

## **FLAC STATISTICAL REPORT FOR YEAR 2004**

### **Introduction**

With the view of having uniform records and statistics of the overall work of its centres, FLAC introduced the Data Collection Programme in January 2004. This report reflects the findings of the programme over the 12-month period of 1 January – 31 December 2004. It is an abridged version of FLAC's Annual Statistical Report for 2004.

The information was gathered from the data collection forms used in the legal advice centres when a client comes for a personal consultation. Every visit of a person to the centres is treated as one client, and one form is used per client. 32 participating centres returned 3,317 forms. This last figure refers to consultations where questionnaires were filled out and indicates that at least 3,317 clients visited those centres during the period of reference.

Referral and legal information are done through the FLAC's network of centres, comprising 19 FLAC Centres that are operated directed by FLAC and a further 40 Legal Advice Centres that are operated by the Citizens Information Centres with the support of FLAC. Centres that participated in the programme during that year were as follows.

**FLAC Centres:** Adelaide Road, Ballyboden, Ballyfermot, Ballymun, Blanchardstown, Clondalkin, Crumlin, Dundrum, Finglas, Killester, National Association of the Deaf (NAD), North King Street, Prussia Street, Meath Street, Pearse Street, Tallaght, and Whitehall/Beaumont all in Dublin, and in Cork.

**LACs:** Clonmel, Thurles, Tralee, Listowel, Navan, Naas, Newbridge, Sligo, Castlebar, Ballina, Limerick, Portlaoise, Letterkeny and Waterford.

Those participating centres sent to Head Office the forms used in all or some of their legal sessions during the period of reference, making up a total number of 532 sessions.

### **Areas of Law**

The 3,317 clients who visited the above mentioned centres in 2004 sought legal information regarding one or more areas of law. Record was made of 3,536 legal queries which were divided into 11 categories of areas of law as outlined below.

**Table 1: Areas of law discussed**

<b>Areas of Law discussed</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Family Law	1249	35.3
Employment Law	361	10.2
Succession/Probate	293	8.3
Property	265	7.5
Housing	247	7
Criminal Law	197	5.6
Consumer Law	179	5.1
Credit and Debt	123	3.5
Immigration/Refugee Law	95	2.7
Social Welfare Law	63	1.8
Other	464	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>3536</b>	<b>100</b>

As can be seen, the most common area of law where queries arose during the period of reference was family law. The remainder of the figures indicate a spread across a wide range of other civil matters, such as employment law which accounted for 10.2% and housing, with 7% of the total number of queries. Other significant areas of law include succession / probate, social welfare and credit and debt. The category "other" includes queries related to personal injuries, client/ solicitor relationship, insurance, road traffic accidents, and defamation, to name just a few.

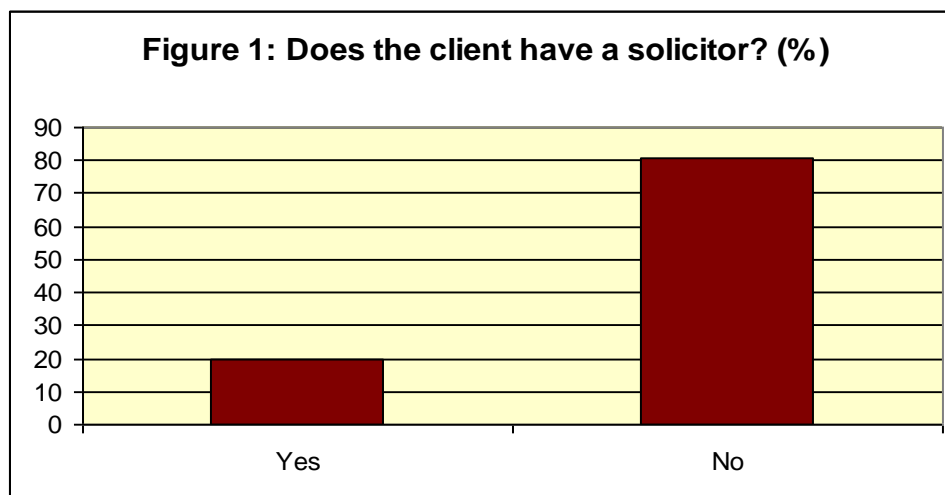
A specific question relates to credit and debt. Clients who sought legal information on this issue were asked at what stage of debt they were. Some 56 clients indicated their stage of debt, half of which reported that they were involved in legal proceedings, as Table 2 below illustrates.

