

"We need to think about rights, justice & the rule of law at national level, in our social structures, legal system and state machinery."

- Prof. Colm Ó Cinnéide at the  
2025 FLAC Justice  
Lecture



**Embargoed until 1am on 13 July 2026**

# Making the Case for Change

# FLAC Annual Report 2025





# About FLAC

**FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres)** is an independent legal, equality and human rights non-governmental organisation which works in a number of different ways to promote **access to justice**:

- FLAC runs a **Telephone Information & Referral Line** that provides basic legal information.
- Volunteer barristers and solicitors provide free phone **legal advice clinics**.
- FLAC's **Public Interest Law Alliance, PILA**, operates a Pro Bono Referral Scheme which facilitates social justice organisations to access legal assistance from private practitioners acting pro bono.
- Our Independent Law Centre:
  - undertakes **public interest litigation** in cases that may have a broader impact in addition to benefitting the individual client.
  - operates dedicated and targeted services via the **Traveller Legal Service** and **Roma Legal Clinic**.
- FLAC undertakes **policy and research** and **law reform campaigning** in areas of law which are most connected with poverty, discrimination and disadvantage, informed by our experience of providing legal assistance.

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# Message from Fiona Donson, FLAC Chairperson

On behalf of FLAC Council, I would like to pay tribute to the many people and stakeholders who made the work and achievements recorded in the pages of this report possible.

FLAC's work would not be possible without those who volunteer to support the organisation, including the volunteers and law firms working on the phoneline and in clinics, the barristers who assist with casework, and the members of the PILA alliance.

I wish to express our immense gratitude to all of FLAC's funders – from Government Departments and statutory bodies to the Law Society, the Bar of Ireland, and philanthropic organisations such as the Community Foundation of Ireland, as well as our wide array of sustaining partners (who support PILA) and individual law firms, practitioners and private individuals – for providing the financial resources that allow FLAC to undertake its work.

We thank our funders for their vision in ensuring that we can support those people who need us in the community. We are also grateful to the King's Inns for again welcoming so many members of the extended FLAC family for the 2025 Justice Lecture and to Professor Colm Ó Cinneide and FLAC's Artistic Patron Stephen Rea for their truly inspirational presentations.

FLAC is also very fortunate to be able to draw on the deep commitment to access to justice within the legal profession, civil society, law schools and student societies across the island of Ireland. Our FLAC community continues to grow and we are very grateful for them. We continue to be proud to work in collaboration with partners and stakeholders who share our vision of a fairer and more just society.

I wish to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of FLAC's fantastic staff and Eilis for her leadership. I want to bid a sad farewell to Lauren Flanagan, Ingrid Colvin and Caroline Smith and thank them for their enormous contribution to FLAC. FLAC Council is acutely aware of the cost-of-living crisis, how FLAC's salaries and benefits fall far short of the private and public sector and how many staff have not had a pay increase for years. The dedication, passion and commitment of staff allow us to continue to deliver the quality support that we provide across legal assistance, representation, and policy and campaigns. This is not taken for granted and FLAC Council is committed to ensuring that this work is recognised and fairly remunerated.





## Foreword by Eilis Barry, FLAC Chief Executive



This 2025 Annual Report highlights the extent of unmet legal need that our hugely oversubscribed Telephone Information & Referral Line, Traveller Legal Service and Roma Legal Clinic encounter on a daily basis. It was this unmet need and the inadequacies of the Civil Legal Aid scheme that was the catalyst for our campaign for a comprehensive review of our civil legal aid system. One highlight of 2025 was the publication of the reports which arose from the Review of Civil Legal Aid. I was honoured to serve as FLAC's nominee on the Review Group and drafted a Minority Report which was joined and supported by Professor

Thomas O'Malley SC. The Minority Report describes the system of public legal assistance as being in crisis - failing and unable to meet significant legal need, especially among individuals and groups who live in poverty, extreme poverty and/or who experience disadvantage and discrimination.

Comprehensive, meaningful reform is doable, practical and cost effective. Establishing general and targeted information services, a network of community law centres in the areas of highest deprivation and targeted centres - for example for people with disabilities - is comparatively cheap and would transform access to justice for the most disadvantaged communities.

The contents of this report clearly corroborate the case for the implementation of the Minority Report reforms. FLAC's Telephone Information and Referral Line team received 66,361 calls during 2024. It had capacity to respond to 14,103 queries in 2025, the highest since 2015, mainly in the areas of family or employment law. FLAC answered 635 queries in relation to domestic violence during 2025, an 18% increase since 2024 and a record high. 2025 also saw the highest number of employment law queries (3,317) ever recorded on the phonenumber, accounting for almost one-quarter of all calls (up 42% compared with the previous year).

There was also a 57.5% increase in queries relating to housing/landlord and tenant issues (1,189 queries). In addition to the phonenumber, volunteer lawyers and solicitors also provided basic legal advice to over 3,600 people at free legal advice clinics.

FLAC has nowhere to refer callers with problems in areas like landlord/tenant, employment and discrimination law because the Legal Aid Board cannot provide legal representation in cases before tribunals like the WRC or RTB. It also has no function to provide legal information.

In 2025, FLAC's Independent Law Centre and its dedicated services for the Traveller and Roma communities, provided 234 people with legal representation – mainly in discrimination and housing/homelessness cases. Again, these are areas where legal aid is not provided.

FLAC provided representation in relation to 107 complaints (or potential complaints) under the equality legislation. During 2025, FLAC's clients in discrimination cases received a total of €91,850 in financial compensation. The very high levels of discrimination against Travellers and Roma who are seeking to access shops, pubs, hotels and restaurants, and in particular cases concerning Roma and access to shops, reinforces our previous calls for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to issue a Code of Practice which addresses access to goods and services and, in particular, the role and responsibilities of security guards.

The very high levels of discrimination witnessed by our Independent Law Centre led to our campaign for a review of the equality legislation. FLAC welcomed the provisions in the General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024, which proposed to increase potential compensation for equal status complaints from €15,000 to €75, 000, to move the jurisdiction for hearing discrimination complaints against licensed premises from the District Court to the WRC, and to improve reasonable accommodation requirements for people with disabilities. We also welcomed the Oireachtas Equality Committee's report in October 2025, which also adopted many of FLAC's recommendations for strengthening the legislation. It is regretful that this legislation has stalled. While it requires improvements and expansion, it is the most significant law reform initiative in this area for two decades. We were pleased that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in Geneva called for the Equality Bill to be expedited and for "access to legal aid and legal representation for women in all areas of law where discrimination occurs".

FLAC's intervention in housing cases resulted in a number of families being able to access social housing or emergency, including a Traveller family who had been living on the roadside in poor conditions for five years. The outcomes in FLAC's housing casework illustrates the consistent issues with the quality and fairness of decision-making by local authorities regarding social housing and emergency homelessness accommodation. At present, judicial review is often the only way to challenge unfair or unlawful decisions concerning access to social housing or emergency accommodation. However, the provisions the Civil Reform Bill which is currently under consideration would block many of these cases.

2025 also saw the introduction of legislation to give effect to the O'Meara decision. 150,000 cohabitating couples and families could benefit from the expanded entitlement to bereavement payments which it provides for. The O'Meara case is another example of the importance of access to judicial review and it is difficult to see how that case could have proceeded if the provisions of the General Scheme of the Civil Reform Bill had been in effect.

At the inspirational FLAC Justice Lecture in December 2025, Professor Colm O'Cinneide highlighted that "we find ourselves in an era where human rights are not as fashionable as they once were." That resonates with the proposed reforms of judicial review, the recent Housing Bill which could block many migrants from access to social housing and emergency accommodation, and the stalling of the Equality Bill. Colm also advised that we must "stay the course in making the case for rights, justice and the rule of law." FLAC will continue to "stay the course". We fervently hope that the Minister will use this once in a generation opportunity to establish a fit for purpose system of public legal assistance and also adopt the recently published recommendations of the Oireachtas Justice Committee in relation to the Civil Reform Bill and engage with people adversely affected by it.

Finally, I want to thank all of the FLAC Council members for their sterling ongoing support and valuable hidden work, in particular our chair Róisín Fitzpatrick who stepped back in August 2025 while on maternity leave and Fiona Donson who stepped up so willingly and with such grace to become Chairperson. I also want to pay tribute to FLAC's staff for their incredible dedication, inspiration, passion and hard work.



# 2025 Overview & Highlights

**14,103 Queries** were answered by the FLAC Telephone Information and Referral Line during 2025 – the highest since 2015:

- **3,317 Employment Law Queries** – a record high.
- **1,189 Housing Queries** – a 57.5% increase since 2024.
- **635 Domestic Violence Queries** – the highest ever and an 18% increase since 2024.

**The Telephone Information and Referral Line received 66,371 calls during 2025.** This includes a number of repeat calls from people desperate to access legal information.

**234 people** were provided with legal representation by FLAC's Independent Law Centre

**127 clients had a case about housing or homelessness.**

- A number of families were able to access social housing/emergency accommodation on foot of FLAC's intervention, including a Traveller family living who had been living on the roadside for five years.

**91 clients had an equality/discrimination case.**

- During 2025, FLAC's clients in discrimination cases received a total of €91,850 in financial compensation.
- The WRC ordered a beauty salon pay €500 each to a Traveller mother and her two daughters after they were subject to discriminatory treatment.

**The General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill** was published.

It contains a number of very welcome provisions which would significantly increase compensation levels, create stronger requirements to provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities, make the complaint process more accessible and move the jurisdiction for claims against licenced premises from the District Court back to the WRC.

The Oireachtas Equality Committee adopted FLAC's recommendations to improve the Bill, including our recommendations for making the legislation accessible and adding a socio-economic status ground.

**3,640 people received basic legal advice** from volunteer lawyers – mainly in the areas of family law and employment law.

**29 Social Justice Organisations** accessed pro bono legal assistance facilitated by FLAC's public interest law project – **PILA**.

**44,906 hours of pro bono work** were undertaken by signatories to PILA's Pro Bono Pledge

**Civil Legal Aid Review:** The reports to emerge from the first ever comprehensive review of the civil legal aid system were published.

Eilis Barry (FLAC Chief Executive) submitted a Minority Report. FLAC is campaigning for the implementation of its clear, practical and cost-effective recommendations to resolve the legal aid crisis.

**The Bereaved Partner's Pension Act 2025** was enacted.

It gives effect to the O'Meara decision and expands entitlement for bereavement payments to qualified cohabitants and their children. 150,000 cohabiting couples/families could potentially benefit from its provisions. Positively, the legislation goes beyond the minimum requirements of the O'Meara judgment by including cohabitants who do not have children.

**The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**

adopted several of FLAC's recommendations. CEDAW called for the Equality Bill to be expedited and for "access to legal aid and legal representation for women in all areas of law where discrimination occurs".

# Section One:

## Early & Preventative Legal Assistance

Access to early legal information, advice and advocacy for individuals and groups can prevent legal problems from arising or getting worse and may prevent or reduce the need for litigation.

