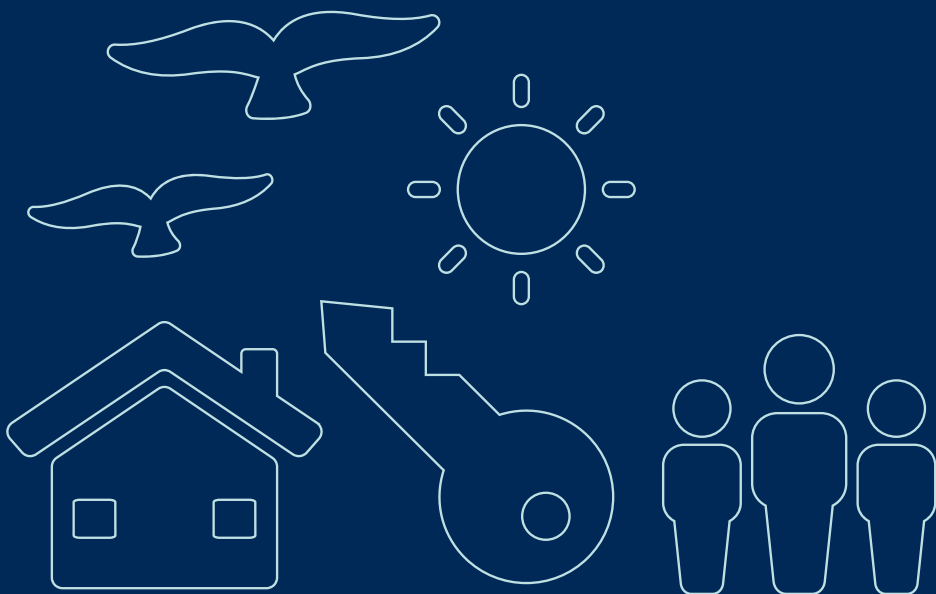




Mercy Law
Resource Centre

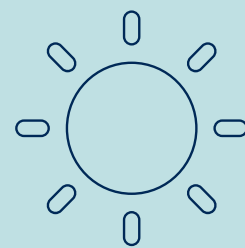
2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Providing free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness



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01. Chairperson's welcome statement



Welcome to the 2022 Annual Report of Mercy Law Resource Centre. We hope that it provides valuable insight to the work which MLRC undertakes on behalf of people impacted by, or at risk of homelessness.

MLRC works exclusively in the provision of legal advice and support to people who are experiencing or facing homelessness. Our staff advocate for the legal rights of people faced with the fundamental deprivation of needing a home. The challenge facing each homeless individual and family is a consequence of the fundamental mismatch between housing need and housing supply. Government statistics reveal that over the course of 2022 the number of individuals availing of emergency accommodation rose from 8,920 to 11,632 (+30.4%) and the number of families from 913 to 1,562 (+71.08%). In the public realm, statistics can become a blind to the underlying personal turmoil that is the reality of each person's daily crisis- their need for a roof and shelter tonight. However, statistics are one of the tools by which we are enabled to assess the scale of the State's unmet housing responsibility. Ownership and delivery upon this fundamental State responsibility can become blurred through the prism of local government obligations and the State's reliance upon approved housing bodies. The year 2022 unfortunately cannot be seen as a watershed year as our current experience at MLRC reflects the deepening of the homelessness crisis during 2023.

In August 2022 our Managing Solicitor Aoife Kelly Desmond addressed the Public Consultation on a Referendum on Housing in Ireland urging constitutional change as a key action towards a transformation from current crisis-based responses to housing. At MLRC we believe that recognising a constitutional right to housing in Ireland would be a strong positive step to reflect a national set of values, both to address the current housing crisis and to safeguard against future crises. A constitutional right would support a long-term vision of a more inclusive, caring society and provide an enduring protection for this basic human right into the future. This would benefit our entire society, and particularly those in vulnerable groups such as ethnic and racial minorities that face greater barriers to access safe and secure housing.

Since our 2021 Annual Report we have had personnel changes both at staffing and Board levels. We were saddened to bid farewell to solicitors Sinead McGarrigle and Paul Dornan and thank them for their excellent service to our clients and to MLRC over many years. We welcomed Adam Boyle to our solicitors' team in November 2022. At Board level, since our last Annual Report Deirdre Quigley, Gerry Whyte, Catherine Dooley and Cara Nagle retired. Cumulatively they have given over 30 years' service, and I take this opportunity to acknowledge their respective unstinting voluntary commitment to people facing homelessness. We have been delighted to welcome newcomers to our Board, Annette O'Donnell, Tom O'Brien, Dr Sarah Hamill and Turlough O'Donnell SC.

As Chairperson, I wish to thank especially all who helped us in our work through 2022. We are deeply grateful to those who provided funds and who gave us generous pro bono services, including barristers, interns and volunteers. As an independent law centre providing a vital free service and relying on donations to function, we need the continuation of your support more than ever.

In conclusion I wish to thank and express our deep appreciation of the dedicated work of our staff; Managing Solicitor Aoife Kelly-Desmond, solicitors Paul Dornan and Adam Boyle, and professional support team Nuala Monaghan, Miriam Nally and Siobhán Tracey. I also thank each of our Board members who serve MLRC with such personal commitment.

To all who read this Report I hope you are encouraged to continue with determination our fight to prevent homelessness. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Edward Gleeson'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Edward Gleeson, Chairperson
Mercy Law Resource Centre

02. Managing Solicitor's reflections



2022 was a deeply challenging year for those in precarious housing situations. Coming out of the pandemic, there was a sense of relief and hope across society. However, for those at the brink of homelessness 2022 was to bring even more challenges.

The number of people facing homelessness soared as pandemic eviction bans lifted and other factors, particularly the collapse of the private rental sector, caused record breaking homelessness toward the end of 2022.

In MLRC we worked hard to meet rising demand for our service, with new requests for legal assistance in 2022 up 10% on the previous year. Most concerning, the proportion of cases concerning refusals of access to emergency accommodation increased by a staggering 250% year-on-year. Our solicitor team reported that cases were more complex and more entrenched than ever before, with matters that would previously have been easily resolved taking more time and effort. The overall sense was that housing and homelessness services were under enormous pressure, with a consequent deterioration in the quality and robustness of decision-making where resources fell short of demand. We were encouraged by the resilience of our clients in the face of such challenges.

We focused our policy work in 2022 on protecting those most at risk; with sector partners we lobbied government for the introduction of the Winter Emergency Eviction Ban to prevent a crisis becoming a catastrophe. The right to housing has been a focus of MLRC's policy work for many years and this continued in 2022, with the deteriorating crisis pressing the urgency of fundamental constitutional reform. We also continued our focus on examining the barriers faced by different groups in housing crisis, preparing a policy report *Mental Health and Social Housing Support* with the support of the Mental Health Ireland Grants Scheme 2022.

