

Annual Report 2024

A New Strategic Direction:
Building for the Future



**An Bord Um
Chúnammh Dlíthiúil**
Legal Aid Board

Providing access to justice since 1979

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Nuala Egan, **Chairperson**

Chairperson Foreword

In 2024, the Legal Aid Board's Statement of Strategy 2024–2026 came into effect. This document sets out the vision of the statutory Board for the organisation in the coming years and embodies the values to be promoted by and within the organisation as it provides the services to those in need of its legal and mediation services. As we drafted the Statement of Strategy, we were mindful of the ongoing challenges that the organisation faces in ensuring the provision of services to those entitled to them and, indeed, of the expanding range of areas of work which our staff must navigate.

The core features of the Statement of Strategy 2024–2026 are embodied in its five pivotal themes: Quality of Service, Community Engagement, Mediation and Dispute Resolution, Civil Justice Reform, and Organisational Culture, People and Communications. Many of those strategic aims will be considered and addressed in the ongoing organisational review project upon which the Legal Aid Board embarked this year, in order to fortify our organisational strength and resilience. Much of that strength derives from the individuals who make up our workforce. It is imperative that we support that workforce and we remain committed to attracting, retaining and empowering individuals with the requisite skills and experience.

We await the Report of the Civil Legal Aid Review in 2025 and its likely impact upon the parameters of the work of the Legal Aid Board. Those parameters may also be expanded by new legislative provisions. We welcome this changing work environment, which demands thoughtful scrutiny and effective leadership on the part of the Executive and statutory Board alike. The undeniable resource implications of such growth must also be acknowledged and addressed in order to ensure the organisation can meet the needs of those members of the public who rely upon our legal and family mediation services now and in the coming years.

As the organisation has now completed the first of the Statement of Strategy's three year term, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who this year contributed to the implementation of the strategic direction embodied in the Statement. I wish to also acknowledge the support and leadership of the Minister for Justice Helen McEntee whose commitment to access to justice underpins our shared vision.

Nuala Egan
Chairperson

“Ensuring the provision of services to those entitled to them.”

Joan Crawford, **CEO**

CEO Foreword

It is with great pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I present the Legal Aid Board's Annual Report 2024. This has been a pivotal year for the organisation — a year of significant achievements, meaningful milestones and important decisions about the future. Central to this has been the introduction of our new Statement of Strategy 2024–2026, which charts a renewed strategic direction, focused on strengthening and future-proofing our services.

Our commitment to providing high-quality legal and family mediation services has never been stronger. This report highlights the progress we have made and the challenges we continue to navigate as we work to meet the evolving legal and societal needs of the people we serve.

In 2024, we operated in an increasingly complex landscape, shaped by changing legal demands and societal shifts. Nonetheless, our achievements throughout 2024 include:

Legal Aid Service

- 28,050 applications for legal aid and advice.
- 58% of these applications were in the private family law area.
- 11,689 people sought legal services in relation to international protection.

Family Mediation Services

- 2,294 new cases.
- 1,045 total agreements.
- 2,389 cases reached a conclusion within the year.

Decision-making and External Services

- 19,693 referrals to our private practitioner panels.
- 1,025 cases under the Abhaile Scheme.
- 7,423 legal aid certificates granted in the District Court on foot of the District Court Private Practitioner Scheme in 2024

Our efforts have been supported by the tireless work of our dedicated staff members, the significant collaboration of our stakeholders, and the insightful guidance of our Board. As CEO, I wish to thank the staff members of the Legal Aid Board for their continued passion and commitment over the past year. Their outstanding contributions continue to be pivotal to the delivery of our societal mission. We are very grateful for the strong relationships we have with the Department for Justice and give special thanks to Minister for Justice Helen McEntee for her ongoing support. We also wish to sincerely thank our statutory Board for their strategic oversight, effectiveness, and governance.

Together, we look forward to building on our 2024 achievements and further delivering in 2025 and in the future.

Joan Crawford
CEO

The Operating Environment

We are the statutory, independent body responsible for the provision of civil legal aid and advice to persons of modest means in the State, family mediation and vulnerable witness related services and for the administration of a number of ad hoc legal aid schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2021.

Civil legal aid and advice are provided by the Legal Aid Board primarily through a network of 34 full-time law centres with 3 part-time centres by solicitors employed by the Board. Specific law centres in Dublin, Cork and Galway include an international protection specialty and there are also dedicated units in Dublin dealing with medical negligence/personal injury cases, Traveller legal supports, Assisted Decision Making services and Child Care proceedings. The Legal Aid Board also provides a family mediation service to couples who are separating or divorcing. This service is administered through twenty family mediation offices, some of which are co-located with law centres. The Legal Aid Board operates a specialised, independent and professional research and library service for all of the main bodies involved in the international protection process. The Legal Aid Board also engages private solicitors in certain areas of law in: District Court family law matters; Circuit Court judicial separation and divorce cases; the Abhaile scheme and international protection cases.

We continue to prioritise being an employer of choice, with a strong focus on supporting our staff and fostering a workplace where people feel valued and satisfied in their roles. Staff retention and engagement remain key priorities for the Legal Aid Board.

We are currently facing challenges due to resource deficits in our permanent workforce, which have led to service availability issues in certain regions. In the past, we could look to meet these demands by appointing private practitioners from our panels. However, some areas are now experiencing shortages with no private practitioners available. This affects our ability to maintain a consistent, accessible, and uniform service nationwide. We are currently working to resolve these difficulties and remain fully committed to ensuring that the same high standard of service is available to clients across the country.

Our current IT infrastructure has not kept pace with technological advancements in the sector. Staff frequently face difficulties accessing essential information promptly or collaborating effectively within the organisation, with practitioners, the Courts Service, or clients. To support our ambitions, a significant investment in a modern fit-for-purpose IT system is urgently needed: one that facilitates, rather than impedes efficient service delivery.

We fully support the ongoing reform of family justice in Ireland and are committed to contributing our extensive experience and insight to this process. We will continue to engage with the Department of

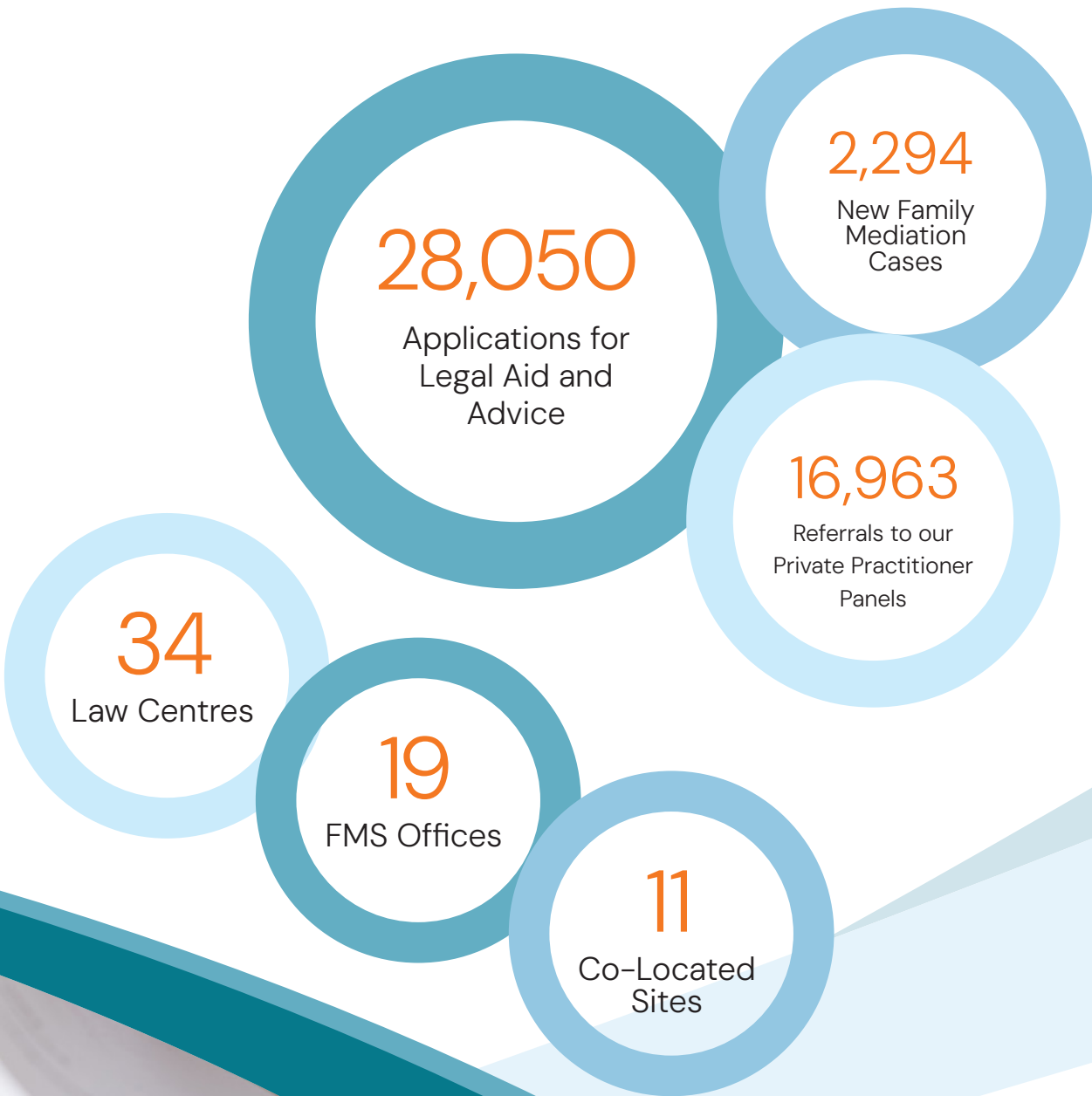
Justice to shape and implement reforms, including those from the Civil Legal Aid Review. We are also preparing to assume full responsibility for the administration of criminal legal aid when called upon.

These important changes represent fundamental challenges. The necessary skills, agility and determination will be embedded to ensure reform promoted by Government is implemented with utmost efficiency. The required change management will build

upon recent work to take forward, amongst other things, assisted decision making, the voice of the child and the handling of personal insolvency cases.

The reforms proposed to the Family Courts; the timely revision of the civil legal aid system and proposals to assign responsibility for the criminal legal aid system to the Legal Aid Board shall necessitate that the Legal Aid Board continues to be hard working, adaptable and imaginative in pursuit of best practice.

Our Mission Activity:



Structure of the Legal Aid Board

We provide three core services to our clients:



These services are supported by 74 staff in:



Statement of Strategy 2024–2026



Mission

Our mission is to assist in the resolution of disputes through family mediation where possible and appropriate, and to ensure that the civil legal system is available to all citizens who are eligible. We provide expert legal services to clients of modest means and family mediation services to all through local Law and Mediation Centres, which are based in the communities they serve.



Vision

Our vision is to ensure that those entitled to our services are provided with them in a responsive, professional, caring, and dynamic manner.



Values

Child-Centred

We recognise that children are at the heart of many of the disputes we seek to resolve, and we acknowledge the constitutional provisions of Article 42A concerning children. We will endeavor to have regard to the best interests of the child and to ascertain the voice of the child in so far as practicable. We will develop a range of policies and mechanisms to ensure that these constitutional imperatives are incorporated into the resolution of all proceedings concerning children that we are involved in.

Respect

We demonstrate respect for the dignity and human rights of the people who use our services, our colleagues and all who work with the Legal Aid Board.

Integrity

We are an open organisation that promotes candour and transparency in how we make decisions at all levels of the organisation and do so in a manner that is honest, accountable, and forthcoming by default.

Collaboration

We work in partnership and consultation with stakeholders across the justice system to achieve shared objectives and to be informed by the needs of the communities in which we are based and whom we serve.

Expertise

We provide an excellent service, where our clients are assisted by leading professionals in their field. We foster a culture of learning that fosters and promotes expertise, and which shares that expertise with the justice sector and informs public and policy discourse.