### Legal Information: Telephone Information & Referral Line

FLAC's Telephone Information and Referral Line team responded to **14,103 queries** in 2025, **the highest since 2015**. This figure reflects our greater capacity to answer calls rather than the level of demand for legal information which remains extremely high and which we simply cannot meet. The Telephone Information and Referral Line received 66,371 calls during 2025. This includes a number of repeat calls from people desperate to access legal information. We are very grateful to Arthur Cox, Matheson, Maples, and Simmons & Simmons who provide staff to the phonenumber which enables significantly more queries to be answered.

In addition, **2,360 call backs** were made to service users to provide them with further information or set up an appointment in a FLAC clinic.

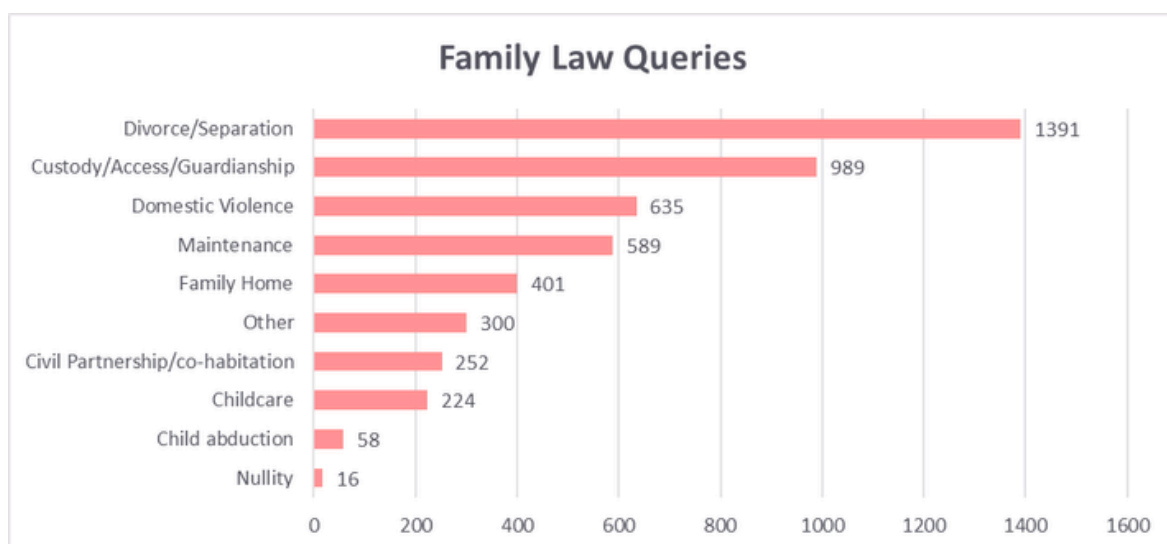
There has been a significant increase in the expertise and experience of FLAC's phonenumber team in recent years which enables them to provide these call backs and more detailed legal information.

|                                   | Calls & emails | % of calls & emails | Annual % change |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Family                            | 3524           | 25.0                | 10.8            |
| Employment                        | 3317           | 23.5                | 41.7            |
| Civil                             | 1217           | 8.6                 | 31.9            |
| Housing/Landlord & Tenant         | 1189           | 8.4                 | 57.5            |
| Criminal                          | 860            | 6.1                 | 13.9            |
| Will/Probate                      | 645            | 4.6                 | 4.2             |
| Consumer                          | 554            | 3.9                 | 30.7            |
| Immigration/refugee               | 489            | 3.5                 | 85.9            |
| Other                             | 410            | 2.9                 | -6.2            |
| Client-Solicitor relations/issues | 306            | 2.2                 | -2.9            |
| Property/Interest in Land         | 295            | 2.1                 | 25.0            |
| Credit & Debt                     | 275            | 1.9                 | -13.2           |
| Negligence/Personal Injury        | 241            | 1.7                 | 20.5            |
| Social Welfare                    | 186            | 1.3                 | 34.8            |
| Neighbour disputes                | 161            | 1.1                 | 1.3             |
| Legal Aid                         | 123            | 0.9                 | 15.0            |
| Discrimination                    | 122            | 0.9                 | 43.5            |
| Legal Services                    | 96             | 0.7                 | 45.5            |
| Contract                          | 54             | 0.4                 | -28.9           |
| Company                           | 39             | 0.3                 | 0.0             |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>14,103</b>  | <b>100</b>          | <b>23.3</b>     |

## Family Law: 25% of Phonenumber Queries (3,524)

Family law remains the area in which the Telephone Information & Referral Line receives the most queries:

- 40% were in relation to a divorce or separation (1391 queries), 28% in relation to custody, access or guardianship (989), 18% in relation to domestic violence (635), 17% in relation to maintenance (589) and 11% in relation to the family home (401).
- FLAC received 635 queries in relation to domestic violence during 2025. This is an 18% increase since 2024 and more than any previous year. Domestic violence queries have risen every year since 2017.
- 2025 also saw a record number of childcare queries (224), a 44% increase on 2024.
- 23% of all family law queries were referred on to a FLAC clinic for legal advice.
- Callers to the phonenumber frequently reported being unable to retain a family law solicitor from the Legal Aid Board's Private Practitioner Panel even though they have been approved for legal aid.



“

*Thank you so much. A wonderful service and much gratitude to the volunteers . Getting legal advice clarified things a little more for me. Even talking to someone in the legal profession and hearing their opinion is worth it.*

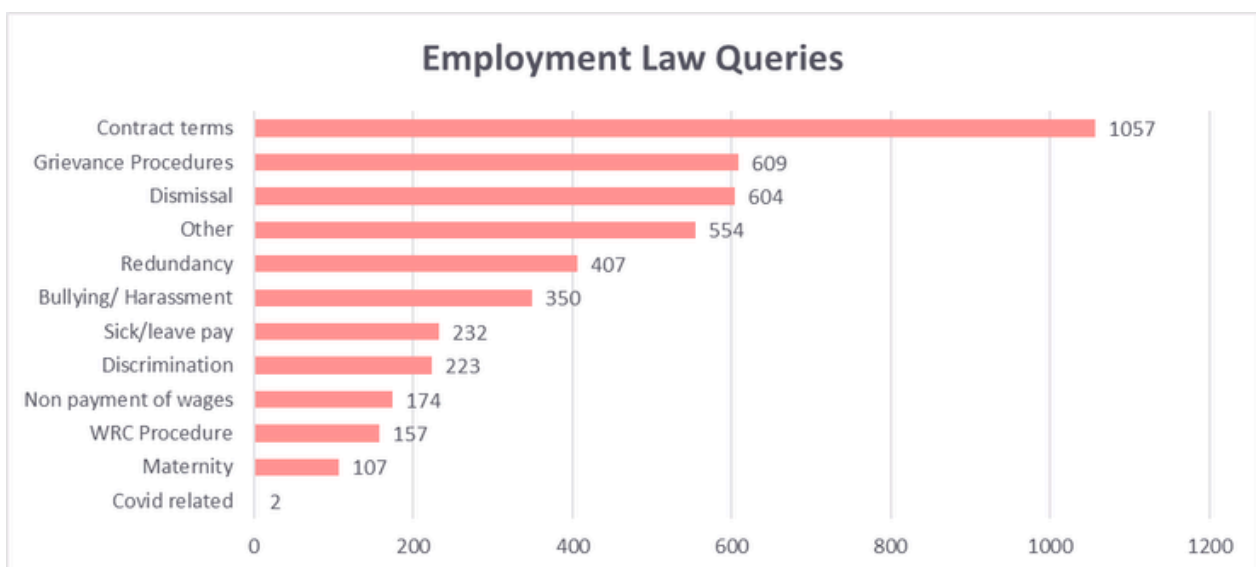
”

## Employment Law: 23.5% of Phonline Queries (3,317)

**2025 saw the highest number of employment law queries ever recorded on the Telephone Information & Referral Line, accounting for almost one quarter of all calls in 2025 and up 42% compared with the previous year.**

32% of all employment law queries (1057 queries) were in relation to contract terms (up 50%), 18% (609) were in relation to a grievance procedure (up 57%), 18% (604) in relation to a dismissal (up 33%), 12% (407) in relation to a redundancy (up 33%), 11% (350) in relation to bullying or harassment in the workplace (up 45%), and 7% (223) in relation to discrimination.

The phonline often hears from callers who are representing themselves in cases before the Workplace Relations Commission in circumstances where their employer or former employer has instructed a solicitor and a junior and senior counsel. These issues regarding 'equality of arms' also arise in instances where callers are bringing employment law cases against public bodies.



“

*Very professional and helpful service. I was guided to take the right steps. The legal information provided during the call was greatly appreciated about my employee rights. I want to thank for the sympathy and goodwill to the legal adviser that gave me the call.*

”



## **“Other Civil Matters”: 8.6% of Phonline Queries (1,217)**

This category of calls includes civil queries that do not fall under the pre-defined list of areas of law. In 2025, almost nine per cent of calls were logged in this category.

Of these:

- 28% were requiring information about tort, the highest number of queries in this category compared with previous years
- 21% had a query about court proceedings
- 8% had a query regarding defamation (higher than any previous year)
- 7% had a query about assisted decision making
- 6% had a query about data protection
- 2% had a query related to power of attorneys including enduring power of attorneys
- Other civil queries included queries about freedom of information (1%) and ward of court (1%)

## **Housing/Landlord & Tenant: 8.4% of Phonline Queries (1,189)**

There was a significant increase (57.5%) in calls regarding housing/landlord and tenant issues in 2025. Of the 1,189 call:

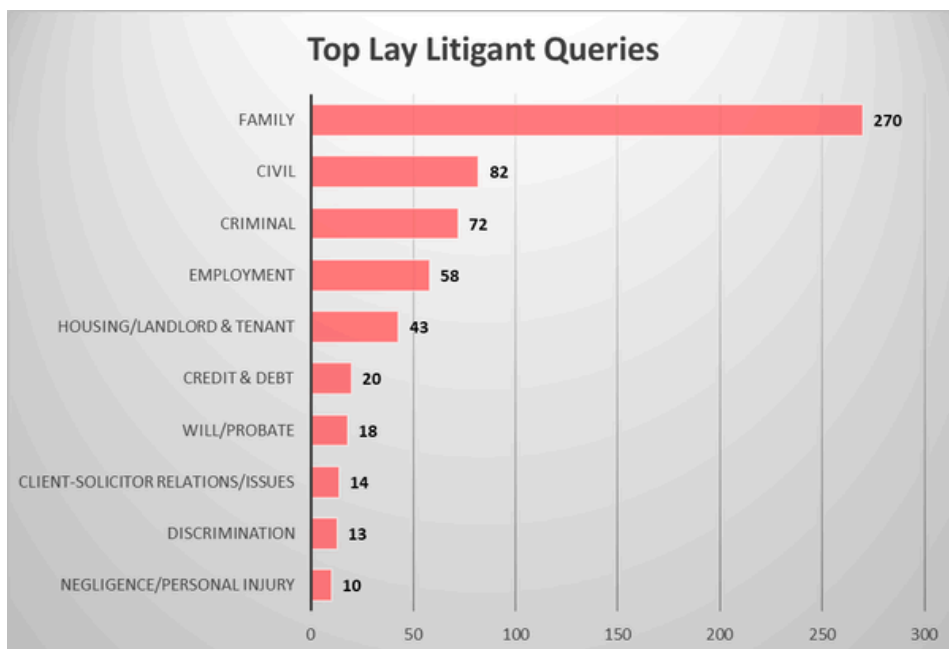
- 194 were regarding Local Authority Housing
- 105 related to homelessness/emergency accommodation.
- 48 were in relation to evictions

## Lay Litigants

FLAC's information line regularly receives calls from lay litigants who are endeavouring to represent themselves in complex court cases and who are desperately in need of assistance, advice and representation which FLAC does not have the resources to provide. 647 calls to the Information line in 2025 were from lay litigants, 5% of all calls.

