established a comprehensive baseline that encompassed competitiveness across judicial functions and enabling factors. By benchmarking practices against international standards, the exercise provided a comparative perspective that highlighted strengths and areas requiring further development, while also enabling clear strategic prioritization, with access to justice, digital readiness, and performance monitoring identified as critical drivers of future reform. The process also served as a catalyst for institutional reflection, enabling staff and leadership to evaluate current practices more critically and to engage in shaping priorities for institutional modernization and continuous improvement.

These outcomes align closely with Dubai’s broader sustainability and innovation agenda. The city was awarded the Gold Certification under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Cities Program in recognition of its progress toward building an innovation-driven and sustainable urban environment. Within this context, Dubai Courts contributed directly to achieving SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by integrating justice-related performance indicators and their

calculation methodologies into the Emirate’s Urban Monitoring Framework, ensuring alignment with the SDG Cities Initiative. In 2023, the public satisfaction index with Dubai Courts reached 88 percent, which according to the official benchmark scale reflects a very strong level of institutional trust. This result underscores how resilient and people-centred court systems play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable governance and strengthening institutional competitiveness.

Following the implementation of the JCF and the resulting institutional reforms, Dubai’s judicial transformation has continued to represent one of the most progressive and analytically grounded models of institutional innovation in the region. Guided by a vision that places the individual, society, and sustainable development at the heart of governance, Dubai Courts have advanced beyond the traditional paradigm of dispute resolution toward a more anticipatory, inclusive, and participatory model of justice delivery. Their measurable impact is reflected in the customer happiness index, which has reached 92 percent and has shown continuous growth over the past three years. This outcome reflects a deeper institutional ethos that the legitimacy of justice is inseparable from the satisfaction, trust, and empowerment of its users.

3.4 The Application of Preventive Justice within Dubai

Dubai Courts’ Amicable Dispute Resolution Centre (ADRC) reported a strong performance for 2023, recording a 74.67 % year-on-year increase in reconciliation agreements and about AED 4.77 billion in financial settlements. The Centre resolved 2,531 disputes and issued 3,266 decisions in that year.³³

In the first half of 2024, over 80 % of commercial disputes in Dubai were reportedly resolved amicably, with each case taking an average of just 13 days from registration to settlement and over AED 20.2 billion in settlements recorded.³⁴

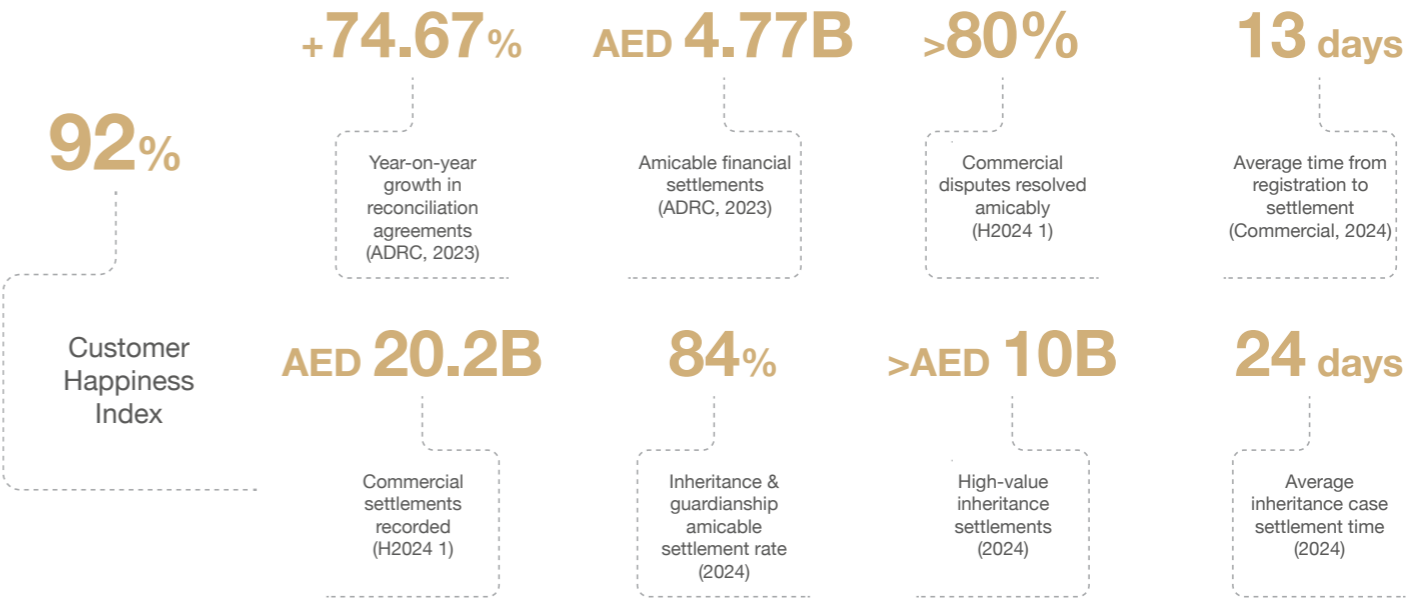
Furthermore, the dedicated Dubai Inheritance Court achieved an 84 % amicable settlement rate in inheritance and guardianship asset matters in 2024, with some settlements valued at over AED 10 billion and an average time to settlement of around 24 days.³⁵