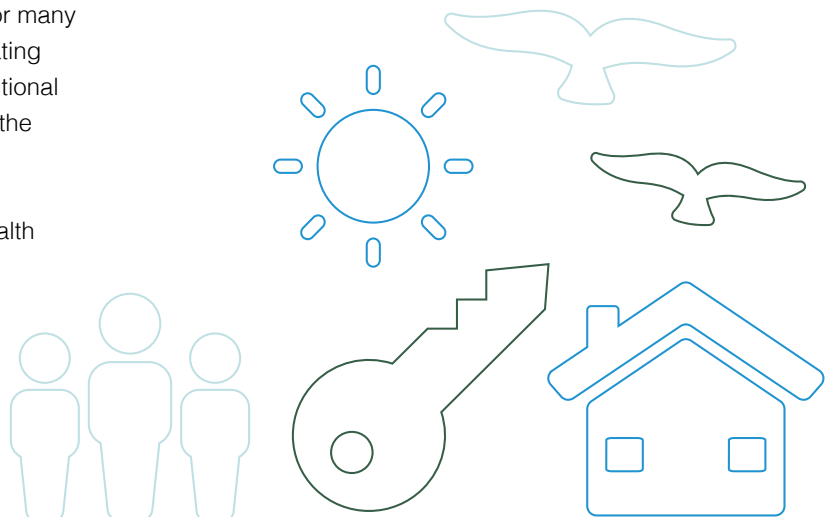
For free legal and advocacy services such as MLRC to best serve our clients, we need to be truly accessible to them. The design of our services must not present further obstacles to people seeking to vindicate their rights; clients must be able to both find out about the service and to meaningfully access it. We took the opportunity presented by the lifting of pandemic restrictions in 2022 to design a better model for MLRC going forward, rather than just returning to 'business as usual'. The output of our service accessibility review, facilitated by Community Foundation Ireland, was published as 'Making free legal and advocacy services accessible - Building a hybrid service delivery model for Mercy Law Resource Centre' to share our findings.

Writing now in mid-2023, the official homelessness figures have continued to break records and demand on our service has continued to increase. Regardless of these challenges our dedicated staff remain committed to meeting the legal needs of those facing homelessness, building on our experiences and learnings in 2022 and motivated, as always, by the strength and resilience of our clients.

Aage Kelly Desmond

Managing Solicitor

Mercy Law Resource Centre



03. About Mercy Law Resource Centre

Mercy Law Resource Centre (MLRC) is an independent law centre, registered charity and company limited by guarantee. MLRC provides free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in the area of social housing and related social welfare law; we work with people in housing crisis to help them through the legal barriers keeping them from a stable home.

MLRC provides a unique service that is designed to be accessible and to meet the individual needs of each client. We recognise that people in housing crisis can be dealing with overlapping and intersectional challenges and we work with other organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure our clients have the appropriate supports they need.

To complement our casework and bring about wider change, we undertake policy work to advocate for changes in laws, policies and attitudes which unduly and adversely impact our client group. MLRC also provides legal training in housing law to people and organisations that work with our client group, including those in support and service-delivery roles in approved housing bodies and local authorities.

Our Vision

MLRC's vision is of a society where each individual lives in dignity and enjoys equal rights, in particular the right to a home, which is fundamental to each human being. MLRC strives for a society where every person enjoys equal access to justice and legal recourse to vindicate those rights.

Our Ethos

MLRC's ethos recognises the dignity of each person. We seek to ensure that all people are treated with respect and compassion and are enabled to achieve their full potential as human beings. We are committed to the principles of human rights, social justice and equality.

Our Key Services

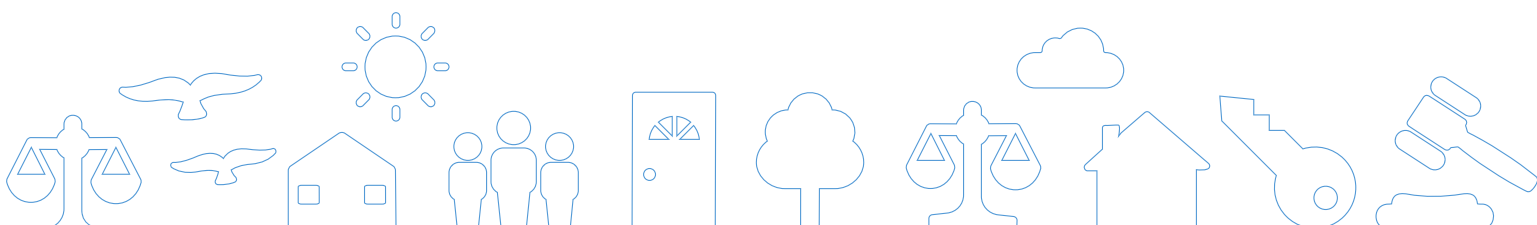
1. Free legal advice for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
2. Legal representation in the area of social housing law.
3. Legal support and training for organisations working in the field of homelessness.
4. Policy work to advocate changes to the laws, policies and attitudes that are particularly harsh for people facing homelessness and on the margins of our society.
5. A befriending service.

Why MLRC is needed

Housing is a fundamental right and safe, secure housing provides the foundation to our wellbeing as individuals and as a society. Legal intervention should not be required for people to access a safe and secure home. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for many people facing housing distress, who find themselves unable to assert their rights without recourse to the law. When this happens free, accessible and compassionate legal advice is essential. MLRC's clients do not have the means to access private legal services and there remains a major gap in state-funded legal aid for social housing and related social welfare law issues.

MLRC seeks to address this unmet legal need through providing a truly accessible and holistic service in this sorely under-resourced area. MLRC is the only independent law centre in Ireland solely dedicated to housing law.

As detailed further in section 4 below demand for MLRC's service grew in 2022 as the twin housing and homelessness crises continued to deteriorate. Writing now in 2023, demand has increased even further and MLRC is deeply concerned at the level of unmet legal need in this crucial area of law.

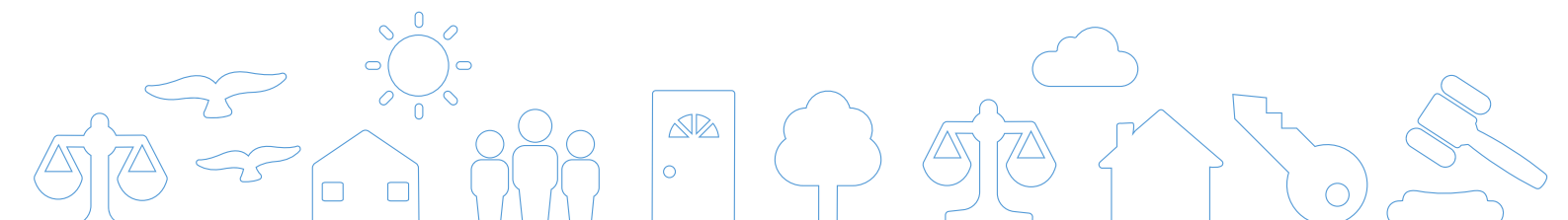


How MLRC delivers

Our core services are delivered by a team of six permanent staff supported by our dedicated and compassionate volunteers.

Every client presents with their own unique needs and circumstances. MLRC aims to be truly accessible to meet the needs of our clients as individuals. We meet clients where and how they need us, whether that is remotely or through on-site clinics, and work directly with other support organisations across Ireland, such as domestic violence refuges, disability support groups and homeless hostels, to combine our expertise and deliver effective, holistic support.

In 2022 we undertook a project to examine how we could make our service as accessible as possible by combining the benefits of remote services developed during the Covid-19 pandemic with the benefits of traditional face-to-face clinics. The project output was published in a report 'Making Free Legal and Advocacy Services Accessible – Building a hybrid service delivery model for Mercy Law Resource Centre' which provided recommendations on how services like ours could adapt to best serve our clients. The report concluded that accessibility is not something that can be addressed by discrete measures alone, but rather that true accessibility requires *“a system of overlapping measures and organisational awareness to keep accessibility at the forefront.”* MLRC is striving to embed these principles into our daily operations at every stage of a prospective client’s interaction with our service.