Of these:

- 42% had a family law issue
- 13% had a civil law issue
- 11% had a criminal query
- 9% had an employment law query
- 7% had a housing related query



## Referrals

14% of callers dealt with by the Telephone Information & Referral Line were referred to FLAC from other organisations or public bodies, including 610 referrals from Citizens Information Centres and 410 referrals from the Workplace Relations Commission (which is a public body with a statutory mandate to provide employment law information itself).



## Legal Advice: FLAC Clinics

At FLAC clinics, volunteer solicitors and barristers provide first stop basic legal information, legal advice and referral in the areas of Family Law, Employment Law, General Law and Immigration Law. People are referred for legal advice consultations through FLAC's Telephone Information & Referral Line and through the Citizens Information Centres (CICs). At least 3640 consultations took place at the clinics in 2025, a 2.4% decrease on 2024. We are grateful to the Citizens Information Board and to the staff and management of local Citizens Information Centres who facilitate and support FLAC clinics.

|                                                       | Type of clinic              | Consultations* |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Appointments made via FLAC Telephone Information Line | Employment law clinics      | 958            |
|                                                       | General law clinics         | 658            |
|                                                       | Family law clinics          | 645            |
|                                                       | Immigration law clinics     | 23             |
|                                                       | <b>Total</b>                | <b>2284</b>    |
| Appointments made via Citizens Information Centre     | North Munster CIS           | 295            |
|                                                       | South Leinster CIS          | 286            |
|                                                       | Dublin South CIS            | 270            |
|                                                       | South Munster CIS           | 245            |
|                                                       | South Connacht CIS          | 129            |
|                                                       | North Dublin CIS            | 59             |
|                                                       | North Connacht & Ulster CIS | 36             |
|                                                       | North Leinster CIS          | 28             |
|                                                       | Sign Language               | 8              |
|                                                       | <b>Total</b>                | <b>1356</b>    |
| <b>Total</b>                                          |                             | <b>3640</b>    |

\* Number of consultations attended are based on Data Collection Form returns

## What were the consultations in FLAC Clinics about?

At least **3640 consultations** took place in 2025. Family law and employment law queries were the most common issues at these consultations, while housing/landlord & tenant queries saw the highest annual percentage increase in consultations.

|                                   | Consultations | % of Consultations | Annual % Change |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Family                            | 1129          | 31.0               | -5.8            |
| Employment                        | 1049          | 28.8               | 1.0             |
| Housing/Landlord & Tenant         | 238           | 6.5                | 34.5            |
| Civil                             | 198           | 5.4                | 6.5             |
| Will/Probate                      | 179           | 4.9                | -19.4           |
| Other                             | 176           | 4.8                | 7.3             |
| Consumer                          | 107           | 2.9                | -15.1           |
| Property/Interest in Land         | 101           | 2.8                | -7.3            |
| Contract                          | 76            | 2.1                | -13.6           |
| Criminal                          | 70            | 1.9                | -30.0           |
| Credit & Debt                     | 67            | 1.8                | -4.3            |
| Neighbour disputes                | 66            | 1.8                | 13.8            |
| Negligence/Personal Injury        | 63            | 1.7                | -1.6            |
| Immigration/refugee               | 36            | 1.0                | -33.3           |
| Client-Solicitor relations/issues | 28            | 0.8                | 3.7             |
| Discrimination                    | 28            | 0.8                | 12.0            |
| Social Welfare                    | 12            | 0.3                | -7.7            |
| Company                           | 10            | 0.3                | 11.1            |
| Legal Aid                         | 7             | 0.2                | 600.0           |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>3640</b>   | <b>100.0</b>       | <b>-2.4</b>     |

## People who attended FLAC consultations in 2025 said:

**"I felt powerless, isolated and didn't trust that there was anything I could do.  
After our chat, I can sleep again."**

**"This service has been a life saver for me and guided me through an exceptionally difficult work situation and I'm extremely grateful. Thank you all, you are doing amazing work."**

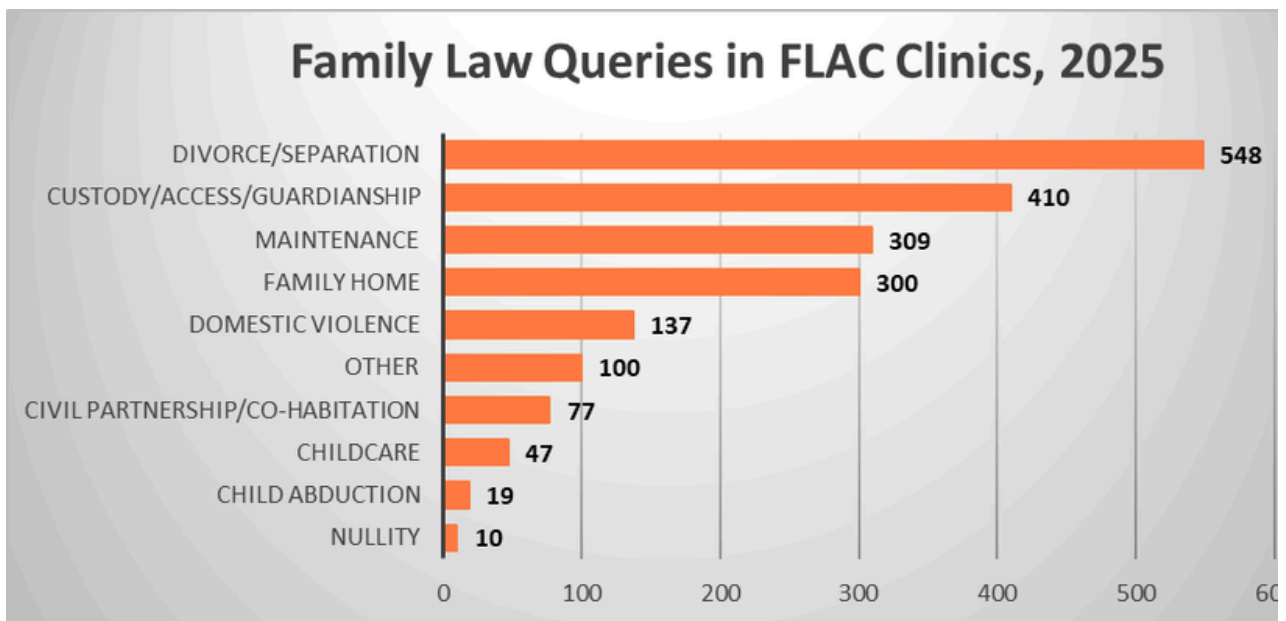
**"My mind is a little more at rest thanks to the answers I have been given. I spoke to a really calm and caring person. I feel like I can get help without giving up.  
Thank you so much."**

**"It helped me in a time of great need and lessened my distress. I am now fully aware of my rights and feel vindicated and supported. The service is truly needed."**

**"I felt isolated until I spoke to the people in FLAC who gave me confidence to carry on."**

## Family Law: 31% of Consultations (1,129)

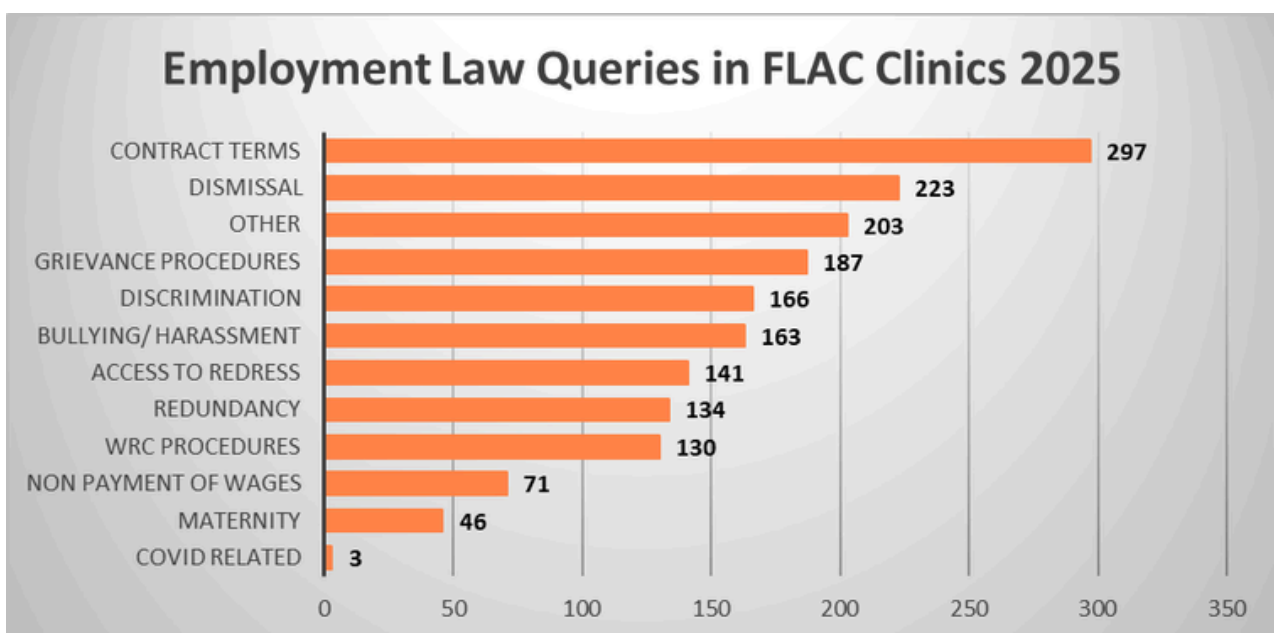
- Almost one third of all consultations (1,129) in 2025 were in relation to a family law query.
- Almost half of family law consultations (548) were seeking legal advice in relation to a divorce or separation (48.5%).
- 36% of family law consultations (410) were seeking legal advice in relation to custody, access or guardianship.
- 27% of family law consultations (300) were seeking advice regarding a family home and 27% (309) were enquiring about maintenance.
- 12% of family law consultations (137) were seeking assistance in relation to domestic violence.