The implications of this transformation are far-reaching. By integrating preventive justice into its judicial framework, Dubai has reduced structural pressure on its courts, improved institutional productivity, and redirected judicial capacity toward complex and precedent-setting matters. This

optimization of resources is accompanied by a parallel increase in public confidence, as individuals now view the judiciary as a partner in ensuring social stability and economic continuity.

In alignment with global justice-service design trends, Dubai Courts actively embeds user voice in service reform. Innovation labs and structured focus sessions are regularly conducted to co-design solutions and enhance user experience. In 2024, Dubai Courts conducted three specialized innovation labs and five public focus sessions, followed by two innovation labs and two user-engagement sessions in 2025, ensuring direct feedback shapes service models and judicial touchpoints.

Dubai’s experience illustrates that preventive justice is not an abstract ideal but a concrete governance instrument aligned with the emirate’s broader strategic vision. It brings together law, innovation, and human development in a unified policy ecosystem. Within this framework, judicial excellence is redefined as a multidimensional concept encompassing accessibility, foresight, adaptability, and ethical responsibility.



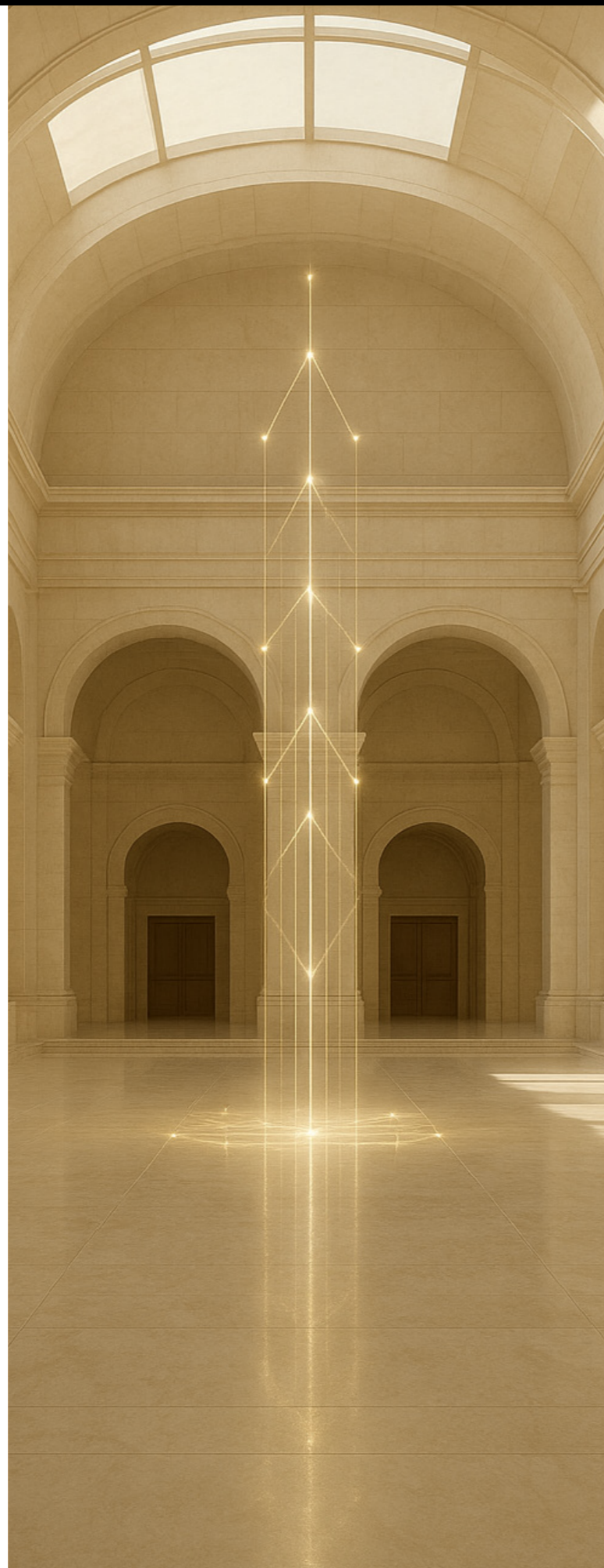
3.5 Judicial Human Resources Data Analysis (2020–2025)