**Table 2: Stage of debt**

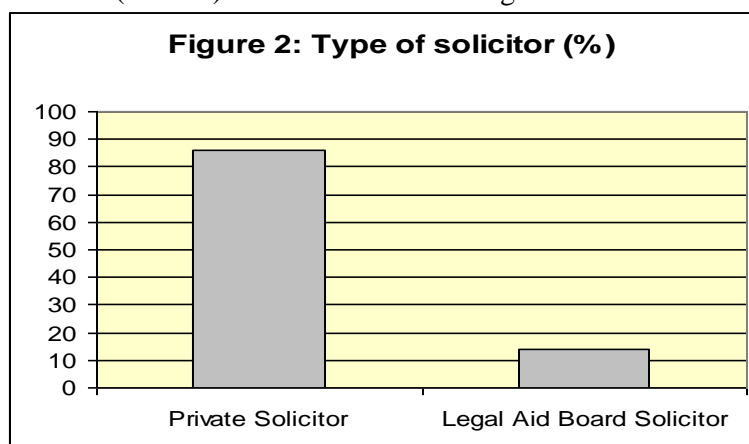
Stage of debt	Count
At legal proceedings	28
Debt collector	14
Creditor correspondence	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>

***Does the client have a solicitor?***

1766 respondents answered this question. Of those, 344 (19.5%) had a solicitor. The remaining 1422 (80.5%) had no solicitor. Figure 1 illustrates the breakdown.



Of the 344 respondents who did have a solicitor, 225 specified whether they had a private solicitor or were clients of the Legal Aid Board. 86.2% (194/225) had privately hired a solicitor, while 13.8% (31/225) were clients of the Legal Aid Board.



Clients were also surveyed in relation to their experience (if any) in accessing legal services and their personal profiles.

***How did the client hear about FLAC?***

Of those respondents, 42.4% heard about FLAC through Citizens Information Centres, 34.5% by word of mouth, 14.3% through the media, 3.9% through a statutory body, 3.9% through community centres and finally 1.2% through a professional body. Figure 4 below illustrates the breakdown.

In exploring people's experience with regard to access to legal services,

58.3% (508/864) said that they had previously needed the advice of a solicitor, while 41.7% (360/864) had needed it. For those who did previously need legal advice, 81% (196/242) reported no difficulties in accessing it, while the remainder did have a difficulty.

Clients were asked had they previously heard of the Legal Aid Board. This was asked to assess awareness of the service. Of the 781 respondents who answered this question, 51.5% (402/781) answered “No” while 48.5% (379/781) answered “Yes.” Of those who answered “Yes” 73.7% (275/373) said they had not applied for legal aid while the remaining 26.3% (98/373) said that they had.

Where clients had applied for legal aid, the following four questions were asked:

- ***For how long did you have to wait to see a solicitor?***

Of the 68 respondents who answered this question 23.5% waited less than one month, 32.4% waited between one and six months, 14.7% waited between seven and 12 months, 7.4% waited between 13 and 24 months, 1.5% waited over 24 months. A further 14.7% were not aware since they were still on the waiting list and 5.9% stated several weeks.

- ***What was the matter in question?***

75 respondents answered this question. 92.1% of those sought legal aid and advice on family law with the remainder 7.9% seeking legal services on a wide variety of issues. The breakdown is as follows:

**Table 3**

<b>Matter in question</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Family law/matter not specified	22	29.3
Separation	20	26.7
Maintenance	12	16
Custody/Access	6	8
Barring Orders	5	6.7
Divorce	4	5.4
Housing	2	2.7
Abuse by family member	1	1.3
Church Annulment	1	1.3
Social Welfare	1	1.3
Immigration	1	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>

- ***Were you granted legal aid?***

Of the 85 who answered this question, 28.2% said “No”, 55.3% said “Yes” and 16.5% were not aware, since they were still on the waiting list.