## Employment Law: 28.8% of Consultations (1,049)

- Just over one quarter of all consultations (1,049) in FLAC Clinics in 2025 were in relation to an employment law query, which was a 1% increase on the previous year.
- Over one quarter of employment law consultations (297) were seeking advice in relation to an employment contract terms, 8% more than the previous year.
- 21% of employment law consultations (223) were seeking advice in relation to a dismissal.
- 18% of employment law consultations (187) were in relation to grievance procedures, 25.5% increase on the previous year.
- 16% of employment law consultations (166) were regarding discrimination, an increase of 14.5% on the previous year.
- 15.5% had a query related to bullying (163) and discrimination (166), with bullying related queries up 9% compared with the previous year.
- 13% had a query related to redundancy (134), down 14% compared with the previous year.



## Feedback on Legal Advice Consultations

FLAC uses the service user feedback survey to help us understand the impact that free legal advice has on the people attending the clinics:

- 88% were satisfied with their consultation.
- 83% said they better understood their legal issue after the consultation.
- 80% said they better understood what next steps they could take.
- 76% said their confidence to take those next steps had improved.
- 71% said they felt less isolated/worried/anxious/stressed about their legal situation.



FLAC volunteers and representatives from partner firms (Simmons and Simmons, Maples, Matheson, Arthur Cox and McCann FitzGerald) who volunteer on the FLAC phone line and clinics.



*I felt extremely supported by the advice I received from the lawyer I spoke with. I had been at sea - I am above the threshold for Free Legal Aid and cannot afford a private solicitor. FLAC hugely helped me navigate the difficult legal terminology and next steps. Thank you!!*



## PILA, the Public Interest Law Alliance

**PILA (Public Interest Law Alliance)** is a project of FLAC that engages the legal community and civil society in using the law to advance positive social change.

The demand for PILA's services has grown far beyond what was anticipated in 2009 when it was established. PILA has positively impacted the work of NGOs and the lives of those they represent. We thank all our dedicated staff, volunteers, corporate partners and stakeholders for supporting our work over the past 15 years; we could not have had this impact without your contribution.

In 2025:

- **PILA assisted 29 social justice organisations** in accessing legal assistance from pro bono lawyers through our Pro Bono Referral Scheme.
- **28 signatories** to PILA's 'Pro Bono Pledge' reported a total of **44,906 hours of pro bono legal work**.
- PILA took on **38 new legal advice and litigation referrals** from partner NGOs.
- PILA continued work on two Impact Projects, including the **Ukraine Legal Panel**.
- PILA launched the **NGO Webinar Series**, a webinar series aimed to provide NGOs with essential legal information on important areas of law.
- PILA hosted the first in-person **"What Can Pro Bono Do for Your NGO"** event, in which lawyers from leading law firms and barristers delivered a session on what pro bono is and how the NGO Community can benefit from it.
- **23 issues of the PILA Bulletin** (which has a circulation of over 2,700) were published.
- PILA supported an alliance of **over 250 partner NGOs, 52 law firms, 350+ barristers and 9 in-house legal teams**.



| Breakdown of Referrals |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Area of Law            | Total |
| Admin                  | 1     |
| Charity Law            | 9     |
| Company Law            | 3     |
| Criminal               | 2     |
| Data Protection        | 3     |
| Defamation             | 1     |
| Disability             | 5     |
| Employment             | 5     |
| Family                 | 1     |
| Housing                | 1     |
| Human Rights           | 2     |
| Immigration            | 3     |
| Property               | 2     |

## Pro Bono Referral Scheme

The Pro Bono Referral Scheme remains the centrepiece of PILA's work, facilitating access to pro bono legal services for social justice organisations. Since 2009, PILA has supported over 1,600 referrals through the Scheme and has provided over 350 social justice organisations with direct legal assistance.

PILA continues to work hard to make sure that organisations offering support to Ukrainians in Ireland have access to the pro bono legal support that has helped them survive and thrive in delivering their crucial work.

## Pro Bono Pledge Ireland



PILA has continued in its role as coordinator of the Pro Bono Pledge Ireland. The Pledge provides a common definition of pro bono legal work, a commitment to a minimum aspirational target of 20 pro bono hours per lawyer per year, and a mechanism to benchmark progress through annual reporting of anonymous pro bono data.

The pledge is open for signatories by solicitors, barristers, law firms and in-house legal departments. Since the launch of the Pledge in November 2020, signatories now include:

- 51 law firms
- 6 individual solicitors
- 40 Barristers
- 2 in-house legal teams

## Sustaining Partners

The work that PILA does would not be possible without the support of PILA's sustaining partners; Arthur Cox, A&L Goodbody, McCann Fitzgerald and Matheson.

"Arthur Cox is proud to continue its role as a sustaining partner of PILA and to work alongside the exceptional team at FLAC. We were delighted to continue our support the FLAC Information Line and the FLAC Employment Clinic, initiatives that deliver real and practical access to justice for those who need it most. Through this collaboration, Arthur Cox lawyers helped hundreds of FLAC service users to access clear legal information and better understand and assert their rights.

Through PILA, FLAC plays a vital convening role in bringing the legal profession together to support NGOs delivering essential front-line services to marginalised and vulnerable communities. This collective pro bono effort remains critical to strengthening access to justice and promoting fairness across our society."

**- Carolann Minnock, Of Counsel & Head of Pro Bono at Arthur Cox**



## PILA Bulletin

During 2025, PILA published 23 issues of the PILA Bulletin which has a circulation of over 2,700. You can subscribe to the Bulletin by emailing [pila@flac.ie](mailto:pila@flac.ie).

The Bulletin aims to provide a resource bridging the fields of law and social justice, and shines a spotlight on domestic and international caselaw, policy issues, legislation and legal trends. The PILA Bulletin is an excellent source of legal and human rights news.

## Pro Bono Week 2025

Pro Bono Week Ireland 2025 took place from the 9th to the 13th June and celebrated the vital role that lawyers play in supporting civil society and human rights organisations and in promoting equal access to justice. FLAC was delighted to participate in the organisation of Pro Bono Week as a member of the Pro Bono Week Committee.

*"Pro Bono Week 2025 is focused on bringing free legal assistance to the community and using its power to achieve meaningful social change.*

*"Pro bono is an important component of Ireland's access to justice architecture. At its most effective, it can address the barriers to justice faced by people experiencing discrimination and disadvantage and who often have multiple, inter-related legal issues.*

*"I salute all those who provide legal services free of charge for their inspiration and commitment to social justice, equality and human rights."*

**– Ellis Barry, FLAC Chief Executive**



Official Launch of the Pro Bono Impact Report 2025



The week was a great success with unprecedented numbers in attendance at each of the events that took place. The week of events was supported by A&L Goodbody, Arthur Cox, DLA Piper Ireland, Matheson, McCann FitzGerald and members of the Law Library.

The Central Theme of Pro Bono Week 2025 was “Strengthening Civic Participation in Europe”. Events included:

- What can Pro Bono Do for Your NGO?”. This event featured leading pro bono lawyers and barristers explaining how the NGO Community can benefit from free legal assistance.
- Amplifying Impact and Access to Justice Event. This event included the launch of the Pro Bono Pledge Ireland Impact Report 2024, followed by a series of panel discussions with pro bono lawyers and the NGO Community.
- The [2024 Pro Bono Impact Report can be accessed here](#).





# Legal Education & Training

## FLAC Volunteer Training

FLAC volunteers had the opportunity to attend six online training webinars in 2025. These covered the topics of Landlord and Tenant Law, Social Welfare Law, Employment Law, Family Law, Social Housing and Legal Costs.

We are extremely grateful to the speakers who put time and effort into preparing and delivering comprehensive information sessions: Finn Keyes BL, Christopher Bowes BL, Owen Keany BL, Keith Walsh SC, Seán Beatty BL and Barry Magee.

## FLAC Student Societies

There are eight FLAC student societies at universities around Ireland, along with the UCD Student Legal Service. They operate independently of FLAC. However, FLAC works with them as part of our aim to support legal education and to complement the academic training that Law students receive.



Eilis Barry with members of Trinity FLAC

2025 saw the student societies collaborate on events and activities from charity fundraisers to essay competitions, as well as organising their own guest speaker events, moot court competitions and conferences. Through providing occasional support and organising biannual online catchups with the societies, FLAC has been encouraged to see a strong ethos of “access to justice” within the current population of Law students, one they will hopefully carry into their future legal careers.

In March, FLAC TIRL Development Manager Erin Brogan participated in a ‘Women in Law’ Panel Discussion organised by UCD SLS as part of their Law / B&L Week 2025. That month FLAC Societies Liaison Officer Conall Cahill also delivered an online presentation about FLAC’s history, important cases and current work to members of University of Galway FLAC Society. Later in the year, FLAC was delighted to welcome members from several of the student societies to the Annual Justice Lecture at the King’s Inns in Dublin.

## Section Two: Legal Representation

FLAC's Independent Law Centre takes on a number of **cases in the public interest** each year. These cases are taken on with the aim of benefiting a wider community, as well as being important for the individual client.

Throughout 2025, FLAC continued to run **dedicated and targeted legal services** which are tailored to the needs of groups who do not typically access FLAC's Telephone Information & Referral Line and Free Legal Advice Clinics or other mainstream services:

- **The Traveller Legal Service**
- **The Roma Legal Clinic**

While these services cannot act as an alternative to a comprehensive system of civil legal aid, they seek to identify and respond to unmet legal need to the greatest extent resources allow, and undertake strategic litigation which has the potential to benefit the wider community. These services also seek to model best practice in the delivery of specialised and targeted legal services. FLAC believes that such services should be a central component of a reformed legal aid system.

FLAC's Independent Law Centre provided 234 people with legal representation during 2025. This includes 124 new clients (whose files were opened during 2025). 127 clients had a legal problem in the area of housing, 91 had an equality/discrimination issue, and 5 had a social welfare issue.

### **A message from a parent whose daughter was represented by the FLAC Legal Team:**



I can't thank you enough for all your help, helping me fight for my daughter's rights, thanks for having her side as much as I do, this means the world to us both.

This money will pay for a lot of my daughter's therapies without waitlist and it means so much to us it's literally life changing and I will never forget everything you done for us!



| 2025 Legal Representation |                    |             |               |                 |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Area of Law               | Continuing Clients | New Clients | Total Clients | % Total Clients |
| Discrimination/ Equality  | 45                 | 46          | 91            | 38.89%          |
| Housing                   | 60                 | 67          | 127           | 54.27%          |
| Social Welfare            | 3                  | 2           | 5             | 2.14%           |
| Other                     | 2                  | 9           | 11            | 4.70%           |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>110</b>         | <b>124</b>  | <b>234</b>    | <b>100%</b>     |

## Dedicated & Targeted Legal Services



### Traveller Legal Service



The Traveller Legal Service was founded in 2020 to address the enormous unmet legal need that exists within the Traveller community through representation in strategic litigation and through the provision of training and support to advocates working with the community. The Traveller LegalService is supported by the Community Foundation of Ireland. A Steering Group of Traveller Organisations provides the service with guidance and oversight.

