

# Reforming Ukraine's Legal System in the Context of Sustainable Development: Challenges and Prospects\*

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## Abstract

The article aims to analyse the status of reforming the legal system of Ukraine and identify the main challenges and prospects for sustainable development. To achieve this goal, the author used a descriptive research methodology, particularly the PRISMA approach, which included a search for relevant scientific literature (2018-2024) and legislative acts. The study formed four inclusion criteria based on relevance, content, geographical focus, and timeframe. In total, 52 items of scientific materials were analysed. The study results show that Ukraine's legal system has made some progress in aligning with the principles of sustainable development, especially in environmental protection. At the same time, key challenges remain, such as corruption, insufficient harmonisation with international standards, lack of systematic understanding of environmental legislation, and the effects of the financial crisis and Russian aggression. The recommendations include harmonising legislation with EU standards, strengthening the environmental component, focusing on socially oriented legal reforms, ensuring economic justice, and digitalising judicial and law enforcement processes. The study confirms that adherence to Ukraine's European integration course and implementing environmental and social principles can strengthen the legal framework for sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Reforming the Legal System; Sustainable Development; Harmonisation of Legislation; Anti-Corruption Measures; Digitalisation of the Judicial System; International Standards; Principles of Law.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become a fundamental principle of modern society, requiring balanced economic growth, social welfare, and environmental protection, with legal system reform serving as a crucial mechanism to achieve these goals in Ukraine. The country's ongoing transformation faces multifaceted challenges from globalization, European integration, military conflict, and socioeconomic pressures, all demanding legal system adaptation (Kaminskyy, 2024). As Ukraine strives for EU membership, aligning its legal framework with international sustainable development standards presents particular challenges in regulatory harmonization. The legal system's role as both regulator and enabler of sustainable development makes its reform an urgent priority, especially regarding anti-corruption measures, judicial transparency, and rule of law strengthening.

This study examines Ukraine's legal reform challenges through a sustainability lens, focusing on three key areas: (1) harmonization with international standards, (2) digitalization of legal processes, and (3) integration of sustainable development principles across economic, social and environmental dimensions. Despite reform progress, significant gaps remain in implementing innovative approaches to sustainable governance. The research employs a theoretical framework grounded in sustainable development concepts while empirically analyzing current reforms, their outcomes, and persistent challenges in Ukraine's legal transformation.

The research aims to examine the process of reforming Ukraine's legal system within the sustainable development framework, identify key challenges, and develop recommendations for optimizing the legal system to align with the core principles of sustainable development. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: What is the state of Ukraine's legal system in terms of its alignment with the principles of sustainable development? What challenges does Ukraine face in integrating the concept of sustainable development? What recommendations can be formulated to optimize legal regulation in Ukraine to promote sustainable development?

The study proposes the following hypothesis, requiring comprehensive scientific validation: the insufficient adaptation of national legislation to current international sustainable development standards hampers Ukraine's economic, social, and environmental progress.

## **Literature Review**

### **Areas of legal system optimization, innovations**

Contemporary academics have explored various legislative reform techniques and identified key areas for systemic improvement, with particular emphasis on innovative solutions in legal system evolution. Blikhar et al. (2020) analyzed Ukraine's economic and legal development to determine the prerequisites for its sustainable and creative growth, while Cherep et al. (2024) assessed the impact of artificial intelligence technologies on the country's socioeconomic security, emphasizing their critical role in advancing European integration. Golovko et al. (2020) examined the implementation of European standards in Ukraine's legal framework, and Iliev (2022) highlighted the regulatory challenges and opportunities of Blockchain technology, demonstrating its significance for modern legal systems.

Further research suggests that emerging data exchange technologies could transform society into a more transparent and equitable system. Judicial reform has also been a focal point, with Woelk (2024) analyzing it through the lens of the rule of law, offering key insights into ensuring judicial independence in Ukraine. Concurrently, Pomaza-Ponomarenko et al. (2024) investigated the dynamics of legal transformations and their societal impact, proposing new methodologies for evaluating legislative reform effectiveness. Innovative educational approaches, such as online distance learning (ODL), have also been recognized as potential models for systemic change, with Ismail et al. (2022) demonstrating ODL's effectiveness in enhancing student motivation through empowerment, usefulness, and engagement. Environmental justice has likewise been a critical area of study, with Saputra et al. (2024) examining sanctions for environmental violations and proposing mechanisms to strengthen Ukraine's environmental law, while Yeshchenko et al. (2021) underscored the importance of legislative regulation in ecology as a core component of sustainable development.