The data spanning the years 2020 to 2025 presents a clear and inspiring picture of Dubai’s judiciary as it continues to strengthen its institutional capacity and modernize its operations. Throughout this period, the evolution of court structures, the expansion of judicial capacity, and the steady professionalization of supporting staff demonstrate a well-planned and forward-looking reform strategy aimed at achieving the highest standards of judicial excellence, efficiency, and specialization.

From 2020 to 2024, the total number of judges serving across the Court of Cassation, Courts of Appeal, First Instance Courts, and the newly established Inheritance Court increased from 201 to 238, reflecting a healthy overall growth of approximately 18 percent. This expansion highlights the judiciary’s ongoing commitment to developing its human capital and ensuring that all levels of the court system are adequately staffed to meet the growing demands of justice delivery.

The First Instance Courts consistently maintained the largest number of judges, averaging around one hundred each year, reaffirming their pivotal role as the foundation of the judicial process. The Court of Cassation demonstrated a steady increase in highly qualified judges, growing from 33 to 40, which reflects the judiciary’s focus on deepening expertise and ensuring excellence at the highest level of adjudication. The introduction of the Inheritance Court in 2023 and its continued development by 2024 stand as strong evidence of Dubai’s commitment to specialization, modernization, and administrative innovation.

Judicial training data further underscores the judiciary’s forward-thinking approach to human



capital development. A comprehensive and ongoing program of professional training has equipped judges with advanced skills and knowledge, ensuring continuous improvement in judicial performance. The consistent participation of judges in these programs reflects a sustained culture of learning, capacity building, and professional excellence.

The number of judicial assistants has shown consistent and healthy growth, increasing from 467 in 2020 to 617 in 2025, a rise of nearly one-third in just five years. This upward trend reflects the judiciary’s strategic commitment to strengthening its administrative backbone and ensuring that judges receive the support necessary to enhance efficiency and service delivery. By 2024, the ratio of assistants to judges had reached about 2.5 to 1, illustrating a well-planned institutional investment in improving the operational capacity and day-to-day functionality of the courts. This deliberate expansion of non-judicial staff is already contributing to streamlined procedures, reduced delays, and improved research and case management support.

Taken together, these developments depict a judiciary that is confidently expanding, diversifying, and modernizing. The post-2022 recovery in both judicial appointments and professional training signals a revitalized institutional drive to consolidate reform achievements. The creation of specialized courts and the steady increase in judicial assistants highlight a forward-looking strategy that links human capital development with structural innovation. By 2025, the judiciary presents a picture of balance and renewal, successfully aligning quantitative growth with qualitative improvement, and coupling expanded staffing levels with a renewed emphasis on capacity building and specialization.