- The Traveller Legal Service provided representation to 149 people during 2025. 68 were new clients whose files were opened during 2025. 81 clients (whose cases were opened prior to 2024) continued to receive legal representation.
- 62.42% of clients' legal issue concerned accommodation and 34.9% concerned discrimination.
- In addition to cases where legal representation was provided, the Traveller Legal Service provided legal advice and advocacy in response to queries from Traveller advocates and organisations.

## Roma Legal Clinic

FLAC continued to operate its Roma Legal Clinic in 2025. The clinic is funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.



- Legal advice and information was provided through consultations with members of the Roma community. Information and advice was also provided to Roma people via community and advocacy organisations who were working directly with them. FLAC provided this 'second-tier' support through consultations (concerning housing, discrimination and social welfare issues) with staff of those organisations.
- 52 clients of the Roma Clinic received legal representation during 2025. 34 were new clients whose files were opened during 2025. 18 clients (whose cases were opened prior to 2025) continued to receive legal representation.
- 48.15% of clients' legal issue concerned discrimination, 38.89% concerned housing and 9.26% concerned social welfare.

## LGBTQI+ Legal Clinic



The LGBTQI+ Legal Clinic was established in 2022 to meet the specific needs of the gay and trans community. It was funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth until mid-2024. The service is currently unfunded and limited in capacity.



James Rooney BL and Cillian Bracken BL of the LGBTQI+ Legal Clinic

- During 2025, FLAC provided legal representation to 7 clients in cases which emerged from the LGBTQI+ Legal Clinic. This included 5 in the area of equality/discrimination, 1 in relation to registration of citizenship in correct name and 1 in relation to Garda conduct.

# Housing/Homelessness Casework

## Overview

FLAC provided legal representation to **127 people in housing/homelessness cases** during 2025.

Most of these cases emerged from the Traveller Legal Service (93 clients) with another 21 housing/homelessness clients emerging from the Roma Clinic and 13 clients from migrant backgrounds being referred to the legal service.

The vast majority of the housing/homelessness cases taken by FLAC related to access to emergency accommodation or social housing supports, or the adequacy of the social housing supports which clients were being provided.

FLAC continued to act in a number of High Court judicial review and plenary cases concerning social housing during 2025.

**There is no expert and accessible independent tribunal which deals with cases concerning social housing or emergency accommodation.** High Court litigation is often the only recourse available to clients. In many cases, it is the threat of such proceedings which results in a favourable outcome for the client.

The outcomes in FLAC's housing casework illustrates the consistent issues with the quality and fairness of decision-making by local authorities regarding social housing and emergency homelessness accommodation. Decision-making in these areas is often quite arbitrary and standards vary hugely across different decision-makers and local authorities.





## Significant Outcomes in Traveller Accommodation Cases

### **Traveller family secured emergency accommodation after being unreasonably evicted from previous emergency accommodation facility.**

A Traveller family of four, two of whom have significant medical issues, were evicted from emergency accommodation for vague reasons and without any supporting evidence. This eviction seemingly came about as result of their refusal to move to a manifestly unsuitable smaller room within the emergency accommodation. A medical professional had provided a report setting out the nature of the accommodation which would be appropriate in light of the family's medical needs, and the room which had been offered was manifestly unsuitable. FLAC issued correspondence to the local authority which challenged the legality of both the withdrawal of emergency accommodation and failure to provide emergency accommodation following the eviction. This intervention resulted in the family's immediate need for accommodation being met.

### **A Traveller family living who had been living on the roadside for five years in poor conditions were offered a three-bed social home by a local authority.**

The family's caravan was dated and had no facilities. The situation was severely impacting the children's school life and was having an overall adverse impact on their daily lives. Although the family had been assessed as homeless, the local authority did not offer them emergency accommodation or provide them with access to basic services or amenities. The local authority had advised that the family should move to live with family members in another county far from the children's school and despite the fact that those family members already lived in over-crowded conditions. FLAC argued that the council had failed to comply with their statutory obligations under the homelessness legislation or to exercise their powers to provide accommodation under that legislation. This correspondence resulted in an offer of housing being made to the family.

### **A Traveller man's caravan and belongings (which had been seized by a local authority) were returned from to him on an unconditional basis.**

The local authority had seized the caravan and possessions after obtaining a Court Order stating that FLAC's client and others parked near a public utility had to move. The local authority told our client that in order for these items to be returned he would need to pay a significant financial charge. FLAC highlighted that the Court Order did not allow for the imposition of a financial charge or any other condition. Following this correspondence, the local authority agreed to return the client's caravan and personal possessions on an unconditional basis.

## Overview

**FLAC provided legal representation to 91 people in equality/discrimination cases during 2025.**

**52 of these clients came from the Traveller Legal Service, 26 from the Roma Legal Clinic and 5 from the LGBTQI+ Clinic.**

**FLAC provided representation in relation to 107 complaints (or potential complaints) under the equality legislation.**

**Cases under the equality legislation involved alleged discrimination in employment and by shops, hotels, schools, healthcare providers, childcare providers and providers of public transport.**

**During 2025, FLAC's clients in discrimination cases received a total of €91,850 in financial compensation or pursuant to settlement/mediation agreement.**

**The majority of cases concerned discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and/or membership of the Traveller Community.**

**FLAC also acted in a number of cases concerning disability discrimination, including cases about access to education.**

## Discrimination against Roma in Shops and Services

Roma people, in particular Roma women and girls, who have encountered discrimination while shopping and running daily errands frequently seek the assistance of the Roma Clinic.

In 2025, FLAC acted for a significant number of Roma people who had experienced discrimination in a retail context. 13 Roma people received compensation pursuant to settlement agreements after making discrimination complaints. This includes two Roma women who each received €5,000 in compensation from a discount variety retailer.

A common feature of these cases is that the incident giving rise to the complaint involved security guards. In some cases, this resulted in legal arguments about whether the provider of goods/services were responsible for the actions of security guards. Customers access to goods and services in shops is often dependent on the actions and decisions made by security guards. In FLAC's view, equality policies adopted by shops and service providers should clearly apply to security guards.

## Discrimination on the grounds of disability

FLAC continues to act in a number of cases regarding discrimination on the grounds of disability. One case (which settled on a confidential basis) concerned the termination of a child's place within a crèche.

## Traveller Discrimination on Pubs, Hotels & Restaurants

In 2025, 25 Travellers represented by FLAC received compensation on foot of settlement agreements after making complaints of discrimination.

FLAC continues to see many Traveller families deprived of the opportunity to mark significant life events (including weddings, funerals and Communions) as a result of discrimination. The continued operation of section 19 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 creates legal uncertainty about whether cases against pubs, hotels and restaurants should be heard in the District Court or the Workplace Relations Commission and acts as a barrier to justice for Travellers who experience discrimination in these settings. The General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024 proposes to repeal section 19 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 and move the jurisdiction for cases against licenced premises back to the WRC. This legislation should be advanced urgently.

## Court of Appeal finds that Traveller family entitled to take Judicial Review case challenging “unfair” Circuit Court Discrimination appeal

The Court of Appeal dismissed an appeal taken by a hotel which sought to overturn a High Court decision in favour of a young Traveller family who were subject to an “unfair” Circuit Court discrimination appeal. The hotel argued that the family should have taken a statutory appeal and not a judicial review case but did not challenge the other findings of the High Court. The case centred around the procedural issue of whether the family were entitled to take a judicial review case in circumstances where the relevant legislation provides for a separate statutory appeal procedure. The family pursued both options as a precautionary measure but were ultimately given permission by the High Court to take a judicial review case. In the Court of Appeal decision, Mr Justice Meenan found that the family “have been ‘entirely successful’ in opposing the appeal”.

**Read more: [Traveller family were entitled to take Judicial Review case challenging “unfair” Circuit Court Discrimination appeal, Court of Appeal finds](#)**

## WRC orders Beauty Salon to pay compensation for discrimination against Traveller family

FLAC represented a Traveller mother and her two daughters in discrimination cases against a beauty salon at the WRC. The beauty salon has been ordered to pay €500 to each of the three complainants in compensation for discrimination against them as Travellers. At the WRC Hearing in February 2025, the mother gave evidence of bringing her daughters to the beauty salon in July 2023 as a “birthday treat” for one of them. However, they were discriminated against in a number of ways. They were asked to pay for their treatments in advance unlike other customers who paid after their treatments. One of the complainants was shouted at by the owner/manager of the salon and one complainant was left to queue for longer than other customers who were not members of the Traveller Community.

**Read more: [WRC orders Beauty Salon to pay compensation for discrimination against Traveller family](#)**



I am delighted with the decisions of the WRC. We did not take these cases for money, we wanted to challenge the unfair way we were treated. As a mother, I want my girls to know that people cannot and should not treat them badly because they come from the Traveller community. We could not have taken these cases without Sinéad Lucey (FLAC's Managing Solicitor) and FLAC's Traveller Legal Service. I am very grateful to them for the support they provided to us and for the service they provide to members of the Traveller community.

**- The complainant's mother**



# Section Three:

## Policy & Law Reform

Fair and just laws are an essential overarching component of access to justice. FLAC develops policy and law reform recommendations in areas of law where people and communities experiencing discrimination, disadvantage and poverty are most likely to have a legal issue or multiple legal issues such, human rights, equality, housing/homelessness, social welfare and equality/discrimination, access to justice and legal aid.

Our recommendations are informed by FLAC's experience of providing legal assistance. They draw on insights from individual cases as well as FLAC's Telephone Information & Referral Line to promote systemic reforms. Our policy work seeks to ensure that FLAC's casework benefits a wider community, promoting systemic reform in addition to individual clients.