### **European integration course as a basis for further legal transformations**

Contemporary authors emphasize that Ukraine's legal system must evolve through qualitative improvements, European integration, adherence to international norms, and alignment with key principles (Gryshchenko et al., 2021; Bondarenko et al., 2020), with future trends prioritizing the rule of law, human rights, prevention of state abuses, codification of legislation, and adoption of European legal standards in law enforcement (Kachur et al., 2020;

Kubiv et al., 2020). In the digital sphere, Rodinova et al. (2024) highlight economic challenges and prospects, stressing the integration of sustainable development into state strategies through legal measures, while Shcherbakovskiy et al. (2020) address corruption-related evidentiary hurdles, proposing reforms to strengthen the rule of law. Teremetskyi et al. (2024) examine the influence of the European Court of Human Rights on Ukraine's judicial system, and Tylchuk et al. (2018) analyze anti-money laundering efforts and financial transparency as key to European integration. Therefore, these works provide a multidisciplinary foundation for legal modernization but reveal gaps in comprehensive studies on sustainable development-oriented reforms, particularly in innovative solutions beyond EU standard adoption. This study aims to address these gaps by defining key development vectors, challenges, and prospects for Ukraine's legal system within a sustainable development framework.

## **B. METHODS**

This quantitative descriptive study examines Ukraine's legal system reform process without analyzing cause-and-effect relationships, focusing instead on systematically collecting and analyzing current scientific materials related to legal optimization. The research employs purposive sampling of scholarly sources, including academic literature (articles, monographs, and conference proceedings) and official reports addressing both Ukraine's legal reforms and international experiences with sustainable development integration. Grounded in factual data from scientific literature and Ukrainian legislation, the study aims to accurately describe the reform process while identifying key challenges and future directions for aligning Ukraine's legal framework with sustainable development principles.

### **Official Acts**

Ukrainian laws pertinent to legal system reforms and the promotion of sustainable development. Pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to select relevant academic literature and official acts. These criteria were based on relevance, content alignment, thematic consistency, and temporal and geographical scope (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Materials**

| <b>Inclusion criteria</b>                                            |                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The study describes the state of the legal system of Ukraine         | The study describes in detail the peculiarities of the functioning of the legal system of Ukraine, identifies ways to reform it and certain challenges |
| Geographical focus: Ukraine and EU countries                         | The paper outlines the key principles of sustainable development and the main directions of legal reform                                               |
| Data relevance and timeframe                                         | For inclusion, attention was paid to the works related to Ukraine and EU countries                                                                     |
| The study describes the state of the legal system of Ukraine         | The research includes works that provide up-to-date information and were written during 2018-2024.                                                     |
| <b>Exclusion criteria</b>                                            |                                                                                                                                                        |
| The study does not correspond to the topic                           | The paper does not address the functioning of the legal system of Ukraine and does not identify ways to reform it                                      |
| The study does not describe key aspects of sustainable development   | The study lacks aspects of sustainable development                                                                                                     |
| The paper does not describe the realities of Ukraine or EU countries | The research does not describe the practice of law reform in Ukraine and EU countries in the framework of ensuring sustainable functioning             |
| Time range and incomplete works                                      | Studies that are incomplete and unavailable are not included<br>Publications before 2018 are not included in the study                                 |