What happened in MLRC in 2022



Solicitor Adam Boyle joined MLRC in November 2022



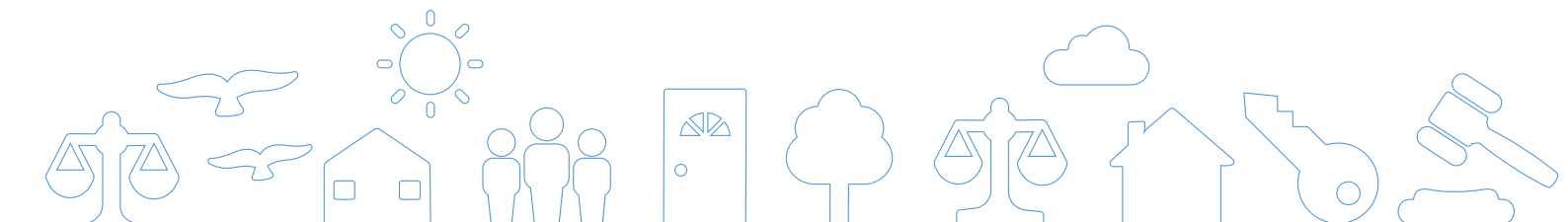
Solicitor Paul Dornan at the reopening of MLRC's flagship legal clinic in the Carmelite Centre



Aoife Kelly-Desmond speaking at Irish Association of Social Workers Conference in November 2022



Aoife Kelly-Desmond as chair of the legal subgroup of the Home for Good coalition, appearing before the Joint Oireachtas Committee in July 2022





Aoife Kelly-Desmond at Housing Commission Conference in May 2022



MLRC solicitor Paul Dornan speaking at a Trinity Flac event in September 2022



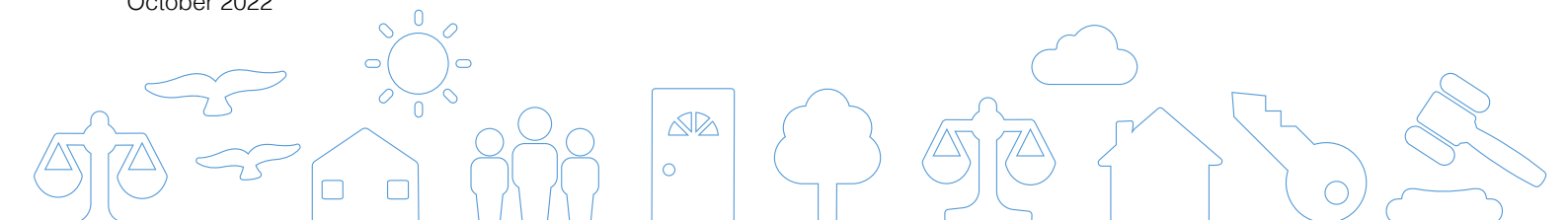
Aoife Kelly-Desmond taking part in the Ombudsman Consultation - July 2022



Aoife Kelly-Desmond and Nuala Monaghan at the Wheel's Celebrating Heroes event in December 2022



Edward Gleeson, Aoife Kelly-Desmond and Fr. Peter McVerry at the launch of the 2021 MLRC Annual Report in October 2022



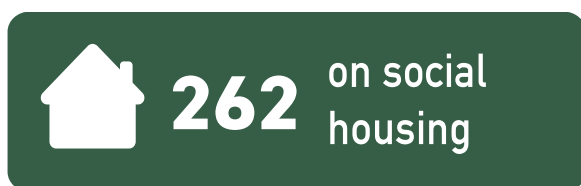
04. Our Impact

The core of MLRC’s work is providing free legal advice and representation to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Since we began in 2009, MLRC’S network of legal advice clinics and outreach with other organisations that work with homelessness has had a big impact. Our legal casework connects us to the real needs of those experiencing homelessness and housing distress and informs everything we do, guiding our organisational strategy; our policy and advocacy work, and the focus of our legal training programme.

Who we helped in 2022



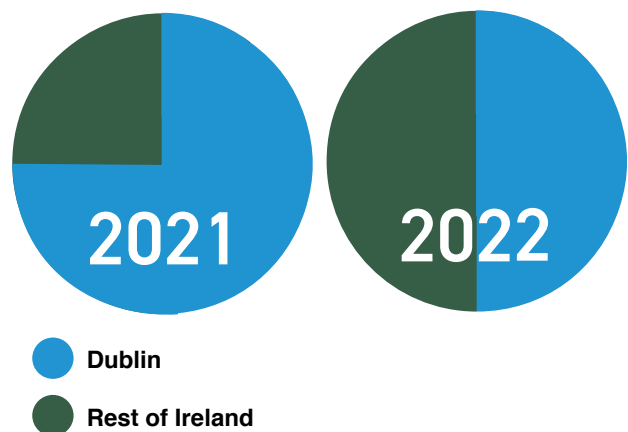
368 new advice matters of which:



2022 also saw a significant increase in the proportion of cases coming from outside the Dublin area – in 2021, approximately two-thirds of cases concerned Dublin area

local authorities, while in 2022 cases from outside Dublin nearly doubled, resulting in referrals being evenly split between Dublin and the rest of the country.

Where our clients live



In 2022, normal service started to resume after the turbulence caused by the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. In accordance with public health advice, our team continued to work remotely for the first half of the year. In June 2022 we were delighted to reopen our flagship legal clinic operating from the Citizen’s Information Liberties Outreach space in the Carmelite Community Centre Aungier Street. This was the first in-person legal clinic operated by MLRC in over two years due to pandemic restrictions. We held six in-person legal clinics in 2022 serving 16 clients.

2022 became the year in which we paused to examine our service model to ensure it was best adapted to the needs of the individual client. Where it was preferable to the client for accessibility reasons, we continued to provide essential legal advice and representation remotely and over the phone but we were also delighted to be able to offer services in person once more where that best suited the client’s needs.

During the pandemic there were some reductions in overall levels of homelessness, but this trend began to sharply reverse in 2022 and has continued to deteriorate since. This had a knock-on effect for MLRC’s service, with new requests for legal assistance up 10% in 2022.

Most worryingly, 2022 continued a trend which began in late 2021 with a significant increase in cases presenting to our service concerning the most urgent and distressing issue of people being refused access to basic emergency

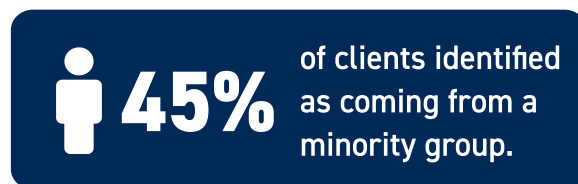
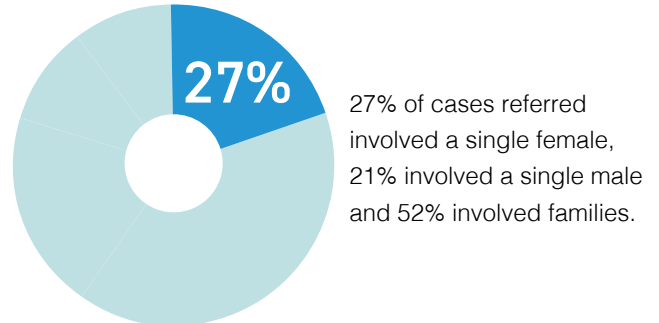
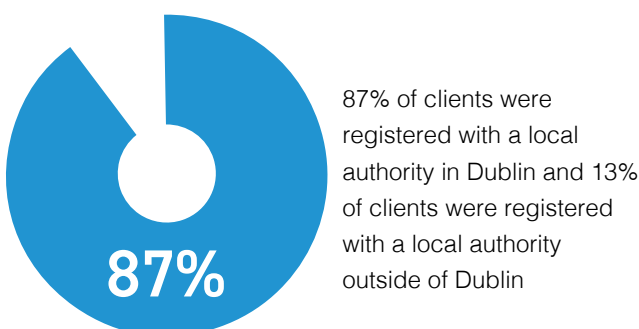
homeless accommodation; we dealt with 54 separate matters of this nature in 2022 compared to just 15 in 2021, a 250% increase. Our solicitors reported a notable increase in cases which were more complex and more entrenched, with less clear solutions. In MLRC's experience, the increasing pressure on emergency accommodation supply risks a deterioration in the quality of decision-making and respect for individual rights, in particular the right to fair procedures requiring legal intervention to resolve.



