



Key Facts:

Accessing Justice in Hard Times

FLAC is committed to the provision of a comprehensive civil legal aid scheme in Ireland which ensures equal access to justice for all. While the scheme has never been comprehensive, the goal of a more efficient, accessible and sustainable system slipped further and further out of reach during the recession. Here we present 15 key facts drawn from FLAC's latest research on this area, *Accessing Justice in Hard Times*:

1. In June 2013, the number of principal dwelling houses with **mortgage accounts in arrears** peaked at 142,892. Although mortgage arrears generally involve households with reduced income requiring increased legal help, in 2013 the Legal Aid Board provided legal advice and representation in just 479 debt-related cases.
2. In 2007, some 3173 complaints were submitted to the **Employment Appeals Tribunal**. In 2009, this rose to 9458. Legal aid is not available in cases before the Tribunal/Workplace Relations Commission.
3. In 2007, some 14,070 applications were made to the **Social Welfare Appeals Office**. By 2012, this had increased to 35,484. The Appeals Office is excluded from the remit of the legal aid scheme.
4. In June 2015, the **UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** recommended that the State ensure the provision of free legal aid services in a wide range of areas, including by expanding the remit of the civil legal aid scheme.
5. The **Civil Legal Aid Regulations 2013** cut the disposable capital threshold allowance from €320,000 to €100,000.
6. In 2013, the same regulations meant the Legal Aid Board increased mandatory **contributions** for legal advice from €10 to €30 and for legal aid from €50 to €130.
7. In its 2015 Concluding Observations, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights voiced concerns about the insufficient support services for victims of **domestic violence**, and recommended that such services, including legal aid, be strengthened.
8. Since 2013, parents in **child care proceedings** are no longer required to pay financial contributions.
9. The number of legal aid certificates granted to private practitioners for representation in divorce and separation matters in the **Circuit Court** dropped from 329 in 2007 to zero in 2013.
10. The number of legal aid certificates granted to private practitioners dealing with **District Court** cases increased from 1,977 in 2007 to over 5,000 in 2012.
11. In 2007, there were 10,164 applications for legal services in the Board's Law Centres, excluding asylum related applications. By 2011, this figure had **increased by 84% to 18,657 applications**.
12. A **triage** system was introduced in 2012, whereby applicants are supposed to be seen by a solicitor for a short consultation within the first month of applying for legal services. By the end of 2012, only three of the eleven Law Centres operating the triage system had waiting lists of one month or less.
13. In 2007, the **maximum waiting time** in a Law Centre for legal services was 6 months. By 2012 this had surged to **15 months**.
14. Between 2007 and 2013, the number of people waiting on a first consultation with a solicitor in a Law Centre increased from 1163 to 5067, a percentage increase of over 335%.
15. The number of **child care cases** in which civil legal aid was granted progressively increased from 707 in 2007 to 1,178 in 2012.