*Source: author's development*

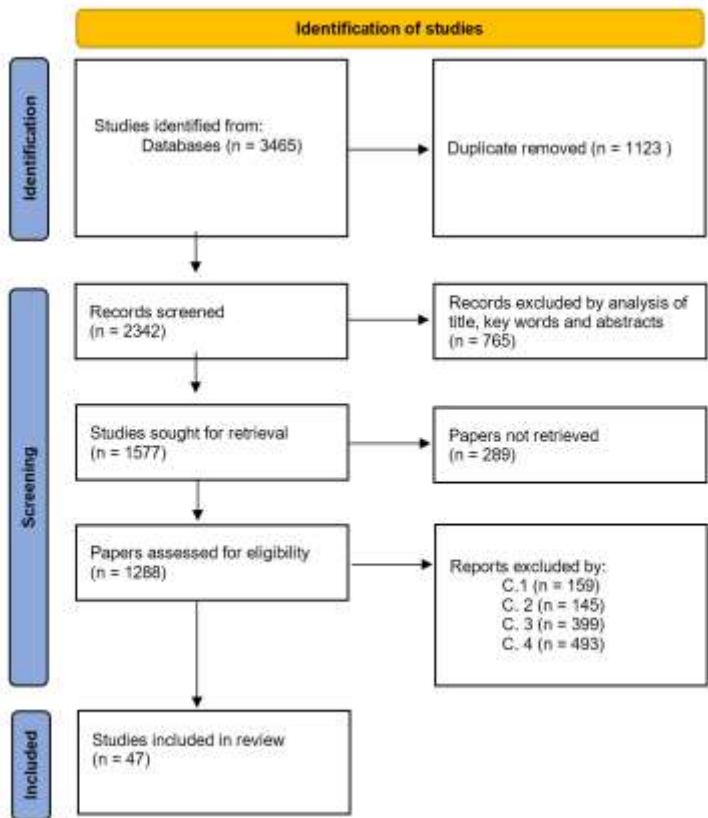
## **Procedures**

Initially, the collection of key legislative acts related to the reform of Ukraine's legal system was carried out:

- On the Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine for the Period up to 2030, Law No. 280/97-BP (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2019).
- On the Ecological Network of Ukraine, Law No. 1864-IV (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2023).
- On the Protection of the Environment, Law No. 1264-XII (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024b).
- On Social Dialogue in Ukraine, Law No. 2862-VI (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024a).
- On Local Self-Government in Ukraine, Law No. 280/97-BP (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2025).

This study employed the PRISMA framework to systematically identify and analyze relevant academic literature through searches in Google Scholar and Web of Science using keywords including "reforms," "Ukraine," "legal system," "sustainable development," and related terms. From an initial pool of 3,456 results, the selection process involved removing duplicates and non-novel works (1,123 exclusions), screening titles/abstracts for topical relevance (765 exclusions), eliminating 289 irrelevant studies, and finally applying inclusion/exclusion criteria to yield the final corpus of studies, as detailed in Table 1 and Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Data collection in accordance with the PRISMA approach**



*Source: author's development*

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was also phased and comprehensive. It consisted of a legal analysis, which included a study of key legislative acts, international agreements, and other legal documents. In particular, the main laws related to Ukraine's sustainable development were first reviewed, and the mechanisms for implementing the commitments made under various international acts were identified. For the scientific literature, the content analysis method was used. It was also carried out in stages. First, the key concepts and principles of sustainable development in scientific texts were identified. Microsoft Excel software was used to analyze all the texts. This software was chosen because of its availability and convenience in organizing data. Data such as "author" or "law", "year of publication" or "year of amendment", "main aspects of reform", and "general conclusions" were entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. This allowed for data coding. After that, a comparative analysis of the data obtained with the works of other scholars was carried out.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Russia's ongoing invasion has created severe economic, environmental, and social crises in Ukraine, undermining previous sustainable development initiatives and rendering many ineffective (Kaminsky, 2024; Perfenko, 2024). Despite these challenges, Ukraine must continue pursuing EU integration by aligning its legal framework with European standards, particularly in sustainable development - a cornerstone of national policy (Clarke & Gold, 2024). This requires implementing UN sustainable development goals ranging from poverty reduction to environmental protection through a comprehensive approach: cross-sectoral legal reforms, gradual integration of sustainability principles across all governance levels, strengthened civil society engagement, and harmonization with international legal standards. The current conflict makes this transformation more urgent yet more difficult to achieve.

In particular, the Law of Ukraine "On the Ecological Network of Ukraine" (2023) or "On the Protection of the Environment" (2024) should consider climate change adaptation as an important factor in regulating low-carbon development and renewable energy and develop an effective sanction mechanism against those who pollute and stimulate environmental costs (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2023; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024b). A possible direction of the Law of Ukraine "On Social Dialogue in Ukraine" (2024)

is the further development of a legislative framework that will support the social orientation of business, which can help reduce social and gender inequality and create new jobs (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024a). The Law of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine” (2025) forms the basis for local community governance but does not consider the opportunities for formulating local sustainable development strategies (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2025). In addition, local communities openly lack legally grounded opportunities to manage local resources and thus to finance and implement projects at the local level. In the context of Ukraine's European integration, there is a need to develop and implement the provisions of the Association Agreement with the EU, including those related to environmental protection, gender equality, social protection, and economic cooperation.