Key Actions and Success Indicators

Strategic Ref	Expectation	Key Actions	What Success Looks Like	Key Performance Indicators
1	Quality of Service			
1.a	The development of environments that are client-friendly and accessible and, where appropriate, child-friendly.	Undertake a systematic Improvement and refurbishment of all existing premises, accompanied by a Capital Investment Plan to be approved by Board.	All Legal Aid Board premises are universally accessible, suitable workplaces for our staff, welcoming for clients and relevant premises are appropriate for children.	An audit of our premises is undertaken to assess the level of accessibility of each; Capital Investment Plan is developed.
1.b	The establishment of a quality — assurance system to assist in the preparation of improvement plans and the identification of best practice.	Develop a quality improvement system to include peer review, international comparator research and dissemination and promotion of findings internally.	A culture of continuous improvement in all services, processes and management systems informed by evidence-based quality assurance and review.	External review of our quality assurance processes completed; A Quality Improvement System is developed to include peer review, international comparator research and dissemination and promotion of findings internally.
1.c	The promotion of feedback from all clients to generate data to improve our practice.	Develop and roll out client satisfaction tracking, with documented processes in place to use and action client feedback.	Clients are engaged with meaningfully on how to improve our service, that feedback is incorporated into regular quality improvement cycle.	Client experience surveys are developed as part of the Quality Improvement System.
1.d	The introduction of a resource-allocation model in order that services are planned and delivered according to need, not solely based on demand.	Put in place a resource allocation model which will be reviewed regularly, and will inform management practice.	Services are available to clients consistently, with sufficient flexibility to be able to provide particular services in cases of acute need.	A resource allocation model is designed and implemented.
1.e	The monitoring of waiting times and the establishment of minimum-service standards in the context of resources, vacancies, and local circumstances.	Agree minimum service waiting time targets with the board, to be reviewed and revised with an aim to reach no more than twelve weeks for any service.	No client needs to wait more than twelve weeks for their initial consultation with a Legal Aid Board solicitor or mediator. Case completion times are monitored with efficient completion times achieved for all cases.	Continuous monitoring of waiting times is developed and mitigation measures are taken as appropriate.

Strategic Ref	Expectation	Key Actions	What Success Looks Like	Key Performance Indicators
2	Serving the Community			
2.a	To learn from the Minceir/ Traveller Legal Support Service and explore similar projects where a gap in service uptake is identified.	Expand the Minceir/ Traveller Legal Support Service. Pilot and support similar target projects, where successful.	Those most in need of Legal Aid Board services are facilitated to access them, and innovative service provision models are trialled, and rolled out when proven effective.	A review of the Minceir/ Traveller Legal Support Service is undertaken; New innovative service provision models are identified, trialled and rolled out, if proven effective.
2.b	To approve and implement the organisation's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy.	Publish and implement the EDI strategy. Action any recommendations that require action outside the organisation's remit.	EDI strategy adopted, published on website, and progress against indicators reported on annually.	EDI strategy adopted, actions implemented and reported on.
2.c	To augment our working partnerships with the Department of Justice, the Courts Service, and other related statutory bodies such as the new Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency.	Continue formal and informal cooperation with the named agencies, report on in annual reports and furnish regular reports to the Board.	Regular engagements with associated agencies and Department of Justice contribute to improved outcomes and efficiency for our clients, and our practise experience informs national policy.	Participation in Cross-Organisational Committees is tracked and reported as is participation in Groups which relate to national policy.
2.d	To develop further consultation and joint working with NGOs.	Participate in regular formal engagements with NGOs at all relevant levels in the Legal Aid Board.	Our work is informed by the insights and recommendations of our NGO partners, and, where appropriate, decisions are made having consulted with the most relevant stakeholders.	Engagement between the Executive Management Team and the External Consultative Panel is continued.
2.e	To provide services informed by trauma and seek to eliminate re-traumatisation, being cognisant of the vulnerability of many of our clients.	Provide training for all staff in trauma-informed practice.	Regular engagements with experts to ensure services are designed and delivered according to best trauma-informed practice standards.	Training provided for relevant staff in trauma-informed practice. Research to inform any future designed led service initiatives.

Ref	Strategic Expectation	Key Actions	What Success Looks Like	Key Performance Indicators
3 Mediation and Alternatives to Court-Based Dispute Resolution				
3.a	To ensure the availability of mediation whenever appropriate in all local Law and Mediation Centres and Court houses when agreed.	Put in place a documented and mainstreamed procedure to ensure the full mainstreaming of mediation and legal services; Evaluate our current mediation presence in court houses, with a view to improving, and building on the Take the First Steps Programme to increase awareness of mediation at district court level.	Full integration of Family Mediation Service and legal services. All clients for whom it is appropriate are referred to mediation.	Continuous monitoring of waiting times is developed with mitigation measures taken when intervention is necessary, including use of the Private Mediator Panel.
3.b	To increase the number of persons trained, certified, and available to work for the Legal Aid Board either directly or through a private practitioners' panel.	Develop and implement a Mediators' Training Plan with targets for numbers of mediators trained, certified, and appointed to positions in the Legal Aid Board.	Waiting times to access family mediation services reduced. Increased numbers of mediators trained, certified, and appointed to positions in the Legal Aid Board.	Roll out a Mediators Training Plan; Continue to offer trainee Mediator positions within the Legal Aid Board.
3.c	To promote, through national and local campaigns, the nature of mediation and its effectiveness in specific circumstances.	Carry out a wide-reaching public awareness campaign promoting mediation.	Increased public understanding and appreciation of mediation, with a commensurate increase in public queries for mediation.	A communication plan is developed with a view to conducting a public awareness campaign to promote mediation.
3.d	To develop further expertise in alternative dispute resolution.	Include non-litigation dispute resolution processes as a key theme in one of the Board's conferences over the course of this statement of strategy. Support for staff research and publication of findings on Alternative Dispute Resolution, Quasi-Judicial Decision Making, and related processes.	The Legal Aid Board is more recognised for its expertise in non-litigation dispute resolution.	Dispute Resolution content delivered in one or more conference(s); Alternative Dispute Resolution is included in any training and research initiatives by the Board.

Ref	Strategic Expectation	Key Actions	What Success Looks Like	Key Performance Indicators
4 Civil Justice Reform and Reorganisation				
4.a	To contribute as a lead agency in the ongoing implementation of the Family Justice Strategy 2022-2025 and the development of future strategies, promoting practical solutions for a family justice system that supports simple, early, fair, and, where possible, non-adversarial solutions;	LAB personnel will actively contribute and lead key strands of the Family Justice Implementation Group's over the course of this Statement of Strategy. The CEO and Board will be an important voice on policy innovations in this area and will inform public discourse and policy development.	Our work will inform innovations and new policy developments in Family Justice and be informed by colleagues in associated State agencies, and the Department of Justice through the Family Justice Implementation Group.	LAB personnel have actively contributed and have led key strands of the Family Justice Implementation Group's work over the course of this Statement of Strategy.
4.b	To influence and prepare for the outcome of the review of Civil Legal Aid.	LAB personnel will be constructively involved in the review of Civil Legal Aid and the Board will strategically implement internal reforms necessary to adapt to any legislative or policy changes enacted.	A seamless transition to the professional delivery of any eventual adapted Civil Legal Aid reform.	Any recommendations accepted by Government and referable to the Board will be implemented.
4.c	To prepare for taking full responsibility for the administration of criminal legal aid.	The Board will implement necessary internal reforms if required to ensure the effective delivery of any legislative or policy changes implemented affecting our work.	Any legislative or policy changes in this area will be addressed effectively and in a timely manner.	A due diligence engagement between Department of Justice, National Shared Services Office, Courts Service and LAB is conducted in order to prepare for the introduction of the proposed legislation; Prepare and execute implementation plans which explore and reconcile personnel, facilities (including property), and systems in place to administer all functions relating to the criminal legal aid functions which transfer to LAB.
4.d	To seek strong partnerships with other Government agencies to ensure a holistic approach to emerging areas such as assisted decision-making.	Participate in regular formal and informal interactions with other Government agencies; Provide regular policy inputs in areas within our competence and relevant to our work.	Policy development in areas in which we are expert are informed by that practice-based expertise, and we are supported by other Government agencies to provide our services effectively.	Participation in Cross-Organisational Committees and Groups which relate to national policy is tracked.

Strategic Ref	Expectation	Key Actions	What Success Looks Like	Key Performance Indicators
4.e	To develop a range of policies to ensure that children's views and interests, where they are affected and where it is appropriate, are fully considered in our work.	Develop a practical, service-focused, Voice of the Child Policy which encompasses our approach to children's rights, welfare, and voice in all areas in which we work, which is to be launched by 2025.	LAB Voice of the Child Policy published at the latest by 2025 and implemented.	Service provision carried out in accordance with the Voice of the Child Policy in all cases in which children are involved.
5 Culture, People, and Communications				
5.a	To promote a culture that values all staff contributions, provides, and supports responsibility, and rewards and retains our highly talented and qualified staff.	Regularly publish consistent internal communications which highlight any recent work-related achievements and significant wins across the organisation.	Underpinned by good leadership, all staff feel encouraged to excel and build deep expertise in their chosen area of focus and successes are celebrated.	Staff engagement policy is implemented.
5.b	To respond to an organisational and structural review.	Carry out an independent organisational and structural review.	Organisational and Structural review recommendations implemented and embedded by 2026.	Organisational and structural review carried out, recommendations considered, costed, evaluated, and implementation planning completed.
5.c	To seek a balance between local delivery and first-class support systems to promote quality based on sound policy and an equitable distribution of resources.	Put in place employee feedback mechanisms that contribute to the building of fit-for-purpose systems and structures that contribute to a consistent national service, responsive to local needs in each centre.	Our law and mediation centres are consistent in the quality of service available but reflective of the communities in which they are based.	A resource allocation model is designed and implemented; The recommendations of the Organisational Review are implemented, as appropriate; Recruitment campaigns include consideration that staff are reflective of the community which the office services.
5.d	To implement comprehensive digital transformation.	In 2024, commence a digital transformation project which will modernise our IT infrastructure. Publish an action plan by the end of 2024, and a significant first phase of upgrades will be complete in 2025.	Our IT systems are effective, interoperable, and reliable.	Digital transformation action plan is published by end of 2024.

Strategic Ref	Expectation	Key Actions	What Success Looks Like	Key Performance Indicators
5.e	To develop the website in the interests of clients seeking interactive assistance, enabling clients to locate the right service and advice.	Develop, publish, monitor and update a client information and signposting tool.	Our website assists potential clients to locate the right service, learn about the services we provide, and to understand the options available to them.	A refresh of the LAB website is conducted.
5.f	To ensure effective and inclusive communications using a wide range of media and with all staff, management, and non-executive board members.	We will publish regular all-staff updates which promote an understanding of the importance of the work we carry out in all areas of the organisation. These will be supported by a calendar of events where senior leadership (Management and Board) meet and discuss with colleagues the work of the organisation and what improvements could be made.	Publication of a full employee engagement calendar and events carried out to include regional meetings, local meetings with senior leadership, and regular internal communications with an emphasis on giving employees a clear picture of the important work carried out across the organisation.	An internal communications plan is developed; An employee experience application is developed and implemented.
5.g	To approve and implement the organisation's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy.	Publish and implement the EDI strategy. Action any recommendations to ensure that our workforce is reflective of the diversity within our community.	EDI strategy adopted, published on website, and progress against indicators reported on annually.	EDI strategy adopted, actions implemented and reported on.
5.h	To market the opportunities and rewards associated with working for the Legal Aid Board.	Develop a recruitment strategy which seeks to promote employment by the board to legal professionals, mediators, and specialist staff. This should include a focus on early-stage law students, trainee solicitors, and early-career mediators.	Employment opportunities with the Legal Aid Board are promoted. Vacancies and waiting lists reduced accordingly.	Vacancies subject to budget are filled swiftly; A People Strategy is developed with a focus on recruitment, which includes attendance at job fairs, 3rd level institutions, and other relevant promotional opportunities.
5.i	To address the challenge of attracting private practitioners and counsel fully committed to the work of the Legal Aid Board, and seeking support and appropriate remuneration for them, as the retention and involvement of the private sector is part of our strength, vitality, and viability.	As part of our recruitment strategy, we will seek to ensure our offering to private practitioners is effective at attracting and retaining talented and qualified colleagues to fill places on the panels.	Opportunities on Legal Aid Board Private Practitioner Panels are promoted in the legal sector. Vacancies and waiting lists reduced accordingly.	The Terms and Conditions of LAB's Private Practitioner Scheme have been regularly evaluated and adjusted, where need is evidenced; The provision of training to private practitioners in relevant areas is continued.