Pro Bono Partnerships

A&L Goodbody and Focus Ireland pro bono housing law clinic - 2022 in review

In addition to the legal clinics operated by MLRC staff directly, since 2018 MLRC has operated a pro-bono partnership with A&L Goodbody and Focus Ireland. A&L Goodbody solicitors staff the clinic, with support and training from MLRC, to serve Focus Ireland customers who need legal assistance in relation to social housing and/or emergency accommodation. A&L Goodbody took 72 new referrals through the clinic in 2022, an 80% increase from 2021.



The most common issues encountered in relation to social housing were applications for medical priority (13%), deferral from housing list due to criminal convictions (10%), assistance requesting transfers in local authority housing (7%), unreasonable offers of accommodation (5%) reinstating time previously accrued on the waiting list (6%), domestic abuse (6%) and general advocacy for social housing applications and emergency accommodation.

05. Our Casework in 2022

A Year in Review

Refusal of access to emergency accommodation

In 2022 MLRC saw a staggering 250% increase in the number of queries it received in relation to refusal of access to emergency accommodation.

The reasons given by local authorities for refusal of emergency accommodation varied. In many cases, MLRC was concerned to identify misapplication of the law by local authorities as a root cause. One common example was clients being refused emergency accommodation supports on the grounds that they did not have an open application for social housing supports, which is not in fact a legal requirement to access homeless supports. Social housing and homeless accommodation are two separate legal processes, and a social housing application can take 12-16 weeks to be processed, rendering it an entirely inappropriate prerequisite for a person in immediate housing crisis to access temporary shelter.

Another common issue concerned members of minority groups with particular legal status in Ireland, such as those with refugee status or visas connected to the family reunification process for refugees.

Underlying our casework in 2022 was the continued deterioration in the homelessness crisis, as factors such as the unwinding of supports in place through the Covid-19 pandemic and an increase in Notices to Quit in the private rented sector combine to result in record levels of homelessness. This was followed by a consequent shortage of suitable emergency accommodation, particularly from the summer onwards. Ultimately this resulted in the Government introducing a moratorium on evictions from private rented tenancies in October 2022. Writing now in 2023, the moratorium had some effect on reducing the number of people entering homelessness due to eviction but those effects were short-lived due to the lifting of the ban in March 2023 and MLRC is continuing to see high levels of queries concerning homelessness.

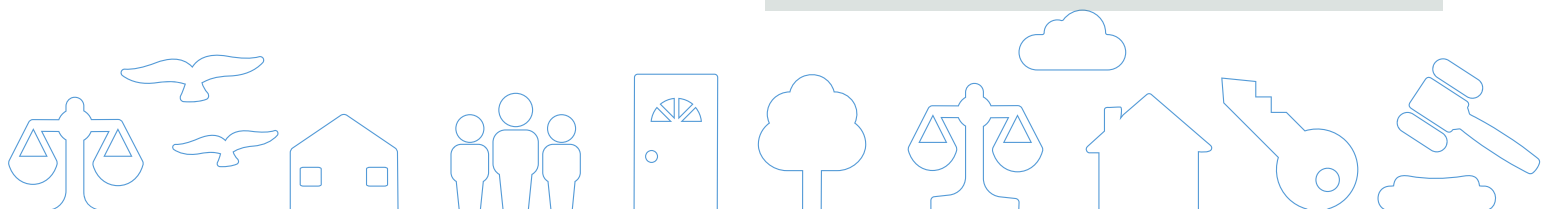
Case Study:

MLRC represented a family with a number of young children who became homeless when they were forced from their home due to serious safety concerns. The family, who were members of a minority group, were refused access to emergency accommodation and forced to shelter in a Garda station for days with a seriously disabled child. Advocacy workers made strenuous attempts to secure shelter for the family through multiple channels but with no success. MLRC intervened directly with the relevant housing authority and emergency accommodation was finally provided. The case presented a common theme among emergency accommodation refusal cases in that it was a somewhat unusual set of circumstances and, in MLRC's experience, cases that are unusual or complex are most likely to face additional barriers.

"A huge thank-you to [Managing Solicitor Aoife] and your MLRC colleagues for getting such a great outcome."

Case Study:

In one case, we assisted a family who had their emergency accommodation placement ended when they went overseas for 2 weeks for a family funeral. Upon their return they were refused access to further emergency accommodation by the local authority on the grounds that private rented accommodation had been sourced for the family through a HAP Place Finder service. However, this property was still under construction and not habitable so did not meet their immediate housing need. The family were then forced to self-fund B&B accommodation. After intervention by MLRC on the family's behalf, the family were provided with a form of emergency accommodation and were eventually provided with an Approved Housing Body tenancy.





Client Testimony:

“We were in hostels for 1 year and couldn’t find anyone that would help. The help we received from MLRC was brilliant, it was amazing, we were fighting just for something small (emergency accommodation) and ended in our own home. [My solicitor] Paul was really helpful; I couldn’t think of where we would be without his help. I can’t thank Mercy Law enough, what they did for me was absolutely fantastic.”

Social Housing Support – Household Means Policy 2021

MLRC worked with a number of clients denied access to social housing supports, and in some cases emergency homeless accommodation, due to the application Social Housing Support – Household Means Policy 2021. This policy governs how income is to be assessed when applying for social housing supports. As it is currently worded it is understood to be intended to give local authorities no scope to allow access to social housing supports for those whose current income is below the

income threshold but whose average income over the preceding 12 months’ may exceed the threshold.

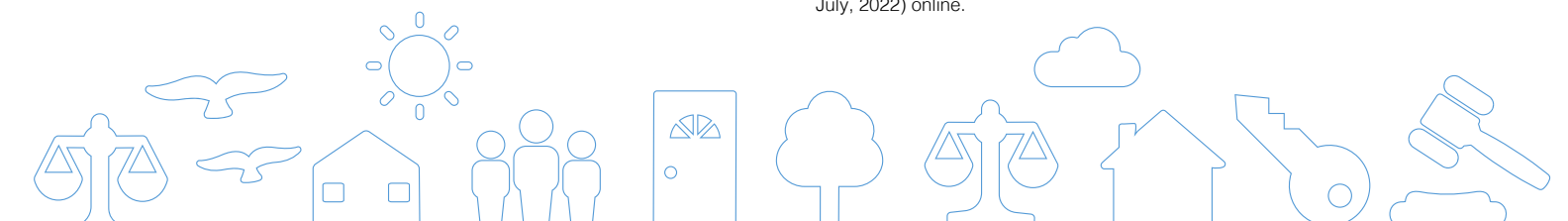
As a result, the policy is creating a block on individuals and families accessing social housing supports. In particular, it is creating a block for those who may have had a material change to their income over the preceding 12 months, e.g. due to the loss of a job or a change in social welfare entitlements.