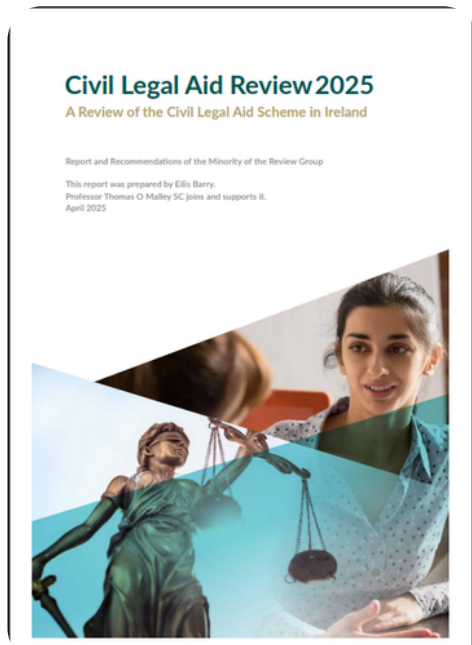
Christopher Bowes, Sinéad Lucey and Féith Cleary at the Raise the Roof Housing Protest in June 2025



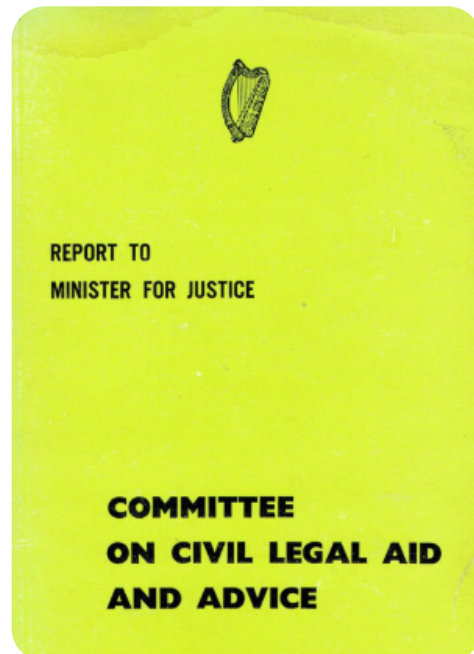
# Civil Legal Aid Review

**The publication of the Civil Legal Aid Review reports is a milestone moment in the campaign for Civil Legal Aid reform and a significant opportunity to bring about improved access to justice in Ireland**

In July 2025, the Minister for Justice published the reports arising from the Review of the Scheme of Civil Legal Aid. FLAC campaigned for the review, which is the first comprehensive examination of civil legal aid in Ireland in almost 50 years. Eilis Barry (FLAC Chief Executive) was the FLAC nominee on the Review Group. She submitted a Minority Report to the Minister which was joined and supported by Review Group member Professor Thomas O'Malley SC.



The 2025 Minority Report of the Civil Legal Aid Review



The 1977 Pringle Report on Civil Legal Aid

The Minority Report identifies that the system of civil legal aid delivered by the Legal Aid Board is in crisis. It is failing to meet huge amounts of legal need, particularly amongst groups who experience disadvantage and discrimination. It contains clear, practical and cost-effective recommendations for resolving the present crisis and creating a legal aid system which prevents and resolves the legal problems individual and communities experience as early (and efficiently) as possible.



Prof. Thomas O'Malley

**Read More:** [FLAC Briefing Note on the Civil Legal Aid Minority Report](#)

“The publication of the reports of the Civil Legal Aid Review Group must provide the impetus for long-overdue comprehensive reform. It is incredibly difficult to achieve change in the area of civil legal aid, due perhaps to a perception that it is about more money for lawyers. This ignores the very high cost of not providing legal aid to children, families and communities, and the growing body of international research that shows unequivocally that investment in legal aid saves States more money than it costs. Civil Legal Aid needs to be treated like the vital public service which it is. A lack of resources can no longer be used as an excuse to prevent urgent progress.

Ireland has the resources, expertise and infrastructure to resolve the civil legal aid crisis. Comprehensive, meaningful reform is doable, practical and cost effective with the service delivery infrastructure already in place with Legal Aid Board Law Centres, the Citizens Information Board and its Citizens Information Centres all around the country, and the existing Independent Law Centres serving as models for what can be achieved. What is needed now is political will, leadership and action. FLAC has asked to meet the Minister for Justice to discuss how the urgently needed reform in this area will be advanced.

- **FLAC Chief Executive, Ellis Barry**, in [FLAC's response](#) to the publication of the Civil Legal Aid Review reports.



Ellis Barry speaking at a Women in Law Event at Trinity College Dublin



FLAC's Managing Solicitor, Sinéad Lucey, on a panel at the Public Interest Litigation & Access to Justice Conference in Galway

FLAC is campaigning for the implementation of the Minority Report. This has included engaging with the Minister for Justice, his Department and the Oireachtas Justice Committee. FLAC has written to the Minister and has sought a meeting with him to discuss reform of the Civil Legal Aid system.



Elis Barry speaking alongside Prof. Thomas O'Malley at a Trinity FLAC Event



FLAC participated in The Bar of Ireland's Civil Legal Aid Review Conference

In December 2025, FLAC held an online briefing for NGOs to about civil legal aid and the Minority Report. Elis Barry outlined FLAC's vision for reform at events held by FLAC Student Societies, at a Women in Law event in Trinity College Dublin, at the Bar of Ireland Civil Legal Aid Review Group Conference in November 2025, and at the Public Interest Litigation & Access to Justice conference in the University of Galway in November 2025.

## Access to Justice

### Ireland's First Legal Needs Survey

In November 2025, the Department of Justice and OECD provided a briefing on the preliminary results of Ireland's first national legal needs survey. The full results are awaited. Ireland is one of very few OECD countries which has not carried out such research which should inform the design and resourcing of legal aid services.

While FLAC welcomed the project, it was concerned about how the project is identifying the legal needs of people and communities who experience disadvantage and discrimination. FLAC and the National Traveller Women's forum sent a joint letter to the team working on the project recommending that "further targeted research is carried out as part of the People-Centred Justice project which is specifically concerned with the legal needs disadvantaged groups including, for example, Travellers, Roma, people in prison and their families, people with intellectual disabilities, people who are digitally excluded (including older people), people who are homeless and people living in poverty and extreme poverty."

## Access to the Courts: Judicial Review

FLAC has been seeking consultation on potential changes to judicial review since 2019 when the Kelly Review of the Administration of Civil Justice was published. FLAC wrote to the Department of Justice in October 2025 to express our concerns at the prospect of legislation limiting access to judicial review and again looking for consultation on the relation to the recommendations contained in the Kelly Review. In response, the Department stated that the General Scheme of a Civil Reform Bill which will “address most of the recommendations of the Kelly Report” is in preparation. In the same letter, it indicated that consultation would only take place after the General Scheme has been published. No such consultation has taken place to date.

The General Scheme of the Civil Reform Bill was published in January 2026. FLAC has serious concerns regarding the General Scheme and is continuing to campaign in this area. We have been informed that a ‘symposium’ would take place in relation to the General Scheme before the summer but no such event or consultation has taken place to date. The Oireachtas Justice Committee have published a valuable report about the Bill and FLAC believes its recommendations should be implemented.

## Public Interest Law: Third Party Litigation Funding

FLAC met with the Law Reform Commission (‘LRC’) in October 2025 to discuss its work “formulating a framework to legalise and regulate third-party litigation funding (TPLF) in Ireland for defined categories of litigation.” On foot of the meeting, FLAC made a [written submission](#) to the LRC recommending that:

- The LRC’s report concerning Third Party Litigation Funding should clarify that the potential introduction of a broader range of third party and alternative models of litigation funding (including crowdfunding and State or philanthropic public interest litigation funds) in Ireland is not precluded by the existing rules of champerty and maintenance. Further, the introduction of these models should not be predicated on the outcome of any review of the operation of profit-motivated litigation funding (or delayed by any such review).
- As part of its next programme of law reform, the LRC should examine the barriers to public interest litigation in Ireland.



# Equality & Discrimination

## Review of the Equality Acts

In 2021, on foot of a campaign by FLAC, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth announced a comprehensive review of Ireland's equality legislation. FLAC supported civil society engagement with the Review and made detailed submissions (including draft amendments to the equality legislation).

In January 2025, FLAC welcomed the publication of the General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024 and provided a briefing for civil society and social justice organisations. The draft Bill would make a number of very significant and welcome changes to Ireland's equality legislation which will have a positive impact especially for Travellers and people with disabilities, and in promoting access to justice. We particularly welcome the provisions providing for:

- significantly increased compensation,
- stronger requirements for reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities,
- moving the jurisdiction for claims against licensed premises from the District Court back to the WRC, and
- greater accessibility in the process for making a claim, including through extended time-limits.



In July 2025, FLAC made a [detailed submission to](#) and appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Equality Committee as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme which welcomed the Equality Bill and outlined how it could be expanded and strengthened. The submission was endorsed by INAR and the ICCL.





*The significance of the General Scheme cannot be overstated. While it requires improvement and expansion, it will be the most significant reform of the legislation in the last two decades. During that time we have seen a worrying rise in discrimination, prejudice and intolerance in this country. This requires strengthened equality legislation, which gives effect to our Constitution's guarantee of equality before the law and EU requirements. Equality legislation is the expression and repository of our shared values of respect and dignity - values that underpin our belief in human worth. The ambition we bring to this legislation is a measure of our concern for creating and progressing a caring, inclusive and flourishing society.*

*Some of the measures outlined in the General Scheme have the potential to breathe fresh life into the prohibition of discrimination and to encourage the development of a culture of compliance with equality law.*

**FLAC Chief Executive, Eilis Barry, in her [Opening Statement](#) to the Joint Oireachtas Equality Committee.**



**Read more: [Equality Bill is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to combat discrimination and create a more equal society, FLAC tells Oireachtas Committee](#)**

In October 2025, the Joint Committee on Children and Equality published their Report on the Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2024, adopting a number of FLAC's recommendations, including our recommendation for consolidating the legislation and making it accessible and that a ground of socio-economic status be included in the legislation.

**Read more: [FLAC welcomes the publication and recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee Report which adopts our call for comprehensive new equality laws](#)**

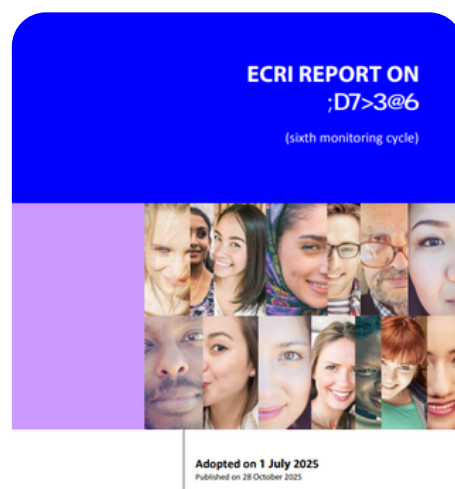
Throughout 2025, FLAC continued to engage with stakeholders about the urgent need to update Ireland's equality legislation. This included a meeting with the Department of Equality officials who are working on the Bill.

## European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

In late 2024, FLAC, along with representatives of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) and the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR), briefed a delegation from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). FLAC highlighted the urgent need for the Review of the Equality Acts to be completed and implemented. A new equality framework should be concerned with full equality in practice across all grounds. State Bodies such as An Garda Síochána and the functions of public bodies in areas like immigration should be brought within the scope of the equality legislation and its prohibition of discrimination.



**Read more:** [FLAC briefs European Human Rights Monitoring Body on Equality and Access to Justice Issues in Ireland](#)



In their [sixth report on Ireland](#) published in October 2025, ECRI specifically cited FLAC's policy in relation to Traveller accommodation and adopted our recommendations on discriminatory profiling.