Services Provided in 2024

Civil Legal Aid

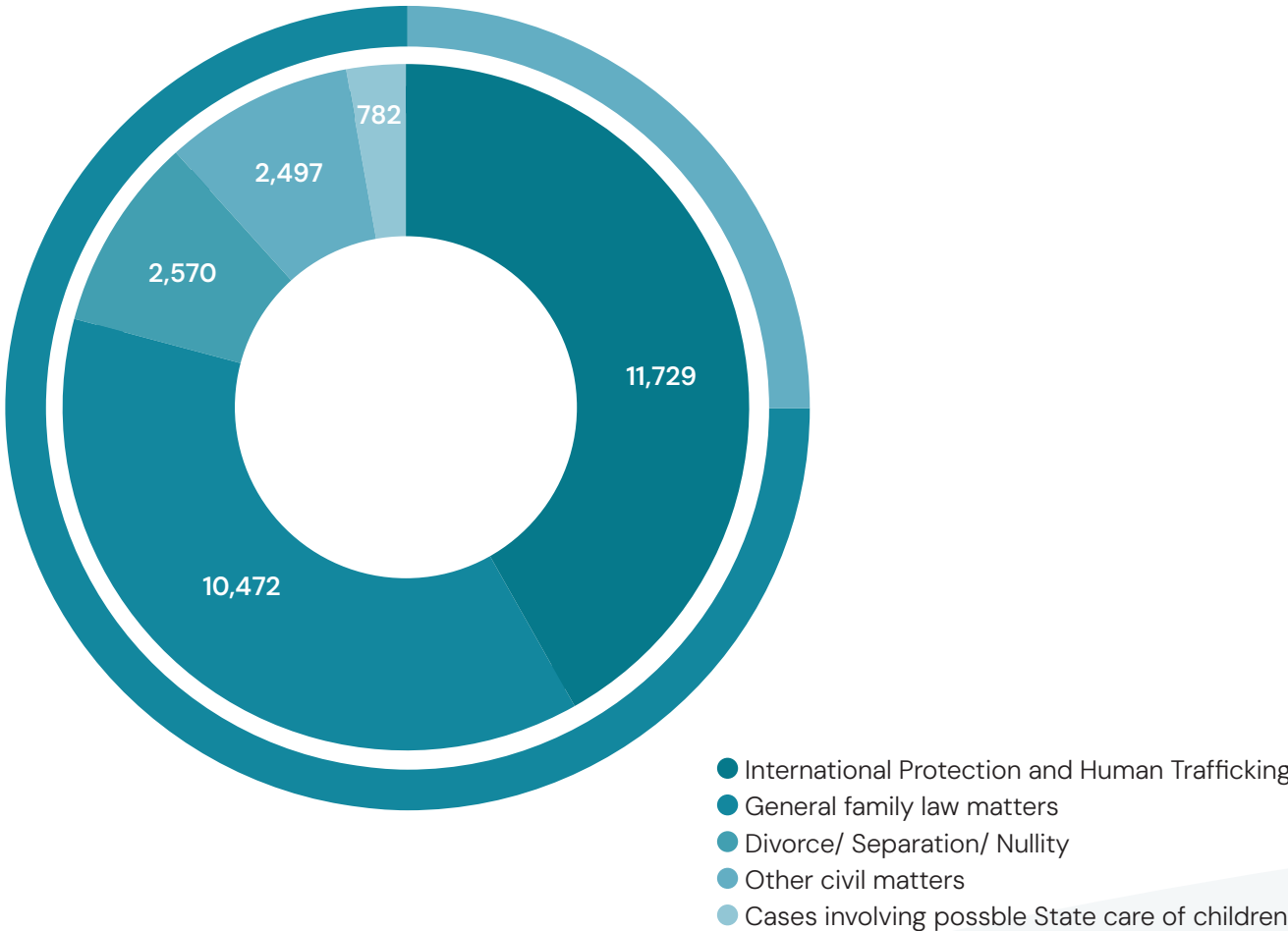
- We collaborated extensively with other stakeholders in the area of Assisted Decision Making including other Government Departments, public bodies and NGOs in responding to emerging issues as practice continues to develop in this area.
- We published an updated version of the Administrative Procedures Handbook (14th edition), taking into account new areas of service and changes in procedures and audit recommendations which have arisen since the previous edition. The Handbook is an important tool in terms of ensuring a quality and consistent service to all clients.
- We developed a new complaints pilot to streamline and improve the process for clients or applicants who wish to make a complaint in relation to services or seek a change of solicitor. The pilot was successful and yielded a reduction in the time taken to deal with complaints and, following collaboration with colleagues in DMES in relation to the use of the same form for complaints in relation to panel members, has been put on a permanent footing.
- The Law Centre network has taken on a new and extensive area of work in relation to orders under the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023, an area in which law centre staff are leading on the development of practice and procedure in the courts in relation to the running of cases. The Civil Operations Unit has worked to provide knowledge, updated procedures and training to staff to take on this new area of service delivery.
- Colleagues from our law centres began work in 2024 in engaging with other stakeholders, Government Departments, Public bodies and NGOs in working on preparations for service delivery under the EU Migration and Asylum Pact which will come into effect in 2026.
- Staff have taken a lead role in ensuring compliance with our duties under the Official Languages Act 2003, in terms of the provision of the Board's services in Irish. Staff have been encouraged to engage in Irish language courses and Lónra Gaeilge has been set up to encourage the use of the Irish language in offices. The group has had great engagement with all staff in using the Irish language.

Civil Legal Aid in Numbers

Table 1. Number of Applicants 2020–2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
General	13,209	13,827	13,849	14,554	16,361
International Protection	1,174	1,464	6,858	9,918	11,689
Total	14,383	15,291	20,705	24,472	28,050

Chart 1. Number of Applications by Case Type 2024



Family Mediation

- We developed a Call-back Application Service for potential clients to contact the Family Mediation Service and receive a call-back response. The service enables potential clients to submit their details and inquiries online, while ensuring timely response and protection of client information. In 2024, 1,535 applicants were responded to and 61% of these registered for Mediation. The ‘Your Call, Out Support’ National FMS Awareness Campaign delivered a 500,000 audience reach on traditional media, including fourteen radio interviews with campaign spokesperson Fiona McAuslan, Director of Family Mediation.
- The Pilot of the Mediator Private Practitioner Scheme was successfully completed within the terms of the objectives set out: a) To improve access to mediation for clients on the service’s waiting list, b) To improve access to mediation for clients in geographical areas where there is no service currently, c) To ensure a quality service is provided by Private Practitioner Mediators comparable to that provided by the service. 211 cases (422 Applicants) were referred to Private Practitioners in 2024. The Panel is now on a permanent footing.
- Dolphin House FMS and Courts Services, with the Courts Communications and Media Unit (CMU), created a bespoke information video, targeting parties who are already in Dolphin House, waiting for their case to be called. It promotes and explains the wrap-around mediation service that the teams in Dolphin House can offer.
- The Dublin District Family Law Office, Dolphin House gave a presentation on a joint initiative with the Legal Aid Board. The two organisations have been working together to promote mediation services available to family law court users in Dolphin House, Dublin. Promotional methods included displaying eye-catching professional materials about the services, and providing staff with cue cards for use in promoting the mediation services.
- Mediation staff utilised innovative channels to inform clients about mediation, including; an information box pops up when booking an appointment detailing the benefits of the free mediation services available in Dolphin House. The end of the presentation featured a “fish bowl” role play to show attendees what happens in a mediation session. The event was attended by members of the Department of Justice and Courts Service, along with the Legal Aid Board and Agencies who use Dolphin House.

Family Mediation in Numbers

Table 2. New Cases 2020–2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
All Issues (couples)	1,091	1,186	1,148	1,199	1,985
Court Based	251	326	355	314	309
Telephone Helpline Cases	248	—	—	—	—
Total	1,590	1,512	1,503	1,513	2,294

Table 3. Total Agreements 2020–2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
All Issues (couples)	581	819	726	707	844
Court Based	162	187	291	221	201
Telephone Helpline Cases	173	—	—	—	—
Total	916	1,006	1,017	928	1,045



Supporting Service Delivery

Decision Making and External Services

- A review of the pilot Central Financial Assessment Facility was completed and presented to the Executive Management Team with options for progression and this report remains under consideration.
- All remaining recommendations from the Abhaile Strategic Review were completed and implemented. In particular, the ability to apply for a second legal advice voucher in certain circumstances was introduced in mid-2024.
- Issues arising from the implementation of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 continue to be addressed and resolved.
- The Board operates a private practitioner panel for the provision of legal aid to family members in respect of inquests relating to certain deaths which are prescribed in the Coroners Acts (usually deaths in custody or maternal deaths). The panel applies in relation to persons where, following a request by a coroner to the Board under Section 60(4) of the Coroners Act 1962, legal advice or legal aid has been granted by the Board in connection with an inquest.

Decision-Making and External Service In Numbers

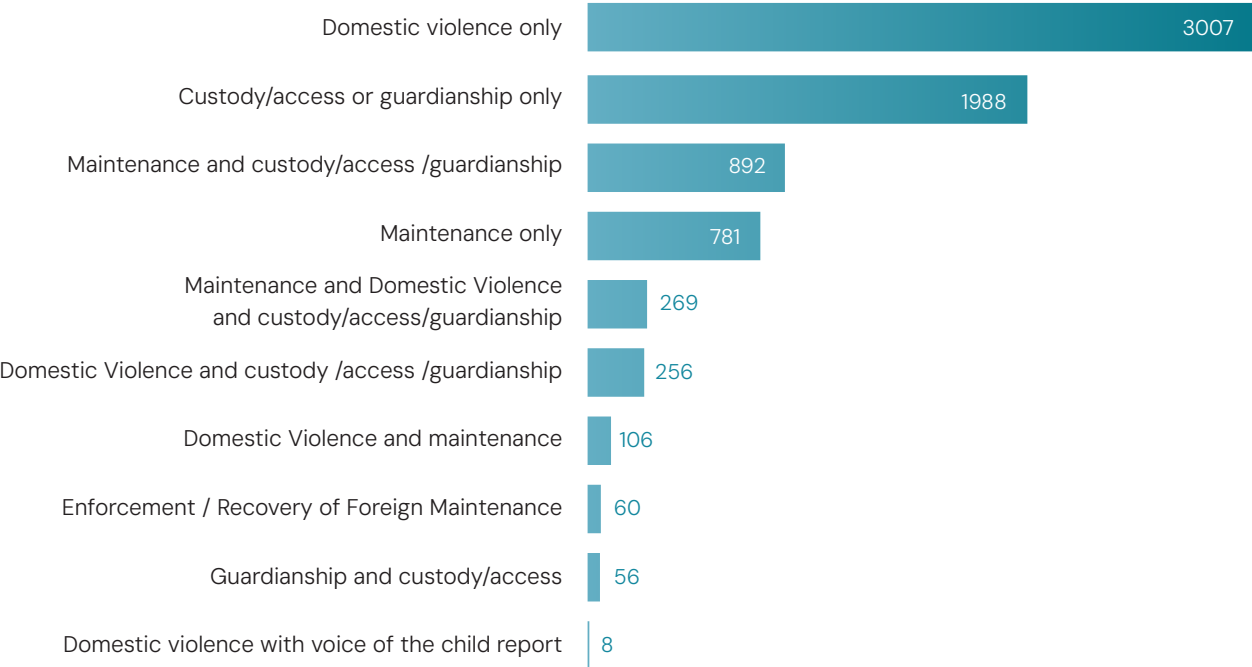
Table 4. Number of Referrals 2020–2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
District Court Private Family Law	6,042	6,961	7,086	7,082	7,423
District Court Child Care	47	55	92	172	193
Circuit Court	7	145	327	101	116
International Protection	941	918	5,725	8,850	11,109
Coroners Inquest	7	50	15	32	14
Assisted Decision Making (Capacity)	N/A	N/A	N/A	41	838
Total	7,044	8,129	13,245	16,278	19,693

Table 5. Abhaile Scheme Cases 2020–2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Consultations using MABS voucher	346	219	301	238	222
Authority to conduct further negotiations	51	25	12	3	3
Number of duty solicitor days scheduled	264	272	262	351	392
Legal Aid certificates granted for PIA reviews	414	324	254	229	334
Legal aid certificates granted for PIA appeals	148	101	70	21	25
Counsel granted for Circuit Court	259	139	41	23	49
Total	1,482	1,080	940	865	1,025

Chart 2. Legal Aid Certificates Granted in the District Court on Foot of the District Court PP Scheme 2024



Appeal Committee

The Appeal Committee is a statutory committee of the Legal Aid Board that decides on cases where a person makes an appeal against a decision of the Executive. The majority of cases that come before it relates to decisions to refuse legal aid certificates, or decisions concerning financial eligibility.