At the same time, there is a need to define in more detail the challenges currently relevant to Ukraine's legal system. The content analysis of scientific opinions allowed us to summarize a separate sample of the problems faced by Ukraine in integrating the concept of sustainable development (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Challenges to the legal system of Ukraine**

| № | Challenge                                                     | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Corruption and low trust in the judiciary                     | Corruption, despite the formation of new anti-corruption bodies, remains a serious problem, as it undermines the effectiveness of legal enforcement, especially in the areas of environment and social protection. Low trust in the judiciary creates obstacles to ensuring justice and protecting citizens' rights, and to the country's further progress in the context of sustainable development.                                                                                                                        |
| 2 | Lack of harmonization with international standards            | Lack of the necessary level of adaptation of Ukrainian legislation to the standards and requirements of European structures and certain international agreements (e.g., the Paris Climate Agreement). The integration of mechanisms for the implementation and enforcement of international norms into the domestic Ukrainian legal framework is also problematic.                                                                                                                                                           |
| 3 | Lack of systematic understanding of environmental legislation | The lack of integration of environmental issues into legislative reforms has become an obstacle to proper protection of natural resources, climate change, or waste management. Similarly, the effectiveness of sanctions for violations of environmental laws is low, which makes the process of environmental protection much more difficult.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 4 | Financial difficulties                                        | The lack of financial capacity to support the implementation of reforms in the judicial and law enforcement systems, the creation of new environmental development strategies and plans to improve infrastructure projects do not contribute to sustainable development. The lack of incentives for businesses to implement sustainable development principles (even the Green Tariff program in the energy sector is only marginally funded) is not compensated by the existing system of legislative privileges or grants. |

|   |                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | Impact of the war and its consequences | Infrastructure losses and the gradual depletion of available resources because of hostilities make it difficult to implement reforms.<br><br>Forced displacement creates additional burdens for the social system. Attention to the needs of the war constrains civil society initiatives. |
|---|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

*Source: compiled by the authors based on the analysis of Dyka et al. (2024); Asgarova (2022); Gulac et al. (2022); Mabeba (2024).*

Overcoming these challenges further achieving the goals of sustainable development, which is defined as maintaining a harmonious balance between the principles and needs of economic growth, adherence to the fundamentals of social justice, and further preservation of the environment for the needs of future generations, will also require the gradual integration of the principles of this concept into all aspects of public policy, including such a relevant area as the legal system of Ukraine. In the context of responding to the existing global challenges and internal transformations, further transformations of the legal system of Ukraine are becoming an essential aspect of ensuring the successful future of every citizen, respect for their rights and freedoms, economic, social, and political needs, etc. Given this, there is a specific list of areas for reforming the legal system of Ukraine, considering current challenges (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Main directions for reforming the legal system of Ukraine**

|  | Direction                  | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Harmonization              | One viable avenue for the legal system's further development is harmonising Ukraine's domestic laws with those of other countries. Ukraine complies with the Paris Agreement and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) standards, as it is an active party to numerous international treaties about sustainable development concepts. The principles of adapting Ukrainian national legislation to international environmental, social, and economic standards – particularly in EU nations with sustainable economies – should also be considered for future legislative changes. |
|  | Environmental friendliness | One of the main tenets of the legal system reform should be the environmentalization of the current Ukrainian legislation. Regulation of the use of natural resources, the reduction and active control of greenhouse gas emissions, adherence to the conservation of wildlife biodiversity, and the management of solid, chemical, and other waste kinds all require further improvement.                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|  | Sociality                  | Economic development should consider the rights of society and its segments. Social orientation guarantees active reforms, which should aim to protect the rights of vulnerable groups of citizens, observe the important principle of equality in the right of access to court decisions, create various mechanisms to bridge social gaps, and reduce social inequality.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | Economic justice           | Achieving economic justice and fair legal regulation in business is no less important than overcoming social inequality. The idea of developing a green economy creates the need to further introduce and apply incentives for businesses that understand their environmental responsibility to the population and the country. This area of legislation regulates the possibilities for introducing tax benefits, special financing regimes for environmental producers, and the application of severe sanctions against violators of environmental standards.                      |

|  |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Digitalization  | The process of digitalization of the legal system is based on the active use of modern digital technologies in the legal sector. It will contribute to a tangible increase in the efficiency and transparency of judicial decision-making. Maintaining and developing electronic court proceedings, online consultations, or other digital legal services should potentially reduce corruption challenges. |
|  | Law enforcement | The law enforcement reform is intended to ensure effective implementation of Ukrainian legislation through judicial reform, organization of professional training of judges and law enforcement officers, and adherence to the vector for further functioning of independent anti-corruption judicial authorities.                                                                                         |

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Babin (2020); Holovko-Havrysheva (2020); Kurepina (2023); Kroitor and Mamnitskyi (2019).