In sum, the period from 2020 to 2025 marks a

phase of sustained, purposeful transformation in the judicial sector. Despite earlier challenges, the overall trajectory points toward a stronger, more efficient, and better-supported judiciary, one that is increasingly equipped to meet the demands of a modern legal system and to deliver justice with greater speed, competence, and reliability.

3.6 Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer

In addition to its evaluative outcomes, the application of the JCF served as a vehicle for institutional learning and capability development. Staff and leadership were introduced to a structured maturity model that provided a systematic approach to evaluating judicial performance. Through a series of knowledge transfer workshops, teams acquired the skills required to conduct periodic self-assessments and to embed these practices into ongoing institutional processes. The initiative also reinforced Dubai Courts’ internal capacity for continuous improvement, aligning with global practices in judicial excellence and governance.³⁶

3.7 Lessons for the Global Judicial Community

The experience of Dubai Courts offers several insights of relevance to jurisdictions worldwide. First, it demonstrates that the JCF possesses the flexibility to be applied across diverse legal traditions while maintaining international comparability. Second, it highlights the value of integrating competitiveness within judicial evaluation as a means of strengthening governance and institutional accountability. Finally, the case illustrates that excellence in the judiciary cannot be measured by efficiency metrics alone; it requires a balanced approach that also emphasizes fairness, public trust, and innovation.



Section 4

Emerging Technology Adoption and Digital Justice

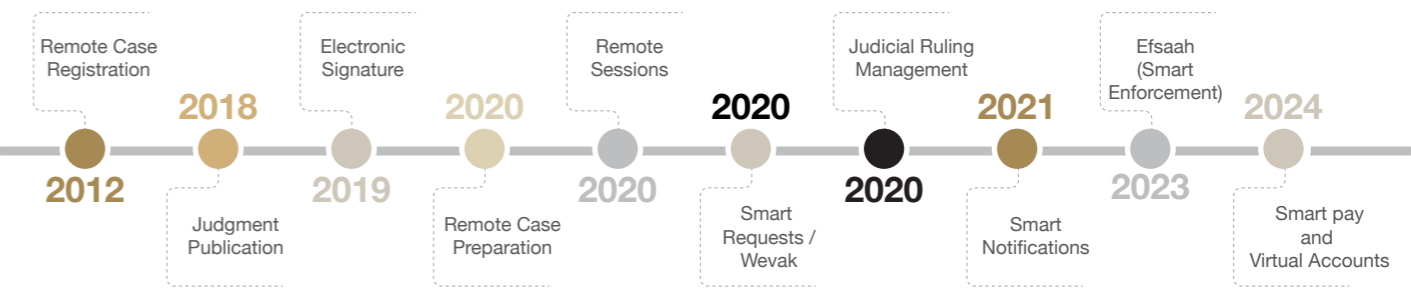
4.1 Evolution of Digital Justice within Dubai Courts

Dubai Courts has emerged as a global leader in digital justice through its pioneering Digital Case File system, a fully integrated platform encompassing case registration, e-filing, real-time case tracking, and remote hearings. This initiative has significantly enhanced both accessibility and operational efficiency, earning Dubai Courts recognition as one of the “Top 10 Courts” for judicial innovation and multiple Stevie Awards, including for customer service excellence, with a 97% user satisfaction rate in 2022.³⁷ These accomplishments demonstrate how strategically embedded digital transformation can simultaneously raise user experience and institutional performance, setting a global benchmark for future-ready courts.

The evolution of the Dubai Courts toward full digitization exemplifies a rich institutional experience, characterized by a series of deliberate and progressive stages that have significantly enhanced the efficiency and integration of the judicial system.

Digital Case File

A seamless digital file that manages the entire case lifecycle from initiation to Enforcement.



Over recent years, the digital transformation has unfolded through several key milestones, reflecting a steadfast commitment to modernizing judicial processes and aligning them with international benchmarks. The journey commenced with the introduction of foundational electronic services, enabling online case filing and document submission, which addressed initial challenges such as manual processing delays and established a robust framework for future growth. This was followed by the implementation of an integrated case management system, allowing real-time tracking of cases and improving accessibility for litigants. A pivotal advancement during this phase was the adoption of secure digital signatures, which bolstered the authenticity and reliability of electronic records, marking a critical step toward procedural integrity. Subsequent developments saw the expansion of e-services to include virtual hearings and automated notifications, streamlining operations and minimizing the need for physical interactions. This phase was supported by the introduction of robust cybersecurity measures, ensuring data protection and reinforcing public confidence in the system.