In 2024, the Committee considered 157 appeals which included 24 appeals which had been deferred from previous meetings. Of the 157 appeals considered, the decision of the Executive was upheld on 115 occasions. There were 15 appeals where the original decision was overturned. There were 26 deferred and 1 withdrawn.

Of the 115 Executive decisions affirmed, 51 pertained to financial ineligibility and 64 related to the applications of the “merits” criteria.

Human Resources

- Under the Staff Support and Wellbeing Programme, 155 colleagues undertook trauma informed practice workshops in 2024.
- We ran 41 recruitment competitions across all grades. Over the course of 2024, including assignments from the Public Appointments Service and civil service mobility, the number of people increased from 544 at the end of 2023 to 571 at the end of 2024. Staff turnover during 2024 was 13%.
- We continued to support service delivery colleagues to further knowledge in the area of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 through numerous training initiatives in this area. To assist family mediation colleagues in the pursuit of their strategic goals, LDU commenced the process of roll out of child inclusive mediation training in 2024.
- The Legal Aid Board's Advance / Refund of Fees Scheme is an opportunity for staff to continue their development through third level educational courses. In 2024, 70 staff were awarded funding through the Scheme for academic courses covering a range from undergraduate certificates up to PhD research.
- OneLearning is the Civil Service Learning and Development Centre that provides access to training that is common across the Civil Service. In 2024, we facilitated 326 attendances at 39 different courses on the One Learning platform.
- Our onboarding experience improved with an emphasis on mentoring to foster meaningful connections, empowering personal and professional growth and creating a supportive community for our mentors and mentees. We seek to ensure new joiner and newly promoted staff members are supported in their new role. Thirty-two new joiner and newly promoted staff members were appointed mentors through the mentoring programme in 2024.

Corporate Services

- Following the modern fit-out and refurbishment of our newly acquired premises, the Board delivered its new Castlebar Law and Family Mediation Centre in Cavendish House, Link Road, Castlebar, providing a modern new functional space for both clients and staff. The services at this new Centre will further enhance the work of the Legal Aid Board. Our mission is to empower communities through accessible civil legal aid and family mediation services. This new office is due to open in March 2025.
- In addition, the Property & Portfolio Unit successfully completed lease negotiations for a new Corporate Office at the Eight Building in Dublin which will be undertaken in 2025 along with the successful pre-project design and tendering process for a new co-location office in Galway City which is scheduled for completion in 2025.
- Both the Blanchardstown and Dundalk Law Centres underwent refurbishments in 2024. Additionally, over 80% of a substantial refurbishment of our Smithfield property was complete in 2024 with completion due in July 2025.
- Facilities Management Unit actioned over 3,500 service user requests relating to building maintenance and urgent remedial repair works throughout the network of service centres and corporate offices. They further responded to over 13,000 helpdesk enquiries. The helpdesk serves as the central point of contact for all users to report operational problems, seek advice, request support.
- €62.1 million in payments were processed in 2024, including approx. €31.4 million in Pay Expenditure and over €30.7 million in Non-Pay Expenditure. The value of supplier payments increased by over 15% from 2023 (€26.6m) to (€30.7m) in 2024. The Finance Unit processed over 32,000 invoices during 2024, which was an increase of 5% (approx. 1,600 invoices) from 2023.

Information and Communications

The IT Unit

- We completed a pilot project deploying a Cloud Digital Desktop. This included the transition from outdated systems like Citrix and Lotus Notes to modern platforms, including Outlook, Microsoft Teams, Microsoft 365, and OneDrive for Business. A full organisation rollout will take place in 2025. A key part of this transition is preparing the organisation for a laptop-only environment, eliminating the need for slow PCs and enabling faster, more flexible ways of working for our staff and a better experience for our clients in 2025.
- In parallel with the Cloud Digital Desktop project, several initiatives were implemented to enhance how we digitally communicate and work:
 - ◊ Upgraded staff to a modern, tailored environment for improved efficiency and compatibility with Microsoft Office 2021.
 - ◊ Deployed the Legal Aid Board's first internet telephony system, with plans for organisation-wide deployment in development.
 - ◊ Delivered seamless virtual meeting capabilities on WebEx and Zoom, ensuring all staff can connect to external set up calls using Board-issued devices.
- 24,803 internal queries were managed by our internal IT Help Desk in 2024.

The Communications Unit

- We amplified our service awareness through three large campaigns:
 - ◊ "Your Call, Our Support" Campaign led to a 20% increase in engagement from those making the initial contact in the family mediation service compared to last year.
 - ◊ The IP Private Practitioner Panel Campaign resulted in a 21% increase in solicitors applying to join the panel compared to the previous campaign, with 26 new solicitors added to the panel as a direct outcome.

- ◊ Our launch of Ballymun Law and Family Mediation Centre was attended by the Minister for Justice and 69 key stakeholders, including state bodies, NGOs, and media representatives (including RTÉ). The launch achieved a media reach of ~2.5 million, equivalent to €70k in coverage value, and ~700,000 social media impressions.
- Recognising the requirement for clear communication, we introduced a new Staff Newsletter — LABNews. Three editions were published reaching 1,937 downloads.
- We also prepared for a brand-new website, a staff-lead two-day marque event and an optimised brand and corporate identity to be delivered in 2025.



The Knowledge & Information Unit

We continued to progress the organisational management of data and its use across operational areas, as per the Strategy Statement 2024–2026. This included:

- Data protection matters—adopting 19 policies and a new training programme to safeguard data and ensure all-staff compliance while addressing 54 external requests around personal information.
- Managing 1,699 Country of Origin Queries providing evidence-based material for international protection cases. Alongside this staff were facilitated with a resource-lending service to inform legal aid and mediation work.
- Assisting with 14 research queries of the Legal Aid Board from Higher education institutes in Ireland and abroad.
- Progressing the Open Data initiative within the organisation and its representation on data matters with external partners on the Criminal Justice Sectoral Strategy.

Internal Audit

The Legal Aid Board's Internal Audit Unit provides an independent and objective internal audit service working to Internal Audit Standards. Internal Audit scope and coverage extends to all the organisation's Directorates, units and relevant activities. The Unit reports to the Audit, Risk & Finance Committee. The Committee reviewed audit reports with a focus on addressing systemic issues and improving internal controls. Audit reports stressed the importance of continuous staff training to enhance procedural understanding and compliance.

The Internal Audit Three-Year Work Plan (2024–2026) was developed with Committee feedback, incorporating audits related to ICT and GDPR compliance, alongside enhanced auditor training. All auditors completed training in 2024 as part of the Unit's commitment to continuous improvement.

Efforts were made to strengthen internal controls, with a focus on collaboration with senior managers to achieve sustainable improvements. The Internal Audit Unit remains dedicated to providing independent assurance and insights, with future efforts directed towards enhancing compliance frameworks and fostering a culture of accountability.

An external audit report by Deloitte reviewed in February by the Audit, Risk & Finance Committee assessed the organisation's GDPR compliance. An action plan was implemented, prioritising key compliance areas, including a data processing agreement and staff training.

Criminal Legal Aid

While the Legal Aid Board does not provide criminal legal aid directly, it administers three non-statutory criminal legal aid schemes:

- 1. Garda Station Legal Advice Revised Scheme:** Offers legal advice to detainees in Garda stations, including solicitor consultations and attendance during interviews.
- 2. Legal Aid — Custody Issues Scheme (LA-CIS):** Provides legal representation in specific High Court, Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court cases not covered by standard legal aid, such as habeas corpus applications, certain judicial reviews, extradition cases, and European Arrest Warrant applications.
- 3. Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) Scheme:** Covers legal representation in proceedings involving the Criminal Assets Bureau, including cases under the Proceeds of Crime Act, certain tax appeals, and social welfare appeals where the CAB is a party.

The Criminal Legal Aid Unit within the Legal Aid Board oversees the administration of the aforementioned schemes. Its responsibilities include:

- **Processing Applications:** Evaluating and approving applications for legal aid under the specific schemes, ensuring applicants meet the eligibility criteria.
- **Managing Payments:** Handling fee claims from solicitors, barristers, and other service providers involved in these schemes, ensuring timely and accurate payments.
- **Providing Guidance:** Issuing procedural guidelines and forms to legal practitioners to facilitate compliance with scheme requirements.
- **Liaising with Stakeholders:** Coordinating with courts, legal professionals, and other relevant bodies to ensure the effective operation of the schemes.

The Unit has been actively involved in the preparatory work for the Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Bill 2023, which proposes transferring the administration of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme from the Department of Justice to the Legal Aid Board. The Unit has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for this transition, which includes developing new administrative processes, enhancing financial oversight mechanisms, and ensuring compliance with statutory obligations. These efforts are designed to facilitate a more efficient and transparent legal aid system, aligning with the Legal Aid Board's strategic goals of enhancing access to justice and modernising legal aid services. This transition is expected to introduce strengthened oversight and governance structures, contributing to a more efficient and transparent legal aid system.



Reporting Obligations

Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021

The Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021 introduced the legislative basis for gender pay gap reporting in Ireland. Regulations under the Act came into operation on 31 May 2022. The regulations require organisations with over 150 employees to report on their gender pay gap and to report on their hourly gender pay gap across a range of metrics.

The Legal Aid Board has published reports related to 2022, 2023 and 2024 on its website. In 2022, the mean gender pay gap for the Legal Aid Board indicated that, on average, men were paid 10.07% higher than women. In 2023, this figure decreased to 4.97%. In 2024, the figure is reported at 6.15%.

Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010

The Legal Aid Board has obligations under the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010 which rendered solicitors “designated persons” and defined certain legal services as AML regulated. To address evolving risk the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) (Amendment) Act 2021 expanded existing obligations.

In line with the above legislation the Legal Aid Board’s Policies, Controls and Procedures and Business Risk Assessment were reviewed in December 2024. Due to the general operating environment for the Legal Aid Board, the level of risk from the services that the Board provide is relatively low. However, the Board is committed to providing ongoing training to staff which will be relevant to the role that the staff member discharges in relation to the prevention of money laundering.

Protected Disclosures Act 2014

Each public body is required under Section 22 of the Act to publish an annual report setting out the number of protected disclosures received in the preceding year and the action taken (if any). The Legal Aid Board publishes this each year on its website.

<https://www.legalaidboard.ie/en/about-the-legal-aid-board/organisational-governance-compliance/protected-disclosures/>

The Legal Aid Board received reports under the relevant policy in respect of five protected disclosures during the reporting period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024. One of the five reports did not require investigation and one was undergoing assessment at year end. No reports relating to a potential breach of EU law as set out in Directive 2019 / 1937 were assessed by the Board in 2024.