Therefore, bringing Ukraine's legal system into compliance with the contemporary idea of sustainable development will undoubtedly become a rather drawn-out process that calls for a thorough strategy and the active collaboration of business structures, civil society, and public authorities to be implemented successfully. Thus, incorporating sustainable development concepts into the legal system and law enforcement operations presents both a challenge and a singular chance to establish a contemporary, competitive state with steady growth and a foreseeable future. Further successful implementation of reforms can provide several benefits for the future (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Results of proper reform of the legal system in compliance with the requirements of the concept of sustainable development**



Source: compiled by the authors

Despite significant progress in aligning Ukraine's legal framework with sustainable development principles, particularly through environmental legislation and anti-corruption institutions like NABU and HACC, substantial

challenges persist due to implementation gaps, corruption, and weak institutional capacity (Verkhovna Rada, 2019; Patyka et al., 2023). The study reveals that while strategic documents like Ukraine 2030 and EU-aligned laws demonstrate reform commitment, challenges including judicial distrust, inadequate harmonization with international standards, and poorly considered socio-economic impacts of environmental laws hinder progress. Although anti-corruption reforms established crucial institutional frameworks, entrenched corruption persists due to insufficient independence of anti-corruption bodies, limited investigative resources, and lack of systemic risk prevention (Lokshyna, 2020; Ibatullin et al., 2024). Overcoming these obstacles requires strengthened international cooperation, domestic commitment, and comprehensive approaches to ensure the legal system effectively promotes sustainable development amidst ongoing challenges from Russian aggression.

While Ukraine has made progress by establishing anti-corruption bodies and implementing transparent systems like ProZorro (Kotzé, 2019; Pasha et al., 2022), significant challenges persist, including political pressure on institutions, low conviction rates for corruption (Coleman & Doe, 2024), and opaque judicial selection processes (Zaiets et al., 2022). The effectiveness of reforms is further hampered by lack of political will (Kovalenko et al., 2023), insufficient harmonization with international standards, and the ongoing impact of Russian aggression. Although Ukraine demonstrated institutional capacity through parliamentary initiatives (Verkhovna Rada, 2019), momentum for deeper reforms has stalled. Key development vectors include EU legal harmonization, digitalization of justice, and sustainable development integration (Lukianets-Shakhova et al., 2024; Damak & Eweade, 2024), though digitalization alone is insufficient without complementary reforms to ensure transparency and norm compliance (Zolkover, 2024). A comprehensive approach combining these elements is essential for achieving sustainable legal transformation.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations in addition to its significant theoretical value, which has demonstrated the primary obstacles to reform, and its practical value, which includes formulating several significant recommendations for additional legal reforms within the framework of sustainable development. It is worth noting that the study focuses on the Ukrainian case, and therefore, the paper describes Ukrainian realities in detail. Another significant drawback is the analysis of exclusively modern scientific literature (from 2018). This has led to the paper not paying attention to the historical context of implementing legal sector reforms in Ukraine. However, these limitations do not detract from the value of the study. The data obtained was verified by comparing various scientific works, such as reports, laws, and

other scientific papers. This made it possible to confirm the results and identify further areas of scientific development in the chosen topic.

## D. CONCLUSIONS

Developing Ukraine's legal system for sustainable development requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating sustainability principles into legislation, strengthening civil society, and aligning with EU standards. Analysis highlights the need for climate adaptation policies, support for socially oriented businesses, and improved local governance to reduce inequality and create jobs. However, challenges persist, including Russian aggression's socio-legal impacts, financial constraints, weak environmental law implementation, corruption, and misalignment with international standards. Key recommendations include harmonizing laws with EU norms, prioritizing environmental and social justice, and advancing judicial digitization. These measures, alongside Ukraine's European integration, can establish a legal foundation for sustainable development.

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