The most recent stage has leveraged artificial intelligence and analytics, introducing predictive justice tools and personalized case management, which have optimized resource allocation and enhanced decision-making efficiency. Key transitional moments, such as the deployment of a unified digital platform and comprehensive training for judicial staff, have been instrumental in elevating the system’s readiness and operational effectiveness.

A leading example of AI-driven judicial innovation is the “Legal Principles Project,” which leverages AI to extract legal doctrines from thousands of judicial rulings. This system enhances judicial consistency, accelerates legal research, and supports informed judicial decision-making, representing a pioneering model for technology-supported legal reasoning in the region.

This gradual transformation underscores the Dubai Courts’ strategic vision, positioning them as a model of judicial excellence that harmonizes technological sophistication with substantive justice.

4.2 Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities: Technology has the potential to streamline judicial processes, eliminate procedural delays, enhance transparency, widen access to justice, and facilitate efficient cross-border dispute resolution.

Challenges: Risks such as the digital divide, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, privacy concerns, and ethical implications for judges remain significant. The OECD (2021) points out that inclusive governance frameworks are essential to ensure that digital transformation in justice systems strengthens, rather than weakens, public trust.³⁸

4.3 Strategic Outlook

The technological transformation of Dubai Courts, as outlined in the preceding sections, provides valuable insights for the global judiciary on how digital justice can become a catalyst for competitiveness. The future of judicial competitiveness will hinge on how effectively courts harness technology while safeguarding fairness, independence, and transparency. By aligning digital initiatives with frameworks such as the JCF, courts can ensure that technology contributes to efficiency, trust, inclusivity, and resilience. Dubai Courts’ experience shows that digital justice, when strategically governed, can become a catalyst for global competitiveness in the judicial sector.

An examination of Dubai Courts’ recent performance indicators reveals a consistent and substantial advancement in the digitalization and efficiency of judicial services. The year 2024, in particular, stands out as a culmination of multi-year transformation efforts, reflecting near-optimal achievement levels across several strategic dimensions.

The most significant development is observed in the rate of remote litigation, which increased from 91.8% in 2023 to 96% in 2024. This progression underscores the institutional capacity of Dubai Courts to sustain high levels of procedural continuity through digital means, ensuring that access to justice remains uninterrupted and efficient. Such a performance evidence not only technological readiness but also societal confidence in virtual judicial processes, positioning Dubai’s judiciary as a regional model in the integration of remote adjudication mechanisms.



Parallel to this, the digital adoption rate achieved an exceptional 99.12% in 2024, compared with 96.04% in 2023 and 87.04% in 2022. This trajectory reflects a profound cultural and operational shift toward full digital engagement by court users and staff alike. It illustrates the judiciary's success in embedding digital practices into its institutional fabric and in advancing the objectives of Dubai's broader strategy for smart governance and digital excellence. Accordingly, in 2022, Dubai Courts received the "Paperless Seal" as part of their commitment to the Dubai Paperless Strategy.

Equally noteworthy is the maintenance of a 100% digital completion rate across all recorded years (2021–2024). This sustained outcome indicates a mature and fully integrated technological infrastructure that supports the complete life cycle of judicial transactions in a digital format. It confirms the institutional stability and procedural reliability of Dubai Courts' digital ecosystem, where all services can be initiated, processed, and completed electronically.

Moreover, the customer satisfaction rate reached 92.5% in 2024, maintaining the high level recorded in 2023 (92.1%). Sustaining satisfaction above 90% across consecutive years signals a strong alignment between service quality, user expectations, and public trust. This consistency suggests that the judiciary's digital transformation has not only optimized efficiency but also enhanced the perceived fairness and accessibility of its services.