Disability Act 2005

In accordance with section 26(2) of the Disability Act 2005, the Legal Aid Board must appoint an Access Officer. The Access Officer is the Legal Aid Board’s nominated point of contact for people with disabilities wishing to access our services. In 2024, over 100 individual contacts (numerous phone calls/ emails). The nature of such requests ranged from application process support, facilitating direct engagement with Law Centres, support with the Board’s complaints procedures, interpretation & translation services and requests for additional advocacy following case decision.

Public Sector Energy Performance — Statement of Energy Use

In order to determine the Legal Aid Board’s trajectory towards its 2030 Climate Change Emissions and Climate Change Energy Efficiency Targets, the Legal Aid Board provides data annually to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland’s (SEAI) Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) system. Since 2024, the progress on implementation of the Climate Action Mandate is also tracked through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland’s (SEAI) Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) system.

Official Languages Scheme

The Legal Aid Board is committed to meeting all of its obligations under the Official Languages Acts (2003 & 2021). A member of Senior Management has been appointed to monitor the performance and report on the Legal Aid Board’s obligations under the Official Languages Acts (2003 & 2021).

The Legal Aid Board took the following actions during 2024 to ensure compliance with the Act:

- 23 staff attended an Irish Language telephone skills online training in September 2024. 2 staff completed Gaelchultúr Irish Courses and 3 staff completed the TEG exam.
- Furthermore, a ‘basic phrases in Irish’ video training course was uploaded to One Learning platform and useful Irish language phrases were emailed to all staff.

Other compliance activities in relation to the Official Languages Acts (2003 & 2021) were undertaken:

- Our Civil Operations Unit contacted all Law Centres to obtain addresses in Irish and website updated accordingly. New Law Centres assisted with their Irish Language address for both the website and stationery letter heads.
- Regular emails were sent to staff notifying them of internal Irish language events and details circulated to all staff in relation Gréasan Gaeilge na hEarnála Poiblí.
- During 2024, the new obligations under section 10A. (Advertising by Public Bodies) which require a minimum of 20% (10A. (1)(b)) of all advertising to be in Irish were met.

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014

The Legal Aid Board recognises its obligations under the relevant legislation to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment for its staff and the individuals it serves, and protect the human rights of its members, staff, and service users. In line with our values, we are committed to creating an environment where we promote positive engagement, open and honest communication, embracing diverse perspectives while striving to be inclusive in all that we do.

A consultation process with all staff facilitated input into the Board’s latest Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The Legal Aid Board has two Disability Liaison Officers who facilitate both new colleagues, and long-term staff with emergent needs, the assistance they require for full participation in the workplace. To that end, a number of applications for Reasonable Workplace Accommodation in line with the Equality Acts were granted in 2023. The percentage of staff members that declared a disability was 6%. The Legal Aid Board’s Human Resources Unit facilitates applicants in recruitment competitions with Reasonable Accommodations to ensure full and equal participation while competing for opportunities. Our Learning and Development Unit rolls out relevant initiatives throughout the year such as mental health awareness, EDI awareness and Pride month events.

Legal Aid Service

The Civil Operations Unit which is responsible for the provision of services to the clients of the LAB maintains a suite of information leaflets written in plain language which are available at each Law Centre throughout the country for clients and other stakeholders of our services and are also available in numerous languages. These leaflets are kept under review and updated as required.

All correspondence between Law Centres and clients is written in plain English using only technical and official terminology where absolutely necessary. It is recognised that in a legal environment, the use of a certain amount of legal terminology will occur, but this is minimised and explained wherever possible.

As part of our ongoing commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the Legal Aid Board continues to deliver the Minceir/Traveller Legal

Support Service, which has been expanded and provides tailored legal support to the Traveller Community.

The Board also plays a leading role in advancing the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act (ADMCA), with a dedicated unit based in Dublin and designated Law Centres across the country focusing on this specialised area. These services aim to empower individuals who face challenges in making certain decisions, by promoting autonomy, protecting legal rights and enhancing access to justice.

To support understanding, a range of plain English leaflets has been developed. These materials explain the process of transitioning from Wardship as well as outlining the legal journey under the new legislation in other areas, ensuring accessible and inclusive information for all. Training has also been provided to law centre staff and private practitioners on the guiding principles under the Act to enable practitioners to support individuals accessing our services to maximise their capacity.

We continue to monitor and adapt to ensure our compliance on a legal and moral level with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion legislative and guidance changes.

Family Mediation Service

The Board’s Family Mediation Service are responsible for the provision of family mediation services to the clients. The service maintains information leaflets written in plain language which are available throughout the country for client’s and other stakeholders of our services. These leaflets are kept under review and updated as required.

A core element of mediation is the need for good communication that is appropriate to each individual client. All clients are engaged with directly by phone, given time to talk through what to expect from the service and to tell us what is important for them. The aim is to empower individuals who face challenges to make the best decisions they can. All written correspondence is written in plain English. The service provides third party supports, where appropriate for parties to mediation.

We continue to monitor and adapt to ensure our compliance on a legal and moral level with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion legislative and guidance changes.

Access to Information on the Environment

The Access to Information on the Environment (AIE) Regulations 2007–2018 gives the public the right to access environmental information held by, or for, Public Authorities. The Legal Aid Board received no Access to Environment requests in 2024.

Section 15 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015

The Legal Aid Board in the performance of its functions, has regard to 15. (1) (d) the objective of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change in the state. The Board has, throughout 2024, continued to work with the Office of Public Works (OPW) via its Optimising Power @ Work campaign to focus on staff awareness campaigns, behavioural change and minor works projects that generate savings in energy usage along with associated reduction in carbon emissions.

Public Sector Climate Action Mandate

By 2024, the Legal Aid Board had achieved a 35.7% reduction of energy consumption, over a 2009 baseline. Returns are made to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on an annual basis. We predict the annual figures in 2024 to follow the trajectory from 2023 to meet our goals in 2030 following the LAB’s Climate Action Roadmap. The Legal Aid Board’s Climate Action Roadmap sets out a plan for our organization to achieve its targets of a 50% reduction in Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and an improvement in energy efficiency from 33% to 50% by 2030, as outlined in the Government’s Climate Action Plan 2023. You can find information regarding implementation of the mandate in the Climate Action Roadmap. The titles of reporting, engaging in training staff, green public procurement, our building and vehicles sections cover this. In regard to Circular 1/2020, the Legal Aid Board will be recording the carbon emissions associated with all official travel in tonnes for 2024 and will value the emissions on the prevailing rate of Ireland’s domestic Carbon Tax for the 2024 year.

Governance Statement and Board Members’ Report

For the year ended 31 December 2024

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General Information

Board Members

Nuala Egan, Chairperson
Maurice Lawlor
Niamh O’Hanlon
Gordon Jeyes
Freda McKittrick
Catherine Keane
Tracy O’Keeffe
Michael Patrick Bourke
Patrick Durcan
Catherine Ryan
Liam Ryan
Maeve Brett
Jane McGowan

Chief Executive

Joan Crawford

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Auditors

Comptroller and Auditor General
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D01 PF7

Governance

The Board of the Legal Aid Board (the “Board”) was established under the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 (as amended) (the “Act”). The functions of the Board are set out in Section 5 of the Act. The Board is accountable to the Minister for Justice and is responsible for ensuring good governance and performs this task by setting strategic objectives and targets and taking strategic decisions on all key business issues. The regular day-to-day management, control and direction of the Legal Aid Board are the responsibility of the Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team. The Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team must follow the broad strategic direction set by the Board and must ensure that all board members have a clear understanding of the key activities and decisions related to the entity, and of any significant risks likely to arise.

Board Responsibilities

The functions of the Board are set out in Section 5 of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 (as amended) (the “Act”) and its responsibilities are set out in the Board’s Governance Manual, as follows:

- The strategic direction of the organisation;
- Determining policy and monitoring its implementation;
- Overseeing the proper and effective management of the organisation;
- Monitoring the implementation of effective financial procedures and providing accountability;
- Approving and monitoring budgets; and
- Making certain reserved decisions.

Section 20 of the Act requires the Board of the Legal Aid Board to keep in such form as may be approved by the Minister for Justice, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, all proper and usual accounts of the resources of the Legal Aid Board.

In preparing these financial statements, the Board of the Legal Aid Board is required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that it will continue in operation, and

- State whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.

The Board is responsible for keeping adequate accounting records which disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, the Legal Aid Board’s financial position and enables it to ensure that the financial statements comply with Section 20 of the Act. The maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information on the Legal Aid Board’s website is the responsibility of the Board.

The Board is responsible for approving the annual plan and budget. The Finance and Effectiveness Committee reviewed the 2024 budget at its meeting on 24 January 2024 and recommended it for approval by the Board. An evaluation of the performance of the Legal Aid Board by reference to the 2023 annual plan and budget was carried out at its January meeting on 24 January 2024.

The Board discussed the 2024 budget in detail at its meeting on 24 January 2024. A New Strategy for the period 2024–2026 was approved by the Board on 12 December 2023. Reflecting the objectives in that Statement of Strategy, the executive drafted an annual set of organisational priorities which can be seen to align with the strategic objectives of the revised strategy. The annual priorities were presented to the Board for review at its meeting in April 2024.

The Board reviewed the monthly financial reports throughout 2024. These reports detailed actual expenditure against the monthly profiled budget. In 2024, the Board were also presented with comprehensive reports in July, October and November which examined the year-to-date expenditure against the annual budgeted figures and forecasted outturn figures for year-end. The full-year review of the 2024 actual out-turn compared to budget for 2024 took place at the Board meeting held in February 2025.

The Board is also responsible for safeguarding the Legal Aid Board’s assets and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Board considers that the financial statements of the Legal Aid Board give a true and fair view of the financial performance and the financial position of the Legal Aid Board at 31 December 2024.

Board Structure

The Act makes provision for the appointment of a chairperson and 12 ordinary members to the Board. The current Board was appointed by the Minister for Justice.

The table below details the appointment period for the outgoing and current board members who served during 2024:

Name	Role	Date of first appointment	Date on which term expires/ resigned
Nuala Egan	Chairperson	21 February 2017*	31 October 2026
Catherine Keane	Solicitor, Cartoon Saloon	9 June 2020*	31 October 2026
Gordon Jeyes	Former Chief Executive of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency	8 November 2016*	31 October 2026
Maurice Lawlor	Department of Social Protection	8 November 2016*	31 October 2026
Freda McKittrick	Assistant Director, Barnardo’s	8 November 2016*	31 October 2026
Tracy O’Keeffe	Department of Justice	22 July 2021*	31 October 2026
Michael Patrick Bourke	Solicitor	1 November 2021	31 October 2026
Patrick Durcan	Retired District Court Judge	1 November 2021	31 October 2026
Marianne Nolan	Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform	1 November 2021	resigned 2 January 2024
Niamh O’Hanlon	Civil Servant (staff member)	1 November 2021	31 October 2026
Catherine Ryan	Civil Servant (staff member)	1 November 2021	31 October 2026
Liam Ryan	Solicitor	1 November 2021	31 October 2026
Jane McGowan	Barrister	3 October 2024	31 October 2026
Maeve Brett	Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform	8 March 2024	31 October 2026

* re-appointed 1 November 2021



Nuala Egan, Chairperson



Joan Crawford, CEO

Committee Structure

At the start of 2024, the Board had seven committees supporting the work of the Board. A decision to consolidate the work of the Finance and Effectiveness committee into the Audit and Risk Committee resulted in six committees in place by December 2024 namely:

Appeal Committee

This Appeal Committee considers requests by legal aid applicants for decisions made by the executive in a particular case to be reversed. The Appeal Committee is chaired by Mr. Michael Bourke and met fifteen times in 2024 (2023: seventeen).