MLRC has concerns with the legality of the policy generally and is aware of numerous examples of practical issues it has caused. While the Department of Housing has not amended the policy, following our intervention the Minister for Housing did publicly clarify that the policy did not apply to the provision of emergency homeless accommodation, which should be based only on the person’s current circumstances.¹

Case Study:

MLRC acted for a family who were refused access to social housing supports as they were assessed as being over the income threshold on a calculation of their preceding 12 months’ net average income, despite being under the income threshold at the time of applying. The family’s composition had changed and they were no longer entitled to the One Parent Family Payment. The family were also not deemed to be homeless by the local authority as they were not approved for social housing supports. MLRC raised the issue with the local authority and the Department of Housing and the issue received media attention. Clarification was received from the Department of Housing that a person does not need to be eligible for social housing to access homeless supports. Prior to litigation being issued, the family’s income averaged under the threshold and they were accepted onto the social housing list.

¹ Kitty Holland, ‘Families being excluded from social housing waiting list due to ‘badly worded’ circular, advocates say’ The Irish Times (22 July, 2022) online.



Client Testimony:

"[My solicitor] Paul kept me in the loop on my case at all times. He got back to me whenever I called, at any hour, which I really appreciated at such a frustrating time. He was very professional. He really cared about this work, you could tell he was very committed to his work and did not just consider it his job. It was just really nice to have someone actually want to help me".

Delay in receiving decisions on medical priority applications

MLRC met with a number of clients in our legal clinic held at the Carmelite Community Centre who had experienced significant delay from a local authority on deciding applications for medical priority to attach to their applications for social housing supports. These delays ranged from 6 months to over a year and a half. Medical priority applications by their nature often concern the urgent housing needs of persons with disabilities who are being negatively impacted by their current living situation, such as persons with mobility issues who cannot access part of their home due to lack of adaptations. These delays raised concerns under the Equal Status Acts and under the general principles of fair procedures. MLRC wrote to the relevant local authority in each case and this resulted in decisions being made on the applications.

Case Study:

MLRC met with a client who had experienced a significant delay from her local authority on deciding an application for medical priority. She told us she had been trying for over a year and a half to receive a response from the council regarding the decision. She informed us that she had been in contact with 3 different TDs looking for help with her situation. MLRC wrote to the council on her behalf, highlighting that this inordinate delay could be raised issues under the Equal Status Acts and under the general principles of fair procedures and might be an issue that the Office of the Ombudsman could investigate. This intervention resulted in a decision being made on the application and the client was awarded medical priority.

Client Testimony:

"I had been trying and received no response from the council, I think the TDs tried their best, but the help I received from Mercy Law was amazing; I think it only took two weeks after reaching out to receive a positive decision. We were struggling for years, and I can't thank Mercy Law enough for their help, especially [my solicitor] Paul. My Anxiety and Depression have improved, and this has improved mine, and my kids' lives. I thank MLRC deeply from my heart. It was one of the best things that came into our life."

Challenging evictions of social housing tenants by Approved Housing Bodies

In 2022 MLRC continued to assist families who had been issued with notices of termination by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in the first six months of their tenancies. As MLRC have outlined in previous reports. AHBs are permitted to do this, relying on the provision of the Residential Tenancies Act which allows a landlord to terminate a tenancy without giving a reason within the first six months of the tenancy. This only applies to social housing tenants in AHBs as the Residential Tenancies Acts do not apply to local authority housing. MLRC has sought to challenge this position in the RTB and High Court in cases of long-term social housing tenants, particularly those who have transferred from local authority-provided accommodation to AHB-provided accommodation.

"I have good news; he has been given a one-bedroom flat from the [Council]. He has seen the flat and we are getting the keys next week It has all been positive for him.

Thank you for all your help, I thoroughly believe your involvement made this all finally happen for [our mutual client]."

Domestic violence

Domestic violence continued to present as a cause of homelessness, particularly for female clients. This issue manifests in a variety of ways and is a focus of MLRC's policy work in 2023. One issue that came to the fore in 2022 was the difficulty people can face when they reached the end of time-limited refuge accommodation stays without alternative accommodation in place. This issue is likely to continue to present as the on-going shortage of social housing and private rental accommodation limits move-on options for those leaving refuges.

Case Study:

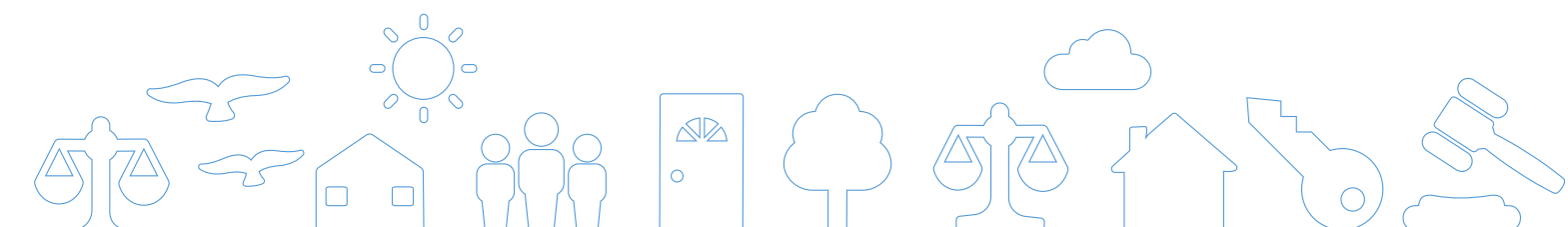
We assisted a client who had been forced to flee her home, which was a local authority property, due to serious threat from her former partner. She was able to access refuge accommodation with her child with a view to using the time provided by the refuge stay to arrange a transfer to safer accommodation. However, the local authority failed to engage with the woman or her support workers for a number of months and she reached the end of the refuge stay with no option but to return to the property she had fled contrary to the advice of Gardai. She tried to access homeless accommodation on a temporary basis but the local authority refused to assess her because she had an active tenancy. MLRC intervened and the local authority ultimately provided emergency accommodation and arranged a transfer of tenancy to a safe location. No explanation was provided by the local authority for their failure to engage which had caused huge distress for this family at a vulnerable time.

"MLRC have been a fantastic organisation to work with in regards to supporting our customers to access their legal rights in regards to homelessness and housing. Their staff are incredibly knowledgeable and resourceful in their work and their support has meant achieving positive results for customers who have often been ignored or mistreated. They also work with an incredible amount of compassion and dedication and have always been a pleasure to interact with."

Daniel Korolev, Focus Ireland Project Worker.

"Mercy Law Resource Centre provides invaluable support to me in my work with clients in Exchange House Ireland. Throughout a number of cases I have worked on with their team, I am struck by their inclusive and anti-discriminatory practice and their dedication to providing thorough legal advice and intervention to the Traveller community. It is a pleasure working with the MLRC team and my colleagues and I am very grateful for their assistance. In particular, I would like to thank [Managing Solicitor] Aoife Kelly-Desmond for her diligence and perseverance in supporting our clients with housing issues."

Anna Birbeck
Mental Health Social Worker
National Traveller Mental Health Service



06. Legal training and organisation support

Providing training to individuals and organisations working with our client group is a strategic priority of Mercy Law. By providing this training we can increase the capacity of others to understand social housing law and the rights of people facing homelessness, to better advocate for their clients, themselves and their families, and to improve decision making.

In 2022 we provided our housing law training in 11 separate sessions to representatives from a variety of organisations including law firms, housing and homeless charities and local authorities.