Collectively, the indicators present a compelling case for Dubai Courts as a leading example of judicial modernization and institutional excellence. The data demonstrates that the digital transformation initiatives undertaken in recent years have yielded tangible, measurable, and sustainable outcomes, effectively redefining benchmarks for judicial performance in the digital era.

Future phases of the JCF initiative may include regional adaptation studies and pilot implementations across multiple jurisdictions. Such comparative applications will reinforce the evidence base and promote knowledge exchange between courts pursuing resilience, innovation, and people-centred justice.





Conclusion and Call to Action

The development of the JCF marks a significant step in rethinking judicial excellence for the 21st century. By integrating core judicial functions with enabling capacities, and embedding innovation, technology, and public trust into performance models, the framework responds to global demands for courts that are efficient, transparent, and future-ready.

The case of Dubai Courts illustrates how such a model can be applied in practice, generating strategic insights, institutional reflection, and capacity building while contributing to the international dialogue on justice sector reform. Although institutional contexts differ, the lessons and methodology are transferable across jurisdictions.

Overall, the data from 2020 to 2025 reveals a steady and deliberate transformation within Dubai's judiciary, marked by institutional strengthening, human resource expansion, and growing specialization. Despite temporary setbacks between 2020 and 2022, the subsequent recovery reflects a renewed commitment to judicial reform, with the total number of judges increasing by nearly 18 percent and judicial assistants by one-third. Training policies shifted from broad-based programs to more targeted professional development, signalling an emphasis on quality and specialization over numerical expansion.

The creation of specialized courts such as the Inheritance Court and the sustained increase in administrative support staff underscore a systemic modernization aimed at improving efficiency, procedural integrity, and case management. By 2025, Dubai's judiciary had achieved a more balanced and professional structure better equipped to meet the evolving demands of justice delivery in a modern legal environment.

Moving forward, the JCF can serve as a catalyst for reform and modernization in judicial systems worldwide. Its adaptability allows its application across diverse legal systems, and its maturity-based design provides courts with a roadmap for continuous improvement and competitiveness. In this way, the framework provides a practical contribution to global efforts to strengthen judicial performance and promote institutional excellence.

The partnership between Dubai Courts, Sia, and peer institutions such as the National Center for State Courts demonstrates the potential of the JCF as a collaborative platform for global judicial advancement. Future cooperation can extend the framework's empirical validation, broaden comparative datasets, and refine it further as a living model of judicial resilience and competitiveness.



About the Authors

This white paper was jointly developed by Dubai Courts and Sia, in collaboration with the NCSC (The National Center for State Courts-USA), reflecting a collaborative effort to advance global knowledge on judicial performance and institutional competitiveness.

Dubai Courts

The leading judicial authority of the Emirate of Dubai, committed to delivering accessible, efficient, and transparent justice. Dubai Courts has pioneered judicial innovation in the UAE, implementing initiatives such as the Digital Case File system, e-filing, and remote hearings, while aligning with the UAE's broader vision for smart and competitive governance.

Alia Abdulla AlMheiri

Director of Strategy and Excellence Department
aaalmheiri@dc.gov.ae

Maha Ajil Alsuwaidi

Excellence Section Head
maalsuwaidi@dc.gov.ae

Sia

Sia is a next-generation, global management consulting group. Founded in 1999, we were born digital. Today our strategy and management capabilities are augmented by data science, enhanced by creativity and driven by responsibility. We're optimists for change and we help clients initiate, navigate and benefit from transformation. We believe optimism is a force multiplier, helping clients to mitigate downside and maximize opportunity.

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Cesar P. Moukarzel

Associate Partner, Global Lead of Citizens' Services
Sia
cesar.moukarzel@sia-partners.com

Farah K. Al-Assal

Senior Manager, Regional Lead of Citizens' Service Excellence
Sia
farah.alassal@sia-partners.com

Ahmad Hamzeh

Consultant
Sia
ahmad.hamzeh@sia-partners.com

Co-Author:

Mohammad F. A. Nsour

Ph.D. Lawyer and Law Professor
nsour@nsourlaw.com

Contributor:

Pamela Casey

Ph.D. Vice President, Research & Design,
NCSC - The National Center for State Courts
pcasey@ncsc.org



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