Finance and Effectiveness Committee

The Finance and Effectiveness Committee considered the Legal Aid Board's finances in detail and reported to the Board on the financial affairs and policies of the Legal Aid Board up to April 2024. This included the review of budgets and financial reports, the approval of the Legal Aid Board's financial statements and detailed consideration of financial matters in order to make appropriate recommendations to the Board and to advise management. The Finance and Effectiveness Committee was chaired by Ms. Catherine Keane and met three times in 2024, ahead of its amalgamation with the Audit and Risk Committee.

Audit and Risk Committee

The Audit and Risk Committee considered organisational and other risks identified in the risk assessment reports or otherwise and reported to the Board on the extent to which such risks were managed or mitigated in a structured and on-going basis up to April 2024. The Audit and Risk Committee was chaired by Mr. Gordon Jeyes, and held one meeting in 2024 ahead of its amalgamation with the Finance and Effectiveness Committee.

Audit, Risk and Finance Committee

The Finance and Effectiveness Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee were amalgamated to form the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee in May 2024. This new committee now supports the Board in fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to good financial governance, financial reporting, risk management and control systems.

Terms of Reference for the new Audit, Risk and Finance Committee were formally approved in June 2024. The Audit, Risk and Finance Committee is chaired by Mr. Gordon Jeyes. The Audit, Risk and Finance Committee convened seven times in 2024.

Environment Committee

The Environment Committee was established in 2022 to consider matters relating to the Government's policies in response to the challenges of climate change, to monitor and oversee the Legal Aid Board's compliance with these policies, and to examine areas of potential reform in the Legal Aid Board's own practices and policies that would assist in further reducing the climate and environmental impact of its operations. The Environment Committee is chaired by Ms. Tracy O'Keefe and met three times in 2024.

People and Culture Committee

The role of the People and Culture Committee is to consider policies, procedures and actions as they relate to staff and the organisational culture and will report and make recommendations to the Board as deemed appropriate. The People and Culture Committee is chaired by Ms. Freda McKittrick and met four times in 2024.

Performance Committee

The Performance Committee is set up to consider the objectives of the Chief Executive and the extent to which those objectives have been achieved. The Performance Committee is chaired by Mr. Gordon Jeyes and met four times in 2024.

Strategy Committee

The role of the Strategy Committee is to support the work of the Board in relation to:

- Overseeing the implementation of the Statement of Strategy 2024–2026,
- Reviewing the strategic objectives and organisational priorities of the Board,
- Considering any relevant areas of reform including new areas of work, and policy initiatives or proposed legislation that may have implications for the work of the Board.

The Committee will report and make recommendations to the Board as it considers appropriate.

In early 2024, the Strategy Committee replaced what was previously known as the Strategy and Opportunity Committee. The Strategy Committee is chaired by Ms. Catherine Ryan and it met twice in 2024.

Key Personnel Changes 2024

Ms. Nuala Egan was formally appointed as Chairperson to the Statutory Board on 4 January 2024.

Ms. Racheal Buckley was appointed Director of Corporate Services & Criminal Legal Aid in January 2024. Ms. Teresa Doolan was appointed as Director of Human Resources in September 2024.

Matters specifically reserved to the Board itself

In compliance with the requirement in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, the Board has a formal schedule of matters specifically reserved to it for decision to ensure that the direction and control of the body is firmly in its hands. In the case of the Legal Aid Board, the matters specifically reserved are:

- Significant acquisition, disposal and retirement of assets. The Board must approve acquisitions, disposals and retirement of assets with an anticipated value at or above a threshold level of €65,000; The Board is to be notified of any acquisitions/disposals/retirement of assets with a value at or above €10,000;
- No contract valued over €65,000 can be entered into, directly or by way of draw down, without the prior approval of the Board. The Audit, Risk and Finance Committee is to be notified of the awarding of contracts with a value over €10,000;
- Approval of terms of major contracts;
- Assurances of compliance with statutory and administrative requirements in relation to the approval of the appointment, number, grading, and conditions of all staff, including remuneration and superannuation;
- Approval of the Annual Budget;
- Approval of the Legal Aid Board's Corporate Plans which are prepared every 3 years;
- Approval of the annual report and financial statements consistent with the Board's obligations under the 1995 Act;

- Approval of recommendations to the Minister for the amendment of legislation;
- Approval of Legal Aid Board policy documents which it is proposed to publish or disseminate;
- Responsibility for systems of internal financial and other controls;
- Delegated authority levels and risk management policies;
- Appointment, remuneration and assessment of the performance of, and succession planning for, the Chief Executive; and
- Significant amendments to the pension benefits of the Chief Executive and staff (which may require Ministerial approval).

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies provides that the Board should meet at least twice a year without executive Board members or management present to discuss any matters deemed relevant.

In the case of the Legal Aid Board, Section 4 (6) of the Act states that the Board shall hold such and so many meetings as may be necessary for the performance of its functions.

Delegations to Management

Under the provisions of Section 10(2) of the Civil Legal Aid Act, 1995, the Board may assign certain functions to the Chief Executive. The Board has formally assigned responsibility for the day-to-day management of the provision of a legal aid and advice service to the Chief Executive, subject to the provisions of the Civil Legal Aid Act, 1995 and any Regulations made under the Act.

Specifically, the Board has assigned the following particular functions to the Chief Executive:

- Reporting to and advising the Board on the operation of the legal aid and advice service;
- Ensuring that the legal aid and advice service is administered in the most efficient and cost-effective manner;
- Decision making in relation to the provision of legal aid and advice in individual cases;
- Management of the dissemination, for the benefit of those for whom its services are made available, of information in relation to those services and their availability;

- The nomination of solicitors and barristers for the purpose of providing a person with legal aid and advice or the referral of a person to the solicitors’ panel as appropriate;
- Liaison between the Board and relevant interests including its clients and the public generally;
- Monitoring and evaluating the performance of the law centres and their staff;
- Maintaining a high standard of communication with the Board, law centres and staff;
- Subject to any policy directives of the Minister and / or of the Board, policy development and the formulation and implementation of suitable strategies;
- Management of the Board’s resources, including physical resources;
- Management of human resource matters; and
- Financial management, including the keeping of appropriate accounts and records as provided for in Section 20 of the Civil Legal Aid Act, 1995.

In turn, the Chief Executive may, with the consent of the Board, specify any of these functions to be performed by a member of staff. The Board’s resolutions set out the decisions taken by the Board in these matters.

The Chief Executive is accountable to the Public Accounts Committee of the Oireachtas. This is on the basis that the financial statements of the State body are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and laid before the Oireachtas in accordance with the State body’s governing legislation.

Schedule of Attendance

In 2024, the Board held 11 board meetings. The meetings took place in a combination of videoconferencing and in-person formats. A schedule of attendance at the board meetings, fees and expenses paid for 2024 are set out below:

Committees of the Board										Fees, €	Expenses, €
	Board	Appeal committee	Audit and risk committee	Finance and effectiveness committee	Audit, Risk & Finance Committee	Environment committee	People and culture committee	Performance committee	Strategy committee		
Number of meetings	11	15	1	3	7	3	4	4	2		
Board member											
Nuala Egan	10	4	1	3	5	1	-	4	-	11,970	-
Catherine Keane	10	3	-	2	-	-	-	3	2	7,695	54
Gordon Jeyes	10	-	1	2	7	-	-	4	-	7,695	54
Maurice Lawlor*	10	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,029
Freda McKittrick	10	9	1	-	-	3	3	1	-	7,695	-
Tracy O’Keeffe*	10	-	1	1	6	3	-	-	1	-	-
Michael Patrick Bourke*	11	15	-	1	-	-	-	3	1	-	-
Patrick Durcan	10	13	-	3	6	-	-	-	-	7,695	2,140
Marianne Nolan*#	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Niamh O’Hanlon*	11	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Catherine Ryan*	9	-	1	-	-	-	4	-	2	-	895
Liam Ryan	9	14	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	7,695	-
Jane McGowan#	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,283	-
Maeve Brett*	6	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Michael Flynn**	-	-	1	3	6	-	-	-	-	3,078	-
Total										54,806	5,172

*Maurice Lawlor, Tracy O’Keeffe, Michael Patrick Bourke, Marianne Nolan, Niamh O’Hanlon, Catherine Ryan and Maeve Brett, who are civil servants, did not receive a Board fee under the One Person One Salary principle.

**Michael Flynn is an external member of the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee only.

#Marianne Nolan resigned 2 January 2024; Jane McGowan appointed 3 October 2024.

Disclosures Required by the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016)

The Board is responsible for ensuring that the Legal Aid Board has complied with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (“the Code”), as published by the Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform in August 2016. The following disclosures are required by the Code:

Employees’ short-term benefits breakdown

Employees’ short-term benefits in excess of €60,000 are shown in note 6(b) to the financial statements 2024.

Consultancy Costs

	2024	2023
	€	€
Legal advice – property	674,927	427,145
Human resources and information technology	22,140	170,971
Business improvement	114,263	–
	811,330	598,116

Key management personnel

The key management personnel in the Legal Aid Board are the Chief Executive, the Director of Decision Making and External Services (Civil), the Director of Human Resources, Learning and Development, the Director of Information & Communications, the Director of Family Mediation, the Director and Regional Managers of Internal Service Delivery (Civil), the Director of Corporate and Criminal Legal Aid Services and Regional Managers under Internal Service Delivery (Civil).

The total value of short-term employee benefits for key management personnel in 2024 was €1,007,803 (2023: €908,620). The key management personnel are members of an unfunded defined benefit public sector scheme and their pension entitlements do not extend beyond the standard entitlements for such schemes.

Legal costs and settlements

The table below provides a breakdown of amounts recognised as expenditure in the reporting period in relation to settlements or judgements in legal actions taken against the Legal Aid Board, and the legal fees associated with these actions. The Legal Aid Board self-insures in respect of Public Liability/ Employer Liability matters. A figure of €7,240 credit (2023: €80,167 expense) has been included in Lit-

igation liabilities in 2024 for public liability. The Legal Aid Board recognises the latter under Note 11 General Administration: Insurance.

It does not include legal fees incurred by the Legal Aid Board on behalf of its clients in the normal course of business, or general legal advice on other matters received by the Legal Aid Board, which is disclosed in Consultancy Costs above.

	2024	2023
	€	€
Litigation liabilities (includes public liability)	(2,935)	17,124
Legal Fees – Legal proceedings	157,061	23,876
	154,126	41,000

Travel and subsistence expenditure

*Includes travel and subsistence of €5,172 paid directly to Board members in 2024 (2023: €6,188). The balance of €11,140 (2023: €10,817) relates to expenditure paid by the Legal Aid Board on behalf of the Board members.

	2024	2023
	€	€
Domestic		
Board*	16,312	14,615
Employees	483,167	495,695
International		
Board*	–	2,390
Employees	894	5,460
	500,373	518,160

Hospitality expenditure

Hospitality expenditure of €7,998 (2023: €5,698) was incurred by the Legal Aid Board during 2024, of which approximately €2,208 (2023: €800) was incurred for external hospitality provided. The balance of €5,760 (2023: €4,898) related to expenditure incurred under the staff support and well-being program

Risk Management

The Board has carried out an appropriate assessment of the Legal Aid Board’s principal risks. These include issues relating to cyber security, health and safety at the Legal Aid Board’s offices, data protection, and the availability of sufficient skilled staff to ensure the effective delivery of services to clients.

The Legal Aid Board has a comprehensive set of internal controls across all of its functional areas. These are reviewed annually by the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee. There is a programme of regular reporting to the Statutory Board on developments in relation to risk, including a Risk Register and Risk Realisation Report.

External Review of the Board

As outlined under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016), the Board is obliged to conduct an annual self-assessment of its performance. The Annual Board Performance Review for 2024 was initiated on 12 December 2024 for all members of the Board. The final report from this review is pending at the date of approval of these financial statements.

Public Spending Code

The Legal Aid Board seeks to obtain maximum value for all its expenditures. Its primary area of non-pay expenditure is in the referral of client cases to private legal practitioners. The fee rates for such referrals are set out by the Legal Aid Board in the terms and conditions for the panels of private legal practitioners.

In other procurements, the Legal Aid Board operates under Public Procurement Guidelines and utilises the Office of Government Procurement centralised purchasing arrangements wherever this is possible.