Those who were not granted legal aid were asked:

- ***What were the reasons given?***

Of the 19 respondents, four were declined because the matter was not covered, six because they failed the means test, one failed the merits test, one because their spouse had LAB representation, and finally seven did not know why they were declined.

Where clients had not applied for legal aid, they were asked the reason why. 67 respondents answered this question. The breakdown is as follows:

**Table 4: Reasons why client did not apply to Legal Aid**

<b>Client:</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Deemed it unnecessary	21	31.3
Chose not to apply due to delay	12	17.9
Deemed that s/he would not qualify	11	16.4
Was not aware of the service	7	10.4
Previously advised that the matter was not covered/not to apply	6	9
Client proposed to apply after advice	3	4.5
Had a solicitor	1	1.5
Advised by another agency	1	1.5
No reason	5	7.5

Total	67	100
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### **Demographic profile of FLAC network centres callers**

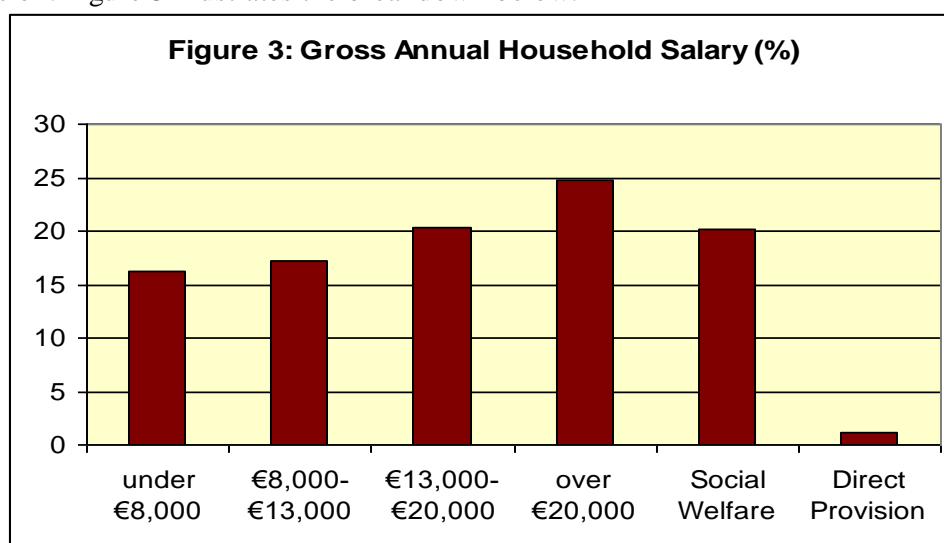
The following personal status information was obtained from the questionnaires:

#### **Employment status**

874 respondents gave details of their employment status. Of those, 32.7% were in full-time employment; 21.7% unemployed; 15% in part-time employment; 11.2% retired/pensioner; 8.2% in home duties, while 2.1% were in CE Scheme and 1.3% were self employed. The remainder 7.8% identified themselves as having “other” employment status.

#### **Gross annual household income**

758 respondents answered the question regarding their gross annual household income. Of those, 24.8% had a gross annual household income over €20,000; 20.4% had between €13,000 - €20,000; 20.2% were recipients of social welfare; 17.2% had an income of €8,000 - €13,000, while 16.2% had less than €8,000 and 1.2% were asylum seekers in receipt of Direct Provision. Figure 3 illustrates the breakdown below.



#### **Marital Status**

Of the 944 respondents who answered, 32.8% were married, 27.6% were single, 20.9% were separated /divorced, 10.6% were single parents, 4.8% widow/widower and 3.3% were cohabiting.