## Disability Rights

In September 2025, the [National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030](#) was published which committed to a comprehensive "legislative programme" which will involve reviewing the Disability Acts and completing the review of the equality legislation. This reflects FLAC's recommendation for a Programme of Disability Law Reform which we made in response to the defeat of the Care Referendum in 2024, including in our [submission on the new National Strategy for Women & Girls](#).

## Gender Equality



In May 2025, FLAC submitted a [report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#) ("CEDAW") to support its Eighth Review of Ireland. FLAC highlighted the need for measures to ensure women have access to

legal aid in discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment cases; for stronger anti-discrimination legislation which applies clearly to the State and Public Bodies to be advanced urgently; and for a stronger 'equality guarantee' in the Constitution.

FLAC was part of a civil society delegation at the United Nations in Geneva. members.



Ireland's NGO delegation to CEDAW in Geneva

CEDAW's [report](#) on 7 July 2025:

- highlighted the need for targeted legal services for Travellers, Roma, migrants and people with disabilities. It also called on the State to "[eliminate] restrictive financial eligibility criteria for legal aid" and to "expand access to legal aid and legal representation for women in all areas of law where discrimination occurs, including labour disputes, welfare benefits and other civil matters"
- CEDAW also called on Ireland to "expedite the drafting and enactment" of new equality and anti-discrimination legislation.

In May 2025, the Irish Times published an [opinion piece](#) by FLAC Chief Executive, Eilis Barry, which responded to the 'skorts' controversy and the proposal to close the last public toilet in Dublin city centre from a human rights and equality perspective.

Opinion

## What the rows over skorts and public toilets reveal about Irish attitudes to equality

The two controversies bely the reality that Ireland has had 25 years of anti-discrimination legislation

Eilis Barry

Thu May 22 2025 - 06:00 • 5 MIN READ



## Bereaved Partner's Pension Legislation

The Social Welfare (Bereaved Partner's Pension) Bill 2025 was published in March 2025 in response to the Supreme Court decision in O'Meara. FLAC represented John O'Meara and his children in their successful legal challenge against their exclusion from the Widower's Pension scheme. The family applied for the payment after the death of Mr O'Meara's partner of almost 20 years and mother of their three children, Ms Michelle Batey.

FLAC welcomed the fact the 2025 Bill expanded entitlement to social welfare schemes aimed at bereaved partners and families to qualified cohabitants and their children. In a very welcome move, the Bill went further than the O'Meara decision strictly required by including bereaved cohabitants who do not have children in the expanded scope of the relevant schemes. In the Dáil debates about the Bill, it was suggested that there are up to 150,000 cohabiting couples/families who could potentially benefit as a result of the new provisions in the legislation.

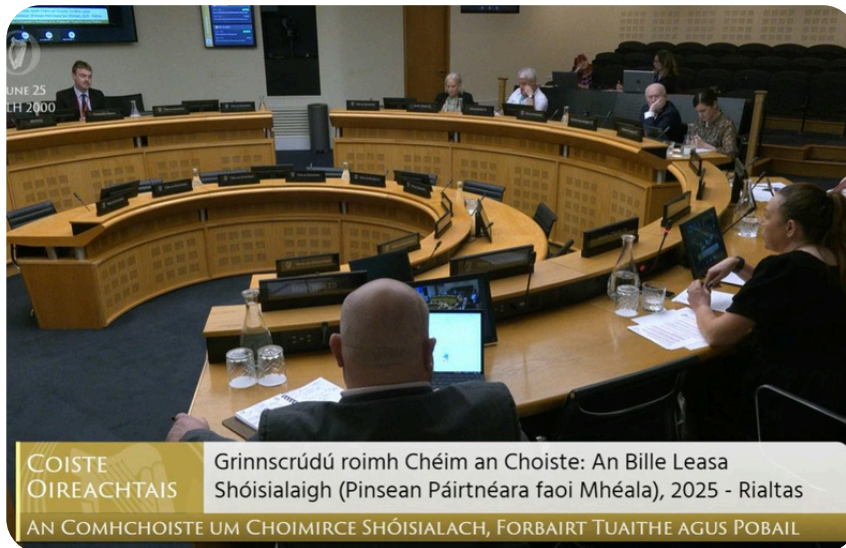
However, in its preliminary analysis of the legislation, FLAC also expressed concerns concerned about the levelling down of the entitlements of certain other categories of bereaved families. FLAC's concerns centred around the provisions in the 2025 Bill which prevent families who have experienced a divorce or separation from accessing relevant social welfare payments after a bereavement.

**Read more: [FLAC calls for amendments to Bereaved Partner's Pension Bill which will give effect to O'Meara judgment](#)**

Family rights organisations Treoir and One Family backed FLAC's call for the Bereaved Partner's Pension Bill 2025 to be amended to delete its proposals to remove the entitlement of people who are divorced or separated to a survivors' pensions if their former partner dies (noting that such entitlement had been in place for almost 20 years). The groups are strongly concerned at the impact these measures will have on lone parents and their children who were reliant on maintenance from a former partner.

**Read more: [Family Rights Organisations join call to remove proposed reductions to the social welfare entitlements of divorced and separated lone parents from the Bill which will give effect to the O'Meara judgment](#)**





In June 2025, FLAC appeared before the Oireachtas Social Welfare Committee. In a submission to the Committee, FLAC provided proposed amendments to the 2025 Bill which would address our concerns with it. FLAC also met with the Minister for Social Protection to discuss the legislation and held a briefing in Leinster House for members of the Oireachtas. FLAC's amendments were tabled at both Committee Stage and Report Stage in the Dáil. Unfortunately, the Government did not accept any amendments to the legislation.



FLAC in Leinster House briefing members of the Oireachtas about our proposed amendments to the Bereaved Partners Pension Bill

In December 2025, FLAC Policy & Public Affairs Manager, Christopher Bowes, briefed civil society organisations and Independent Law Centres about the changes to social welfare law contained in Bereaved Partners Pension Act.

## Steering Group of the All-Island Social Security Network

In June 2024, Christopher Bowes joined this network which is a “brings together researchers to imagine a new future for social security on the island of Ireland.”

## Traveller Accommodation

FLAC welcomed the recommendations of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights for improving the human rights situation of Travellers and Roma in Ireland published in a memorandum on 25 February 2025. This includes a recommendation to “[strengthen] legal aid schemes to enhance access of Traveller and Roma victims of discrimination in all sectors to effective remedies and complaints mechanisms.”

The Commissioner also made a number of recommendations which echo FLAC’s calls for an overhaul of laws concerning Traveller evictions and accommodation. FLAC’s 2024 submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community made recommendations for:

- Enhancing the planning process and ensuring delivery of Traveller accommodation.
- Preventing evictions of Traveller families living on the roadside with no procedural safeguards.
- Introducing minimum standards for all forms of Traveller accommodation.
- Ensuring that the conditions for access to social housing and emergency accommodation do not indirectly discriminate against Travellers.
- Ensuring that there is an effective remedy for racial profiling and discrimination in the housing context.

However, the Government’s written response to the Commissioner’s memorandum does not include any commitments to the necessary law reform in this area. FLAC’s casework in relation to Traveller accommodation is discussed in the ‘Legal Representation’ section of this report.

**Read more:** [Urgent Law Reform is needed to give effect to the Recommendations of European Human Rights Commissioner on Traveller Accommodation and Evictions](#)

## EU Presidency

In December 2025, FLAC made a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs consultation on the upcoming EU Presidency. FLAC called for Equality, Human Rights, and Access to Justice and the Rule of Law to be chosen as high-level thematic priorities for Ireland’s Presidency of the Council in 2026.

## Judicial Appointments



In November 2025, FLAC made a submission to the Judicial Appointments Commission's consultation on a new Judicial Selection Statement. FLAC's submission emphasised the need to promote judicial diversity through the selection process:

*"The lack of judicial diversity is closely linked to the financial and social inaccessibility of the legal professions and professional legal education. The process of achieving a judiciary which meaningfully reflects the diversity of the population begins with access to the legal classroom and legal professions, and in ensuring that a legal career is (and is presented as) a meaningful option for students... By extension, judicial diversity is also dependent on diversity amongst the legal professions, in particular Senior Counsel, and any diversity requirements in the relevant selection processes."*

## Central Bank of Ireland & Israeli Bonds

Paul Joyce, former FLAC employee continues to represent FLAC at the Central Bank's Civil Society Roundtable events. At the roundtable in October 2025, Paul asked the Governor of the Central Bank whether "the CBI engage with legal academics, civil society and campaign groups in the future in relation to its role in the approval of Israeli bonds? What steps will it



take to provide transparency on events to date and to ensure greater transparency around future decisions concerning its role in the sale of the bonds?"

The Governor maintained the Bank's position that it is bound by law to continue to have a role in the sale of the bond (despite the existence of legal opinions to the contrary) and he also asserted that there is no issue with transparency. FLAC will continue to engage with the Central Bank in relation to our human rights concerns about its role in the sale of Israeli bonds.



## Section Four: Access to Justice Events

### FLAC Annual Justice Lecture 2025, in memory of Dave Ellis

Around 200 people attended FLAC's Annual Justice Lecture at 6:30pm on Monday, 8th December 2025 in the King's Inns.

Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the birth of Daniel O'Connell, Professor Colm Ó Cinnéide delivered the lecture "Who Values the People's Rights?" Holding Fast to Justice, Rule of Law and Human Rights. The lecture was preceded by a reading from the speeches of Daniel O'Connell by actor Stephen Rea.

FLAC are very grateful to both Colm Ó Cinnéide and Stephen Rea for their brilliant contributions to the evening which were very well received.





You can see this turn in the political attacks in the UK and elsewhere against the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)... But you also see these trends in it in the Trump administration's ruthless disregard of even the most minimal legal niceties in its deportation policy and its targeted killing of alleged drug smugglers in the Caribbean. You see it in increasing demands for 'streamlined' legal processes, the ouster of judicial controls, and the reining in of national, regional and international courts.

And of course you see this in Gaza, and Ukraine, and the systemic reengineering of much of our world to suit political narratives of utilitarian progress & inevitability – reflected most recently by the outrage of the US's tech oligarchs at the prospect of being subject to regulatory action by European public authorities.

You even see it in quieter, perhaps less noticeable ways – in the neglect of civil legal systems, legislative inertia when it comes to protecting rights, and ever-growing 'populist' anger at how legal processes and the wider business of separation of powers slows down governance.

O'Connell pushed back against those tides. A child of the revolutionary era, he used the language of rights. He also emphasised the value of the legal process, and deployed it to great effect as both a barrister and a politician. And he also placed great importance on the need for rights to be meaningful... Now, zooming forward 200 years into the future, we find ourselves in an era where human rights are not as fashionable as they once were – and where rule of law, understood in a substantive sense as subjecting public power to the justificatory requirements of legal process, is increasingly viewed as a troublesome burden.

**Professor Colm Ó Cinnéide, FLAC Justice Lecture 2025**







“ I have no superfluous tears to shed for Ireland, and shall show my love of my country by continuing my exertions to obtain for her justice and good government; but I feel that I have something Irish at my heart, which makes me sympathize with all those who are suffering under oppression.