Statement of Compliance

The Board has adopted the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (2016) and has put procedures in place to ensure compliance with the Code. The Legal Aid Board was in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies in 2024.

Nuala Egan
Chairperson

Date:

Joan Crawford
Chief Executive

Date:

Appendix

Table 6. Cases Handled in Law Centres 2020–2024

Year*	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total	16,236	16,400	16,477	16,526	17,646

*Data for all years include international protection cases

Chart 3. Cases Handled in Law Centres 2020–2024

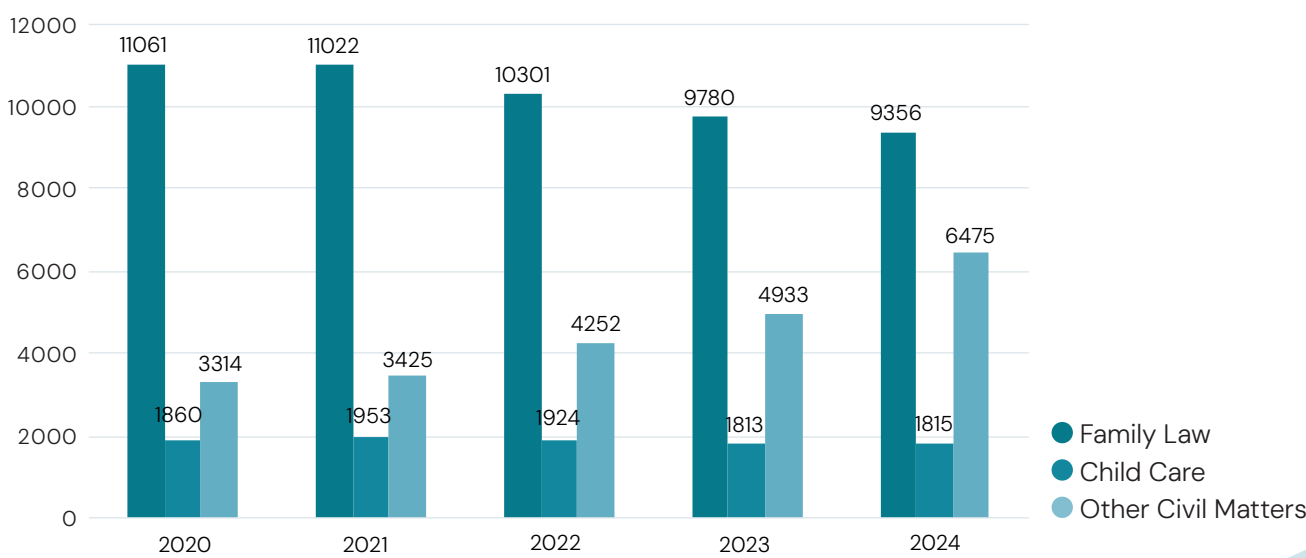


Chart 4. Cases by Subject Matter 2023

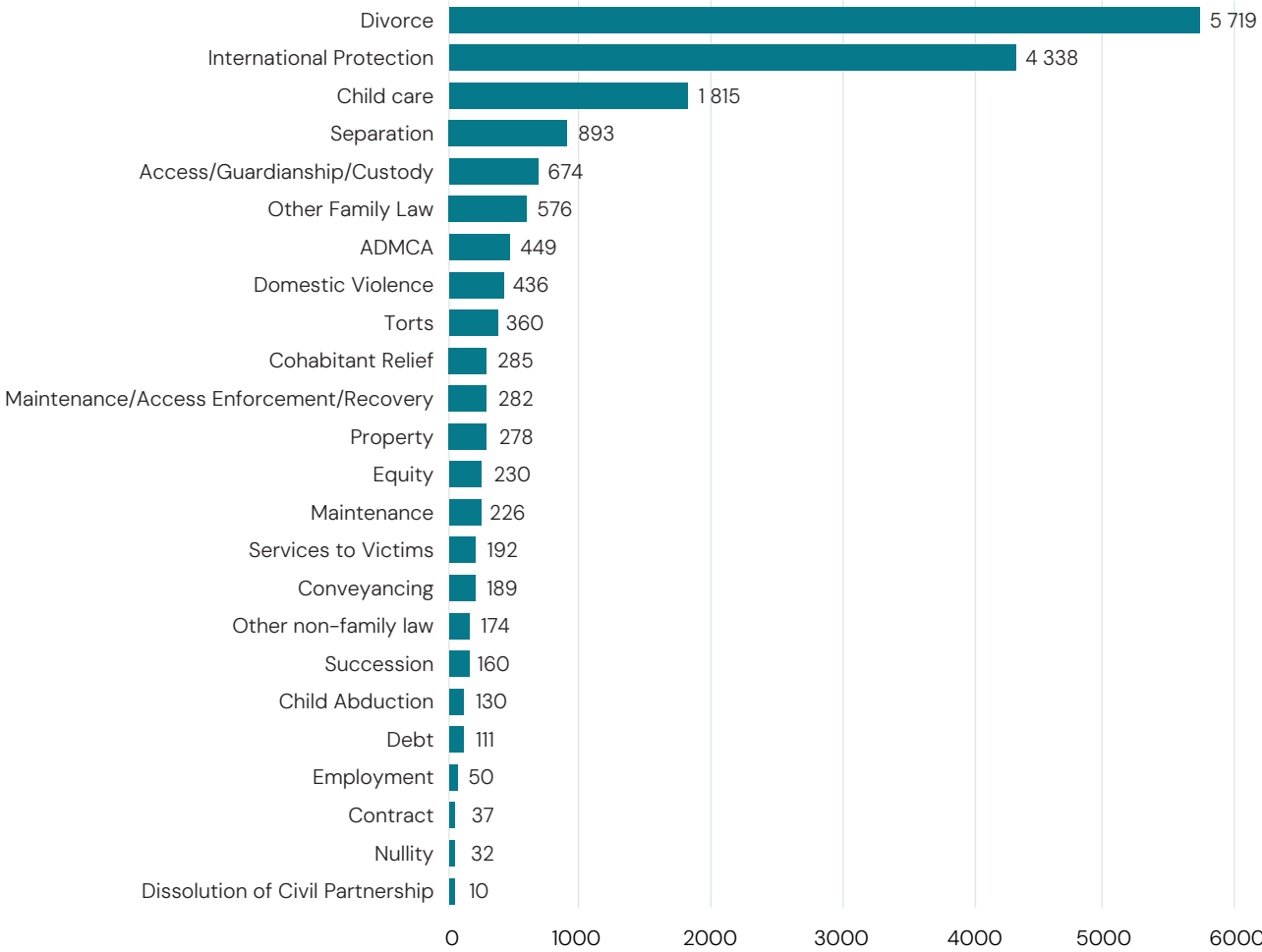


Table 7. New Cases in Law Centres

Year	2020*	2021	2022	2023	2024
New Cases	5,261	5,025	5,289	6,118	6,996

*Including international protection cases

Table 8. Cases Handled in 2024, Year of Application

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number	1,706	2,279	3,780	5,199	5,954

Table 9. Number of Cases Closed 2020–2024

Year	2020*	2021*	2022*	2023*	2024*
Cases Closed	4,841	4,903	5,561	5,360	5,444

*Including International Protection cases

Table 10. Cases Completed in 2024, Length of Time Open

Case Type	<1 Year	1–2 Year	2–3 Years	3+ Years	Total
International Protection	320	349	119	71	859
Child Care	194	121	98	150	563
Divorce/Separation/Nullity	401	406	303	1020	2130
Non-Family Law	475	127	37	100	739
Other Family Law	695	236	77	145	1153
Totals	2,085	1,239	634	1,486	5,444

Chart 5. Civil and Family Law Cases Active at 31 December 2024

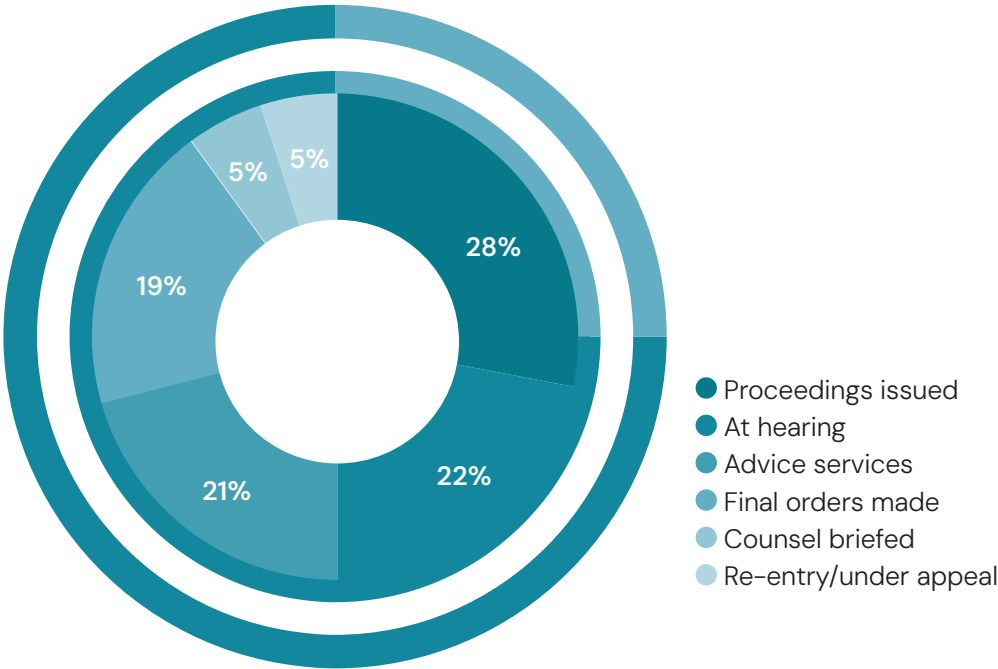


Table 11. Number of Persons Waiting at 31 December 2024

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number Waiting	2,019	1,588	1,279	950	1,269	1,269

Table 12. Waiting Times for First Consultation in Law Centres at 31 December 2024

Law Centre	Max waiting time (weeks)
Athlone	4
Ballymun	14
Blanchardstown	4
Castlebar	23
Cavan	25
Clondalkin	25
Cork Popes Quay	17
Cork South Mall	15
Dundalk	3
Ennis	12
Galway Francis St	25
Galway Seville House*	6
Jervis Street*	25
Kilkenny*	21
Letterkenny*	6
Limerick	26
Longford	32
Mincéir Traveller Legal Support Service	16
Monaghan	10
Navan	20
Nenagh	17
Newbridge	14
Portlaoise*	33
Sligo	45
Smithfield	18
Tallaght	34
Tralee	6
Tullamore	7
Waterford	30
Wexford	14
Wicklow	24

*co-located offices

Table 13. Breakdown by Type of Cases Receiving Priority Service

Case Type	Total
Child Care	541
Child Abduction	67
Family Law, including Domestic Violence	2,969
International Protection	2,273
Legal Services for victims of crime	155