#### **Home ownership**

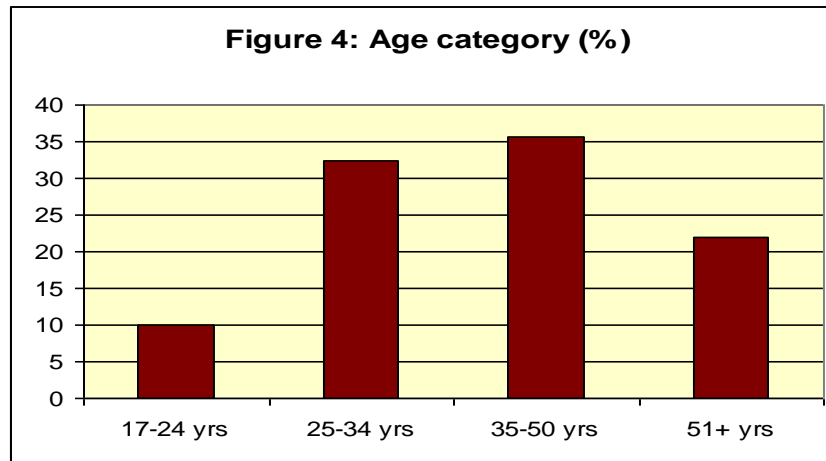
840 respondents gave details of their residential situation. Of those, 31.4% owned their dwelling with mortgage, 24.4% were in private rented accommodation, 17.4% were outright owners, 12.3% lived in local authority housing and the remaining 14.5% lived in other kind of accommodation, i.e. with their parents, friends or in shelters.

#### **Gender**

44% of the 1,150 respondents were male, and the remaining 56% were women.

#### **Age group**

The following graph shows the age category of 1,074 respondents to this enquiry.



### **Nationality**

Of the 1,076 respondents who specified their nationality, 86.9% were Irish, 6.1% were from another EU country and finally 7% were from a country outside of the EU.

### **Conclusions**

Among the conclusions that emerged from an analysis of the data, FLAC was able to observe that:

- By and large, the most common area of law brought to consultation at FLAC network centres during the period of reference was family law, with 35.3% of the total number of recorded queries. However, FLAC statistics indicates that there were other areas of civil law that constitute a significant percentage of queries, such as employment law, which accounted for slightly over one-tenth of the total number of queries. Housing was another area of considerable need for legal advice and information with seven percent of the total number of queries, covering matters such as tenant's rights, neighbour disputes and local authority housing issues. Other significant areas of law include succession/probate, property, consumer, credit and debt, immigration/refugee, social welfare, as well as civil litigation matters such as medical negligence and personal injuries.
- Although the number of responses from clients querying credit and debt who specified their stage of debt was too low to draw conclusions, it is notable that half of those reported that they were involved in legal proceedings.
- Clients were mainly referred to our legal advice centres by the Citizens Information Centres and by word of mouth.
- 51.5% of respondents answered "No" to the question *Have you ever heard about the Legal Aid Board?* Thus, more than half of FLAC clients did not know about the existence of the Legal Aid Board services. Almost three out of four respondents who had heard about the Legal Aid Board did not apply for the service. Although many deemed it unnecessary, other reasons given were no awareness of the service, delays, and the belief that they would not qualify.
- Although advice was needed by clients on a wide variety of issues, FLAC callers perceived the Legal Aid Board Law Centres as primarily a family law service.
- Few respondents answered the question regarding reasons for refusals of legal services. However, it is worth mentioning that almost one in three respondents did not know why their certificates for legal aid or advice were refused.
- FLAC figures show that its clients come from a wide range of backgrounds. In terms of their employment status, less than one third were in full-time employment and only a quarter indicated that they had a household income over €20,000. These figures indicate that the majority of FLAC callers are not in full-time employment and on low income.
- 80.5% of respondents had no solicitor. Where clients had engaged solicitors, only 13.8% had obtained legal aid through the Law Centres, although data shows that over 75% of FLAC clients had gross annual household income of less than €20,000. This suggests that they would have been entitled to state funded legal aid, had they applied.