In 2022, due to the generous funding of Our Lady of Charity Ireland Trust Fund through a grant administered by the Community Foundation of Ireland, we were once again able to offer a free tailored housing law training programme to people working in the area of domestic violence. We are delighted to be offering this programme again in 2023.

Feedback from attendees

"a great session"

"brilliant and informative"

"The Guidance document and your slides will be a very handy resource going forward."

Who we trained in 2022

- Social workers
- Solicitors
- Domestic violence services
- Approved Housing Bodies
- Statutory bodies
- Citizen's Information staff
- Homeless services
- Local authority staff
- People interested in their own rights



07. Policy Work

MLRC's policy work is informed by our casework. Through our policy work we aim to bring about lasting, systemic change to laws, policies and practices that unjustly impact our client group.

In 2022 our policy work focused on two main areas; (i) production of the second in our on-going series of policy reports on barriers to accessing social housing and homeless supports for vulnerable groups, and (ii) the campaign for a referendum on a right to housing.

Barriers to access: mental health, social housing and homelessness

Many of our clients are from minority groups, such as migrants and members of the Traveller and Roma communities, or experience intersectional difficulties, such as language barriers, disability, mental health, domestic abuse, addiction and illiteracy. In our experience, these clients face additional barriers in accessing social housing and homeless supports. MLRC has focused our policy work in recent years on highlighting the additional needs of these groups and making recommendations for positive change. Writing now in 2023, we have just completed the third in a series of Barriers reports. In 2022 we worked on the second report in the series, examining the particular experiences of those with mental health difficulties. The report, *Mental Health and Social Housing Supports*, was developed in 2022 and launched by Mary Butler, Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People in February 2023 at a multi-disciplinary conference event. This project was supported by the Mental Health Ireland Grants Scheme 2022.



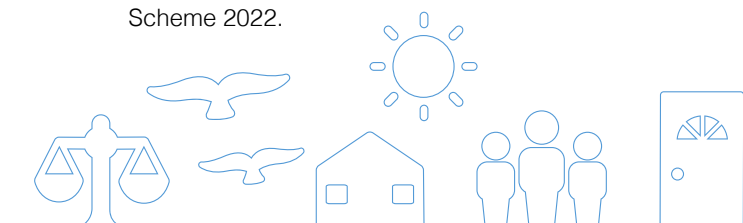
Campaign for a referendum on a right to housing

MLRC believes that every person has the right to a home, which is fundamental to our wellbeing and to our ability to meaningfully participate in society. For many years MLRC has advocated for recognition of a right to housing in the Constitution and this work continued in 2022. We continue to be an active member of the Home for Good coalition, which we co-founded to bring together individuals and organisations committed to the promotion of the right to housing. In May 2022 MLRC's Managing Solicitor Aoife Kelly-Desmond spoke at the Housing Commission's Conference on a Referendum on Housing on the particular impact of a right to housing for ethnic and racial minorities in Ireland. In July 2022, as part of the Home for Good coalition, Ms Kelly-Desmond appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing to discuss the right to housing. MLRC also made a detailed submission to the Department of Housing Public Consultation on a Referendum on Housing in Ireland.

Partnership and collaboration

Working in collaboration with others is at the heart of MLRC's approach. In addition to Home for Good, we are members of the Legal Aid Board External Consultative Panel and Domestic Violence sub-group; the Irish Homeless Policy Group; the Independent Law Centres Network; the Children's Rights Alliance; The Wheel and the Charities Institute of Ireland.

One example of our collaborative work in 2022 was the publication of *From Rebuilding Ireland to Housing for All: international and Irish lessons for tackling homelessness (2022)* in September. This publication resulted from a group comprising Focus Ireland, Simon Communities of Ireland, Society of St. Vincent De Paul, COPE Galway and the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice who together with MLRC, came together to commission international experts on homeless strategies to undertake a review of the government's 'Housing For All' and other homeless strategies. The resulting report is available on our website at www.mercylaw.ie/publications/.



08. Our Team

With the housing crisis continuing to deteriorate and the shortage of emergency accommodation becoming more entrenched, our hardworking staff and volunteers rose to the occasion to continue their dedicated service to our clients.

We would like to pass on our sincere thanks to all Mercy Law staff for their tremendous dedication and hard work.



L-R Adam Boyle, Sr. Kathleen Byrne, Miriam Nally, Nuala Monaghan, Aoife Kelly-Desmond, Paul Dorman and Siobhán Tracey

There were a number of changes to the MLRC team in 2022;

- Siobhán Tracey joined us as Communications and Fundraising Officer in May
- Solicitor Sinead McGarrigle left us in November after 3 years with MLRC
- Solicitor Adam Boyle joined us in November – you can read about the path that Adam took to joining MLRC on the next page.

Adam Boyle

The Newest Member of the MLRC Team



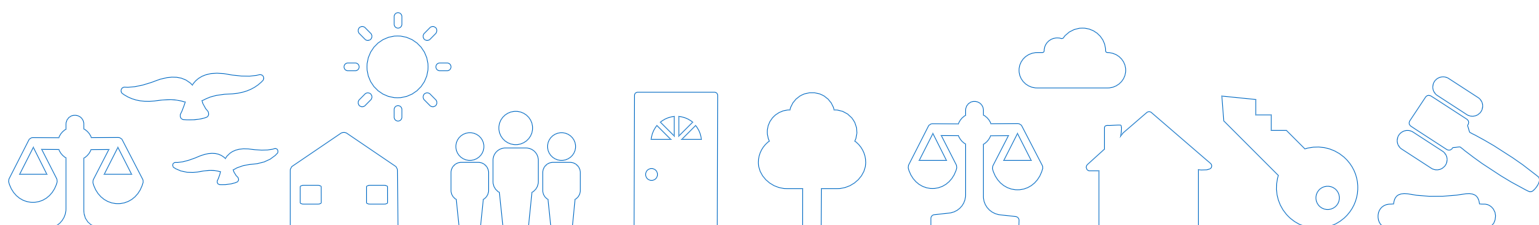
I joined the Mercy Law Resource Centre in November 2022 having qualified as a solicitor earlier that year. I have long admired the work of Mercy Law and was extremely excited for an opportunity to join the team.

Education

My undergraduate degree from UCD was a BCL Law Degree with a minor in Social Justice. It was the first of its kind in Ireland and saw great cooperation between the Sutherland School of Law and the School of Social Policy, Social Work, and Social Justice. A multi-disciplinary degree, I was attracted to the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of the Irish legal system, while also engaging with critical theories and social policy which exposed some of the underlying inequalities in Irish society. For me, it sparked a real desire to bridge gaps in access to justice in Ireland.

I was also lucky to be provided with the opportunity to study abroad in Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto, Canada. While there I had opportunities to engage in the study of Canadian civil liberties, intersections between social policy and law, and to be involved in community organising projects related to youth interactions with the criminal justice system and voter registration drives.

Most recently I was awarded an LLM Advanced Legal Practice Masters from the Law Society of Ireland and Northumbria University. My thesis was focused on the issue of climate litigation before the Irish courts. In particular, the issues of access to justice and climate related human rights were central to the research.