Chart 6. International Protection Case Outcomes 2024

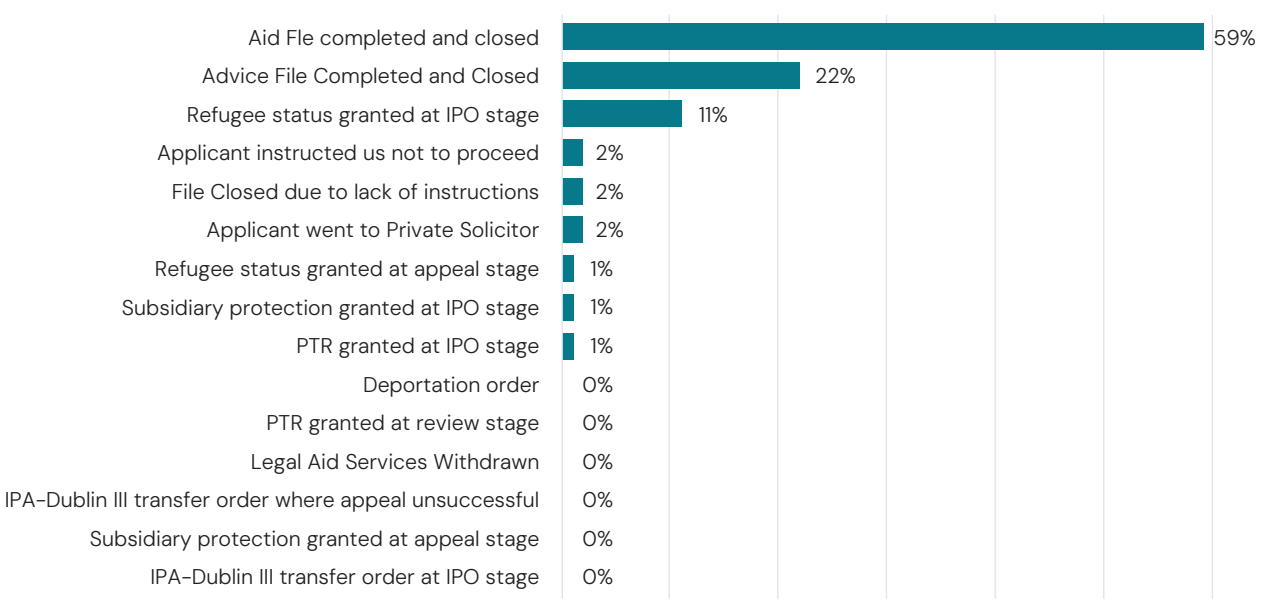


Chart 7. Country of Origin Registration 2023

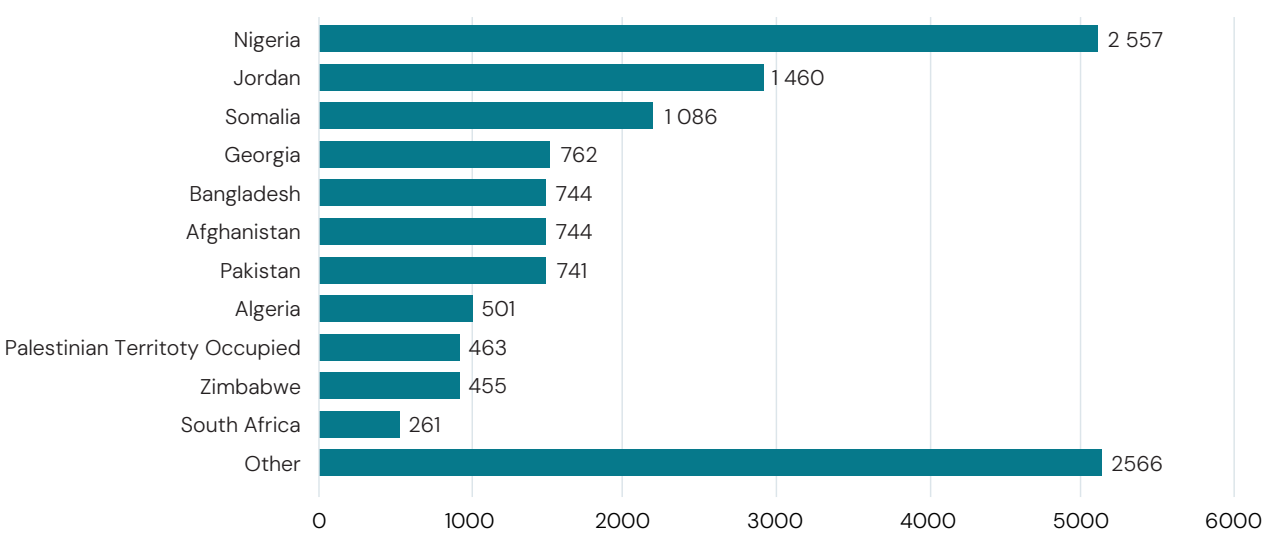


Chart 8. Human Trafficking Cases Referred to the Legal Aid Board During 2024

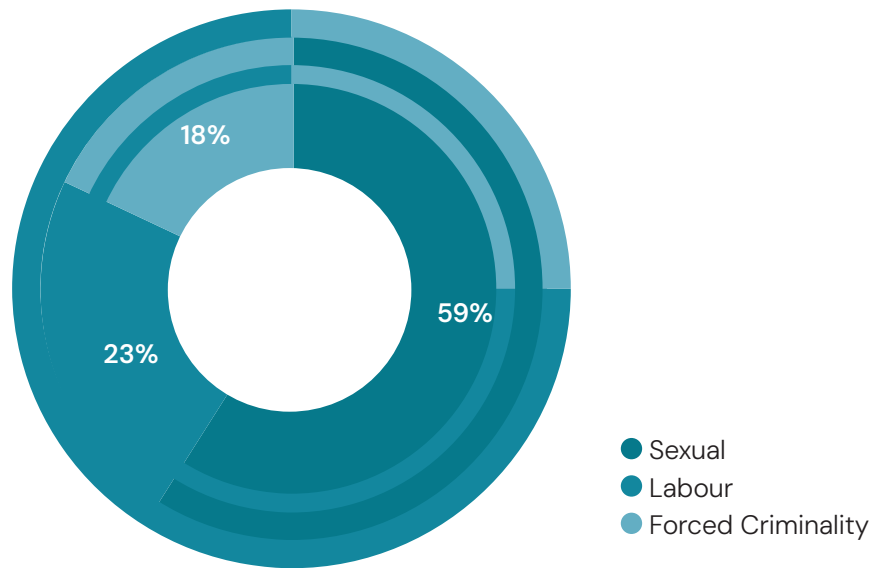


Table 14. Total Joint Mediation Sessions and Information Sessions 2020–2024

	Sessions	All Issues (Couples)	Court Based	Telephone Helpline Cases	Total
2020	Joint	7,563	1,886	1,906	11,355
	Information	438	780**	733	1,951
2021	Joint	5,716	1,233	–	6,949
	Pre Mediation	1,340	971**	–	2,311
2022	Joint	5,201	910**	–	6,111
	Pre Mediation	2,494	992**	–	3,486
2023	Joint	5,286	693	–	5,979
	Pre Mediation	2,459	1,038	–	3,497
2024	Joint	5,695	1,216		6,911
	Pre Mediation	2,892	1,023		3,915

**Additional court cases completed in Full-time offices

Table 15. Cases Closed 2020–2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Cases Closed (including Information Sessions)	2,687	3,867	3,196	2,911	3,262
Cases not progressed to Mediation	695	665	796	776	873
Total Mediation Cases Closed (excluding cases opened but not progressed beyond Information Sessions/Pre-mediation Sessions)	1,992	3,202	2,400	2,135	2,389

Table 16. Demand/ Service Provision

Office	New Cases 2024	Total Mediation Sessions	Reached agreement 2024
Athlone	127	326	58
Ballymun	247	733	99
Carlow	52	215	28
Castlebar	84	233	29
Cork	225	803	92
Dolphin House	156	742	231
Dundalk	112	170	14
Ennis	72	211	33
Galway	161	325	53
Jervis Street	176	738	92
Kilkenny	37	169	16
Letterkenny	79	194	12
Limerick*	117	587	86
Portlaoise	98	185	27
Sligo	56	42	3
Tallaght	250	394	56
Tralee	51	371	64
Waterford	77	266	22
Wexford	117	207	30
Total	2,294	6,911	1,045

*Includes Nenagh

Table 17. Family Mediation Law Centre Referrals 2024

Centre	1st Pre-Mediation Session	2nd Pre-Mediation Session	Total Mediation Sessions	Reached Agreement
Athlone	8	8	17	9
Ballymun	0	0	10	1
Carlow	0	0	8	2
Castlebar	11	11	36	6
Cork	10	10	24	1
Dolphin House	5	5	19	2
Dundalk	4	4	14	0
Ennis	14	14	41	13
Galway	0	0	3	0
Jervis Street	4	5	14	1
Kilkenny	9	9	30	4
Letterkenny	7	7	32	2
Limerick	13	10	31	5
Nenagh	1	1	2	0
Portlaoise	0	0	0	0
Sligo	4	3	15	2
Tallaght	0	0	0	0
Tralee	15	13	34	9
Waterford	0	0	0	0
Wexford	2	2	7	3
Total	107	102	337	60

Table 18. Court-Based Mediation Initiatives 2024

Office	New Cases (1st Joint Mediation Session)	Total Sessions	Agreements
Athlone	8	31	4
Ballymun	1	2	0
Carlow	19	48	10
Castlebar	1	4	1
Cork	11	29	4
Dolphin	210	410	157
Dundalk	0	0	0
Ennis	7	26	6
Galway	0	0	0
Jervis House	3	9	0
Kilkenny	3	8	0
Letterkenny	0	0	0
Limerick	14	45	16
Mullingar	0	0	0
Nenagh	1	6	1
Portlaoise	0	0	0
Sligo	1	5	0
Tallaght	0	0	0
Tralee	1	4	1
Waterford	2	4	0
Wexford	1	1	1
Total	283	632	201

Table 19. Family Mediation Office Waiting Times 2020–2024

Office	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Athlone	49	8	32	13	10
Ballymun	24	12	24	17	9
Carlow	8	15	14	24	10
Castlebar	Vacant	26	Vacant	16	14
Cork	24	14	7	13	9
Dolphin House					5
Dundalk	32	24	11	26	13
Ennis					13
Galway	16	12	10	18	12
Jervis House	24	24	16	15	6
Kilkenny	8	15	14	20	10
Letterkenny	20	6	8	14	11
Limerick	12	15	5	15	7
Nenagh					11
Portlaoise	28	10	20	7	14
Sligo	15	10	12	31	16
Tallaght	36	15	22	20	13
Tralee	24	10	2	13	4
Waterford	16	4	7	15	13
Wexford	28	13	10	16	15

Table 20. Number of Submissions Granted and Refused 2024

	Granted	Refused
Family Law Legal Aid Certificate	10,701	32
International Protection Legal Aid Certificate	11,948	0
Review of PIA Legal Aid Certificate	359	2
Non-Family Law Legal Aid Certificate	1,142	102
Amendments to all types of certificates	7,867	14
Authorisations – all case types	526	10
Waiver or reduction of Contribution	9,621	47
Waiver of Costs	168	23
Termination & Revocation of Legal Aid Certificate	148	3
Instalment Arrangement	275	0
Coroners’ Inquest Certificates	14	0

All cost figures reported in Criminal Legal Aid tables below are inclusive of VAT.

Table 21. Annual Expenditure of Claims Processed Under the Garda Station Legal Advice Revised Scheme by the Financial Shared Services (inclusive of VAT)

Year	Number of claims authorised for payment	Annual Expenditure
2020	4,534	€1,983,000
2021	4,177	€1,888,000
2022	3,266	€1,435,000
2023	3,148	€1,439,569
2024	2,746	€1,315,288

Table 22. Garda Station Legal Advice Revised Scheme Payment Information

	2022	2023	2024
1. Highest cost per individual claim	€8,229	€7,284	€6,670
2. Average cost per authorised claim	€454	€435	€479

Table 23. Number of Detainees Accessing the Garda Station Legal Advice Revised Scheme

	2022	2023	2024
Number of detainees	3,267	3,148	2,746

Table 24. Expenditure on Garda Station Legal Advice Revised Scheme by Type of Detention

Description	Number of claims processed	Cost of claims processed
1 Claims authorised under the Offences Against the State Acts legislation	65	€48,899
2 Claims authorised under the Criminal Justice Act, 1984–2006 legislation	2419	€974,668
3 Claims authorised under the Criminal Justice (Drug Trafficking) Act 1996 legislation	168	€136,143
4 Claims authorised under Section 50, Criminal Justice Act, 2007 legislation	94	€144,024
5 Total Authorised Claims	2746	€1,303,734
6 Add: Value of mileage claims authorised		€11,555
7 Total Expenditure		€1,315,128

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**An Bord Um
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Legal Aid Board

Providing access to justice since 1979