



Reforming India's Justice Delivery System

For Prelims: [Indian judiciary](#), [Supreme Court](#), [e-Courts project](#), [National Judicial Appointments Commission](#), [Lok Adalats](#), [FASTER](#) , [Live streaming of court proceedings](#), [ADR mechanism](#), [Mediation](#), [Public Interest Litigation](#)

For Mains: Judicial Backlog in India, Judicial Reforms in Indian Judiciary, Current Major Issues Related to Indian Judiciary, Key Initiatives Related to Judicial Reforms in India.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

The **Indian judiciary** is facing a massive backlog of **over 5 crore cases** across the **Supreme Court, High Courts, and District Courts**, severely impacting the **justice delivery system, effective governance, and citizen trust** in the legal system.

What are the Key Statistics Related to Judicial Pendency?

Magnitude of Pendency	As of mid-2025, over 5 crore cases are pending in Indian courts, with district courts handling 90% (4.6 crore+) , followed by High Courts (63.3 lakh+) and the Supreme Court (86,700+)
Disposal Disparities (Criminal vs Civil Cases)	<p>Criminal cases have faster disposal, with 85.3% of High Court cases resolved within a year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ In contrast, only 38.7% of civil cases in district courts are resolved within a year, while nearly 20% remain pending over 5 years.▪ The Chief Justice of India voiced concern over the growing pendency of cases, attributing it to a 'fear psychosis' among district courts in granting bail.

What are the Key Factors Contributing to High Pendency of Cases in Indian Courts?

- **Low Judge-Population Ratio:** The judge-to-population ratio remains stagnant at **15 judges per 10 lakh people**, far from the **Law Commission's recommendation of 50**.
 - Although women constitute 38% of the lower judiciary, they are grossly underrepresented in high courts at just 14%
- **Frequent Adjournments:** Frequent adjournments in court cases directly contribute to judicial

pendency, which is the accumulation of unresolved cases.

- This delay in justice delivery undermines public confidence in the legal system
- A study on delayed cases in the Delhi High Court showed that **70% of cases involved more than three adjournments.**
- While procedures exist to limit adjournments, **they are often granted, leading to a "tareek pe tareek (date after date)" culture.**
- **Underutilized ADR:** **ADR** mechanisms like **mediation, arbitration, and conciliation** remain underused despite their potential to reduce backlog.
 - Also, a lack of **centralized, up-to-date, and granular data** on the performance of all ADR mechanisms across the country makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive, national picture of their utilization and effectiveness.
- **Rise in Litigation:** **Growing legal awareness and PILs**, along with **trivial/non-meritorious cases**, increase filings.
 - Nearly **50% of pending cases involve government departments**, where delayed decisions and routine appeals worsen backlog.
- **Structural & Procedural Constraints:** **Inadequate courtrooms, shortage of staff, poor ICT infrastructure, lack of case management systems, frequent adjournments**, witness and evidence delays.

What are the Key Initiatives Related to Judicial Reforms in India?

- **National Mission for Justice Delivery and Legal Reforms (2011):** Aims to **enhance justice access, efficiency, and accountability** through reforms.
- **e-Courts Project:** **Digitizes courts for paperless filing, virtual hearings, and faster case handling.**
- **National Judicial Infrastructure Authority of India:** Proposed body aimed at developing and maintaining uniform judicial infrastructure across the country.
- **Fast Track Special Courts:** Courts dedicated to **speedy trial and disposal of select case types.**
- **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Mechanisms:** Offers **mediation, arbitration, and conciliation** as faster, affordable alternatives to litigation.
- **Tele-Law:** **Connects marginalized people with remote legal advice via technology.**
- **Nyaya Bandhu (Pro Bono):** Volunteer lawyers providing **free legal aid to the needy.**
- **Filling Judicial Vacancies:** From 2014 to 2024, **62 Supreme Court** and **976 High Court judges** were appointed, with **745 made permanent.** High Court strength rose from **906 to 1,114**, and **district courts** from **19,518 to 25,609**, reflecting efforts to **boost judicial capacity and reduce pendency.**

What are the Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms?

Click here to Read: [Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms](#)

What Measures Should be Taken to Strengthen India's Judicial System?

- **Strengthening Judicial Capacity & Appointments:** **Fast-track appointments in High Courts and District Courts** and raise the **judge-to-population ratio to 50 per million (as recommended by 1987 Law Commission).**
 - **Improve efficiency by reforming collegium transparency, increasing retirement age, expanding judge strength, and creating specialized courts.**
 - Implement the **Second ARC's proposals for a National Judicial Council enabling** simplified laws, time-bound hearings, case fast-tracking, court expansion, and enhanced use of IT and training.
- **Infrastructure and Technology Reforms:** Establishing the **National Judicial Infrastructure Authority (NJIA)** will **standardize court facilities.**
 - Expanding the **e-Courts project**, using tools like **FASTER**, and **ongoing staff**

training will enhance **digitization, virtual hearings, and case management efficiency**.

- **Procedural and Case Management Reforms:** Limiting **adjournments**, promoting **summary trials, pre-trial conferences**, and **time-bound hearings** can expedite justice.
 - Integrating **AI tools** for case clustering, listing, and tracking, with defined timelines, will enhance **efficiency** and **transparency** in the judiciary.
- **Promoting ADR and Legal Access:** Expanding **ADR mechanisms** like **mediation, arbitration, and conciliation** can help reduce court burden.
 - Effective implementation of the **Mediation Act, 2023**, and scaling up **Lok Adalats**, which settled **27.5 crore cases (2021-2025)**, highlight the potential of out-of-court resolution.
 - Strengthening **legal aid** through **Tele-Law, mobile clinics**, and wider **NALSA outreach** will improve access to justice for the underserved

Conclusion:

The Indian judiciary stands at a critical juncture, where **reforms must translate into results**. Justice delayed continues to erode **public trust** and **constitutional values**. Bridging the gap between **caseload and capacity**, strengthening **ADR mechanisms**, and modernising **infrastructure and processes** are not mere policy choices but **constitutional obligations** to uphold the rule of law and ensure timely, accessible justice.

Drishti Mains Question:

Judicial pendency is a symptom of a deeper malaise in India's legal system. Critically analyze the structural and procedural constraints contributing to the high backlog of cases and suggest comprehensive reforms to address this challenge

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2019)

1. The 44th Amendment to the Constitution of India introduced an Article placing the election of the Prime Minister beyond judicial review.
2. The Supreme Court of India struck down the 99th Amendment to the Constitution of India as being violative of the independence of judiciary.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (b)

Q. With reference to National Legal Services Authority, consider the following statements: (2013)

1. Its objective is to provide free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society on the basis of equal opportunity.
2. It issues guidelines for the State Legal Services Authorities to implement the legal programmes

and schemes throughout the country.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q. Critically examine the Supreme Court's judgment on 'National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2014' with reference to the appointment of judges of higher judiciary in India. (2017)

Q. Who are entitled to receive free legal aid? Assess the role of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in rendering free legal aid in India (2023)

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