Activism and Training

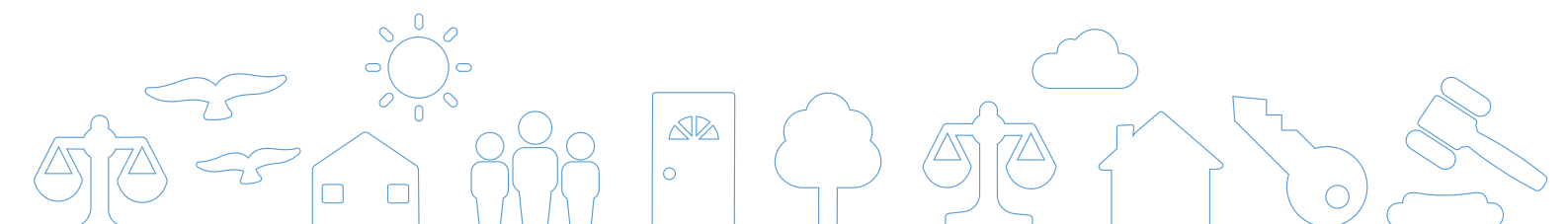
Prior to commencing my training as a solicitor in Ireland I moved to Athens for several months as part of an Erasmus+ funded project aimed at providing structured supports to grassroots NGOs helping refugees and migrants. During my time in Greece I worked with a variety of organisations which are engaged in the provision of formal and informal education, providing shelter for women and children, and providing social supports and links for families.

I returned to Ireland in 2018 and subsequently commenced training to be a solicitor with McCann FitzGerald LLP. Through this training I gained hands on experience in a variety of areas of commercial law including litigation, employment law, commercial tax advisory, and construction law. For a period of time I was also seconded one day a week to support the critical work of another independent law centre, Community Law and Mediation. I qualified in 2022 and continued working for McCann FitzGerald on a litigation team which specialised in complex international fraud, defamation, and investigations.

During this time I also volunteered with a number of homeless outreach groups throughout Dublin. These voluntary organisations provide mobile support to rough sleepers throughout the city. In addition to providing hot meals and clean clothes, the volunteers were a vital link to ensure our clients were aware of their rights and opportunities. We sought to ensure that clients had access to keyworkers, healthcare providers, and emergency accommodation.

Joining Mercy Law

The opportunity to work with Mercy Law was not one I was ready to pass up. It provided me an opportunity to marry my dual interests of law and social justice into a role which provides concrete opportunities to increase access to justice. I have found myself drawing on my experiences not just from my legal training and education but also my background in activism and volunteering.



Volunteer & Internship Programme

Volunteering is a critical part of the ethos of MLRC's impact and work. We have a number of administrative, legal and befriending volunteers who greatly complement and enhance our work.

After the mostly remote volunteer programmes of 2021, 2022 saw a welcome return of in-person volunteers to the MLRC office. We were delighted that our volunteers were able to resume their work on a face-to-face basis, including our long-time volunteer Sr Kathleen Byrne.

Pro-bono Volunteers

We greatly appreciate the generous assistance of Arthur Cox in running a part-time trainee solicitor secondment programme to MLRC throughout 2022. Hannah Grouse, Kate Heffernan, Bronagh Kennedy and Rosanna McAleese provided invaluable support to our solicitors during their secondments in 2022.

Interns and College Placements

MLRC is delighted to support the next generation of lawyers and we relish the chance to impart a spirit of civic activism and professional experience with our internship programme. We are extremely thankful for their professionalism, enthusiasm and energy our interns bring to our office. Interns and placement students assist with and learn about legal research, case work, administration and policy development.

We were delighted to host law student Hunter Tracey from Boston College Law School and human rights student Kim Rolston from NUIG who both worked with MLRC for a semester in the first part of 2022.

We also thank our 2022 summer interns Rachel Ardiff, Emmanuel Ntemuse and Ciara O'Reilly for their dedication.

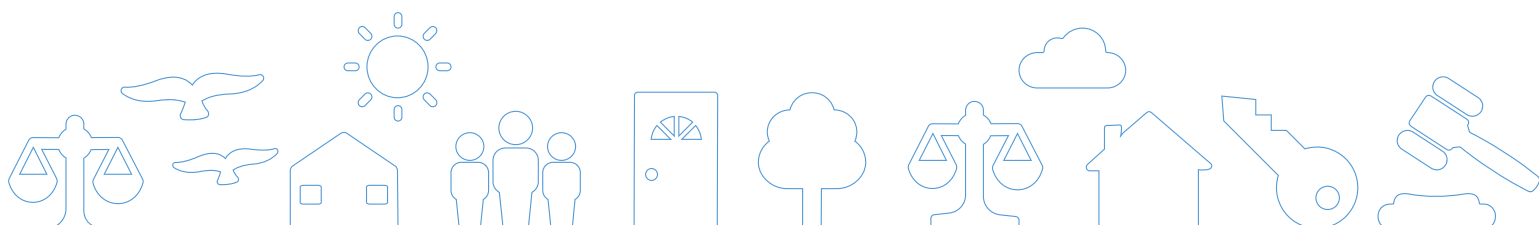
A reflection from Rachel Ardiff, Legal intern



My name is Rachel Ardiff and I completed my final year of law in Trinity this year. I interned with Mercy Law for the second half of the summer 2022. I have always had an interest in public interest law, and through a combination of researching a constitutional right in housing in during my degree, as well as first-hand experiencing the housing crisis in Dublin at the moment, I could not think of anywhere better to have interned last summer.

Everyone here at the Law Centre, from solicitors, communication team and legal secretary went out of their way to make my time here the best experience it could be. I got first-hand experience with clients, going to clinics with the solicitors and getting to hear the types of issues that are brought to the centre. I also conducted legal research into a variety of issues for the cases and people we were advising, which has granted me a much greater understanding of the law and short-comes of housing policy in Ireland, as well as being able to see the other excellent organisations that assist people in this area. I was given the opportunity to sit in on a homeless policy meeting, which was fascinating to be able to see the policy work that Mercy does outside of the day-to-day caseload and seeing the work, research and discussions that are going into wording for the 'right to housing' amendment to the constitution.

It was through my internship that I truly began to understand the homelessness crisis in a new way, and learned invaluable information about the vital service that Mercy provides, as legal processes that surround this area of law.



09. Communications

MLRC's Communications function is an important tool to raise awareness about MLRC and the issues facing our clients.

In 2022 the scope of MLRC's communications continued to grow. We published two ezines, each being distributed to nearly 1,000 subscribers. We also continued to engage across various social media channels to reach different audiences such as potential clients, funders, collaborators and supporters, with coverage given to MLRC in national publications including The Irish Times, The Law Gazette and Irish Legal News.

One of our communications highlights in 2022 was the news that MLRC was awarded the Pro Bono Publico/Community Law Firm of the Year award at the Irish Law Awards. While this recognition is a testament to the hard work of the whole organisation in providing expert legal services to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, it is also a testament to our communications department in ensuring that the work that MLRC is doing is shared and publicised. MLRC Managing Solicitor Aoife Kelly-Desmond and solicitors Sinead McGarrigle and Paul Dornan attended the ceremony to accept the award on behalf of MLRC.



Managing Solicitor Aoife Kelly-Desmond said: We were delighted to be chosen in a category with excellent competition! My sincere thanks and gratitude to all of the MLRC staff and volunteers for their incredible dedication and hard work, which greatly deserves this recognition.

Another highlight was the launch of our 2021 Annual Report in October 2022, which was MLRC's first in-person event since before the pandemic. The Report was launched by Fr. Peter McVerry, founder of the Peter McVerry Trust who spoke passionately about the policy failures that have led to our deepening housing crisis, the importance of compassion, and of respecting the dignity of those facing homelessness.