I am the advocate of civil and religious liberty all over the globe, and wherever tyranny exists, I am the foe of the tyrant; wherever oppression shows itself, I am the foe of the oppressor; wherever slavery rears its head, I am the enemy of the system, or the institution, call it by what name you will. I am the friend of liberty in every clime, class, and colour:—my sympathy with distress is not confined within the narrow bounds of my own green island—no, it extends itself to every corner of the earth—my heart walks abroad, and wherever the miserable is to be succoured, and the slave is to be set free, there my spirit is at home, and I delight to dwell in its abode

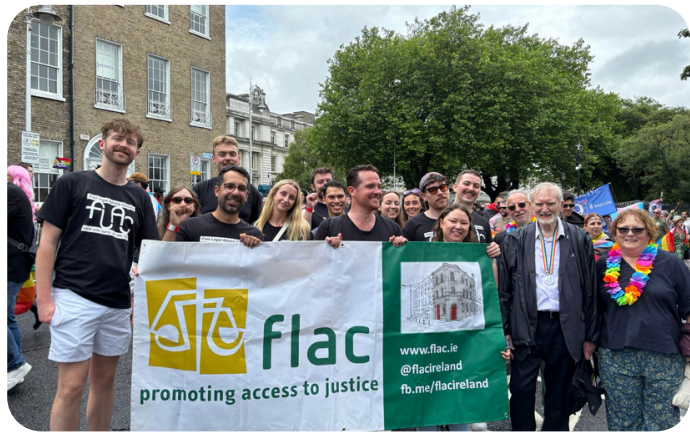
**An extract from the speeches of Daniel O’Connell, as read by Stephen Rea at the  
FLAC Justice Lecture 2025**



# FLAC Golden Pin Awards 2025

## **Promoting Access to Justice for the LGBTQIA+ Community – James Rooney BL & Cillian Bracken BL**

In mid-2024, the FLAC LGBTQIA+ Legal Clinic lost its only source of funding which has left that service operating in a greatly reduced format while we seek a more sustainable and long-term source of funding.



The two barristers James Rooney and Cillian Bracken, who provided legal advice to people through the LGBTQIA+ Legal Clinic have shown a sustained commitment to access to justice, rights and equality for the gay and trans community. Both continue to provide legal advice and support to individuals and organisations on a pro bono basis and to publicly discuss the importance of the access to justice and public legal assistance for the LGBTQIA+ community.

For the last two years, they have been stalwarts behind the FLAC banner at the Dublin Pride Parade – with James acting as the unofficial Grand Marshall each year. We were pleased to present James and Cillian with the FLAC Golden Pin award.

## **Accompanying and monitoring the Global Sumud Flotilla to Gaza aboard the Independent Legal Support Boat - Gemma McLoughlin-Burke BL & Leigh Brosnan BL**

In July 2025, as a famine took hold across the Gaza Strip, the Global Sumud Flotilla set sail towards Gaza in an attempt to provide aid and to break Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip which is illegal under International law. In September, two Irish barristers, Gemma McLoughlin-Burke and Leigh Brosnan, boarded the Shireen – an Independent Legal Support Boat which accompanied the flotilla until it reached the final leg of its journey to Gaza.



(L-R: Leigh Brosnan BL, Gemma McLoughlin-Burke BL, Conall Cahill, Cillian Bracken BL)

During their month aboard the Shireen, Gemma and Leigh provided important media and legal updates – including communiqués in response to the attacks on the unarmed flotilla vessels which they described as a “violation of international maritime law and international humanitarian law.”

Both demonstrated tremendous bravery and commitment to the principles of human rights, equality and access to justice for which they were awarded the FLAC Golden Pin.

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## Section Five:

# Staff, Governance & Funding

FLAC is committed to the highest standards of governance, accountability, and transparency in carrying out its mission to promote equal access to justice.

FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) is a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital and is registered in Dublin (Company Reg. No. 49413). It is recognised by the Revenue Commissioners for charitable tax exemption (CHY No. 6097). FLAC is registered with the Charities Regulator (Registered Charity Number 20010256), and is fully compliant with the Charities Governance Code. It submits its accounts and annual report to the Charities Regulator each year.

FLAC is an independent law centre under the terms of the Solicitors Acts 1954-2002 (Independent Law Centres) Regulations 2006, S.I. 103/2006.

The organisation is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors, which has overall responsibility for FLAC's strategic direction, governance, and financial stewardship. The Board works closely with the Chief Executive and senior management team to ensure that the organisation operates effectively, fulfils its charitable purpose, and complies with all relevant legal and regulatory obligations.

During 2025 the Board comprised of six directors and met nine times to oversee organisational performance, approve budgets and strategic plans, monitor risk, and ensure that appropriate policies and controls are in place. The board is supported by Finance and Audit, Governance and Strategic Planning sub committees that provide detailed oversight in key areas and reporting regularly to the Board on their activities and recommendations.

The organisation maintains robust systems of internal control and financial management to safeguard its assets, manage risk effectively, and ensure that funding is used responsibly and efficiently in furtherance of its charitable objectives.

The Board recognises that effective governance is fundamental to maintaining the trust and confidence of our service users, staff, volunteers, funders, and the wider public.



## FLAC Council

- Róisín Fitzpatrick (Chair)
- Fiona Donson (Vice Chair)
- Maria Elena Costa Sa
- Don Crewe
- Owen Keany
- Eoin Mac Aodha



(L-R: Fiona Donson, Colm Ó Cinnéide, Owen Keany, Stephen Rea, Eilis Barry and Maria Elena Costa Sa)



Eoin MacAodha joined FLAC Council February 2025. Eoin is a partner in Bryne Wallace Shield's Litigation and Regulation Department. He has been involved with FLAC since 2017 including the provision of pro bono advice, training to volunteers and bringing public interest litigation.

## Funders

FLAC is grateful to all our funders and supporters who have shown their commitment to access to justice through donations and grants. This support enables FLAC to promote access to justice through all of our various work programmes. In 2025, FLAC's funders included:

- Citizens Information Board
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.
- Community Foundation for Ireland
- Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration
- Members of the Law Society of Ireland
- Department of Rural and Community Development through SSNO (2022- 2025)
- St. Stephen's Green Trust
- Embassy of France
- Members of the Bar of Ireland

FLAC also thanks all the individual barristers, solicitors, donors and Friends of FLAC for their financial support. In addition, PILA was supported by a number of law firms who demonstrated their commitment to pro bono and law in the public interest by becoming Sustaining Partners. Sustaining Partners in 2024 were: A&L Goodbody, Arthur Cox, Matheson and McCann Fitzgerald.



## FLAC Staff 2025

Junaid Abdulkarim – PILA Legal Research Officer    Corina Byrne - Finance, HR & Office Manager

Karan Ahluwalia - Public Interest Litigation  
Solicitor

Conall Cahill - National Clinics and Volunteers  
Development Manager (Maternity Cover)

Eilis Barry – Chief Executive

Féith Clarke – Receptionist & Administrative  
Assistant (Since August 2025)

Christopher Bowes - Policy & Public Affairs  
Manager

Ingrid Colvin – Clinics Co-Ordinator & Assistant  
Chief Executive (Until April 2025)

Cillian Bracken – LGBTQI+ Clinic Advisor (Until  
February 2025)

Deirdre Curtis – Information Line Officer

Erin Brogan – Telephone Information & Referral  
Line Development Manager

Lauren Flanagan – Case Worker (until August  
2025)

Molly Byrne - Volunteers, Clinics & Societies  
Coordinator (Since September 2025)

Maureen Gourley – Legal Officer (since March  
2025)



## FLAC Staff 2025

Demetra Herdes – PILA Legal Officer

Anne McSharry – Information Line Officer

Marie Keating – Information Line Officer

Colm O'Halloran - Communications & Campaigns Officer (Since September 2025)

Gillian Kernan - Information Systems, Governance and Compliance Manager

Sarah O'Malley - Public Interest Litigation Solicitor (Since October 2025)

Liz Lee – Receptionist & Administrative Assistant

James Rooney – LGBTQI+ Clinic Advisor (Until February 2025)

Sinéad Lucey – Managing Solicitor

Maria Saracut - Information Line Officer

Oluwatosin Makanjuola – Information Line Support Officer

Sinéad Scales - National Clinics and Volunteers Development Manager

Nijole Matiukiene – Housekeeper

Caroline Smith - Media & Communications Officer (until July 2025)

Mary McMorland - Information Line Officer





In 2025, FLAC bid a sad farewell to Caroline Smith, our Media & Communications Officer who joined the organisation in 2017. Caroline played an important role in FLAC's work over many years, and was a central and much-admired part of the FLAC team. We wish her well.

We also bid farewell Ingrid Colvin (FLAC's Assistant Chief Executive) who made a huge contribution in the volunteers and clinics management and governance. We thank her for her very valuable work and wish her well in her new ventures.

Finally, we said goodbye to James Rooney and Cillian Bracken, following the loss of funding for FLAC's LGBTQI+ Legal Clinic, as well as to Lauren Flangan from the legal team.



Ingrid Colvin



Caroline Smith

During 2025, we were delighted to welcome Sarah O'Malley to the legal team and to say hello again to FLAC stalwart Maureen Gourley. We are also very pleased to welcome Molly Byrne to the Clinics team, and to Colm O'Halloran who has taken up the FLAC comms mantle.



Maureen Gourley



Molly Byrne



Sarah O'Malley



Colm O'Halloran

## FLAC Income & Expenditure 2025

FLAC's accounts are prepared in accordance with FRS102, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland. FLAC's 2025 accounts will be audited by PKF Brenson Lawlor. Our audited accounts are made available in full on FLAC's website. FLAC's financial year runs from 1 January to 31 December. The following extracts are from FLAC's accounts for the year ending 31 December 2025.

| <b>Income</b>                                    | <b>Unaudited<br/>2025</b> | <b>Per Audited<br/>Financial<br/>Statements<br/>2024</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Philanthropic Funding                            | 109,140                   | 95,947                                                   |
| Bar Council & Law Society Members' Contributions | 325,356                   | 345,843                                                  |
| Statutory Funding                                | 841,635                   | 843,571                                                  |
| Fundraising and Donations                        | 111,378                   | 95,141                                                   |
| Legal costs received                             | 103,415                   | 1,062,185                                                |
| European Funding                                 | -                         | 39,283                                                   |
|                                                  | <b>1,490,925</b>          | <b>2,481,971</b>                                         |
|                                                  |                           |                                                          |
| <b>Expenditure</b>                               |                           |                                                          |
| Staff costs                                      | 1,306,057                 | 1,203,055                                                |
| Programme of work                                | 192,496                   | 883,658                                                  |
| Overheads, equipment & depreciation              | 136,367                   | 108,423                                                  |
|                                                  | <b>1,634,920</b>          | <b>2,195,136</b>                                         |