Social Media

MLRC sought to increase outreach through the means of social media and digital presence in 2022. As well as increasing engagement, our communications objectives included increasing our followers by 5% on all three platforms. This was easily surpassed with the following results:

Twitter: +9% an increase of 101 followers

LinkedIn: + 23%, an increase of 135 followers

Facebook: +6%, an increase of 43 followers

To stay in touch with our latest news and updates, please subscribe to our e-zine and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

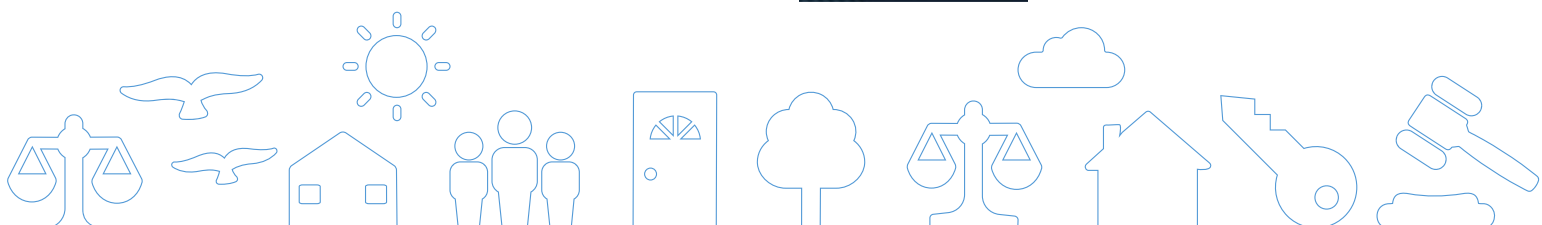
Website: www.mercylaw.ie

Email: info@mercylaw.ie

Facebook: [@MercyLawResourceCentre](https://www.facebook.com/MercyLawResourceCentre)

Twitter: [@MLRCLaw](https://twitter.com/MLRCLaw)

LinkedIn: [@mercy-law-resource-centre/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mercy-law-resource-centre/)



10. Governance

Mercy Law Resource Centre CLG is registered as:

- An Independent Law Centre with the Law Society of Ireland.
- A Charity with the Revenue Commissioners (CHY No: 18698) and with the Charities Registration Authority (Charity Registration No: 20072254).
- A Company Limited by Guarantee and not having share capital with the Companies Registration Office (Co. Reg. No: 471072).

MLRC is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meets with the Managing Solicitor every six to eight weeks. In 2022 MLRC held 6 Board meetings. MLRC has two specialist Board sub-committees that meet between Board meetings; the Finance & Risk Committee and the Policy Committee. The Finance & Risk Committee comprises at least 2 Board members with expertise in finance and risk matters and is attended by the Managing Solicitor, Finance Administrator and Communications & Fundraising Lead. The Finance & Risk Committee met 6 times in 2022, prior to each Board meeting. The Policy Committee comprises 3 Board members and is attended by the MLRC Managing Solicitor & solicitor team and it met twice in 2022.

Strategic Plan

MLRC’s work is governed ultimately by the direction set out in its Strategic Plan 2019-2024. The Strategic Plan was created after extensive consultation with our staff, Board and other stakeholders. The Board is regularly appraised of the progress towards achieving the goals as set out in the plan at each meeting and we look forward to refreshing the Strategic Plan as it comes to an end in 2024.

Charities Governance Code

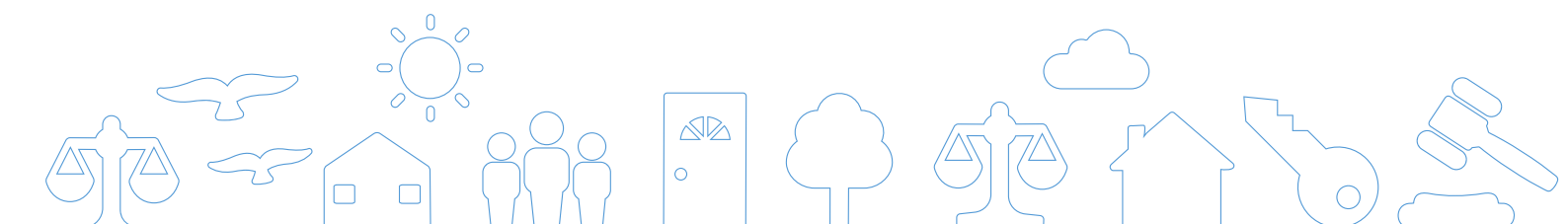
MLRC is registered with the Charities Regulator and is listed on the Public Register of Charities.

The Charities Governance Code is the standard that a community, voluntary or charitable organisation is expected to maintain in order to effectively manage and control its affairs.

MLRC is committed to meet the core standard as outlined in the Governance Code. MLRC operates in compliance with the Governance Code and is committed to continuing and further improving policies and procedures on an ongoing basis.

The Directors of the MLRC Board in 2022 were:

- Helena O’Donoghue RSM - Chairperson since 2009 Retired April 2022
- Edward Gleeson, Chairperson since May 2022
- Eamonn Casey – Director since 2019
- Catherine Dooley RSM – Retired May 2023
- Niall Farrell – Director since 2011 Retired April 2022
- Ciara McGrath – Director since 2009
- Cara Nagle – Director since 2020 Retired September 2023
- Deirdre Quigley – Director since 2011 Retired February 2023
- Stewart Reddin – Director since 2022
- Liam Twohig – Director since 2011
- Gerry Whyte – Director since 2009 Retired June 2023



11. Finance

MLRC's financial year runs from 1st January to 31st December. The accounts are prepared in accordance with FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice" (the Charities SORP) and is consistent with MLRC's commitment to best practice in financial reporting and accountability.

MLRC are committed to best fundraising practices, promoting high levels of accountability and transparency, and providing clarity and assurances to donors and prospective donors. In this respect, MLRC adheres to the Charities Regulator's Guidelines for Charitable Organisations and on Fundraising from the Public and is also complies with the Charities Institute standards. MLRC's commitment to good governance is highlighted by our recent attainment of 'Triple Lock' status from the Charities Institute of Ireland which demonstrates that we comply to the Triple Lock Standards of transparent reporting, ethical fundraising and good governance.

This annual report incorporates the Balance Sheet as an extract from the audited accounts for the years ended 31st December 2022 and 2021 respectively.



Cost of our service

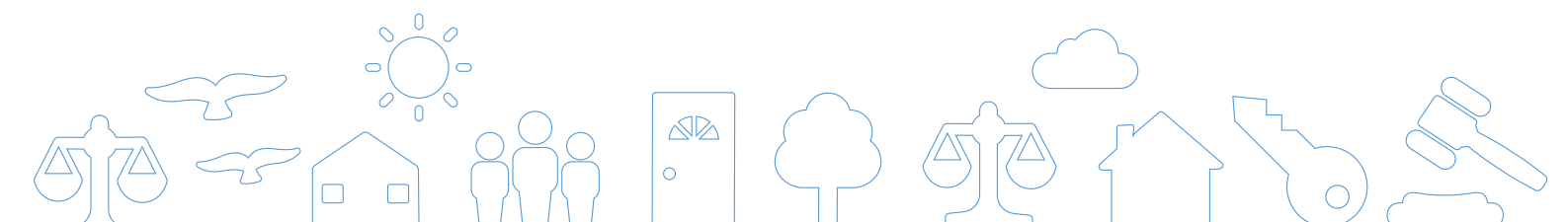
Cost to our Service

The cost of running MLRC for the financial year 2022 amounted to €298,403 seeing a reduction of approx. 9% on the running cost from the previous financial year. MLRC's total Income for 2022 was €286,269, which was up approx. 8% on the comparable period for 2021.

The majority of MLRC's 2022 income comprised of donations (€203,382) grants (€50,593) legal cost settlement (€20,000) and the remainder derived from delivering training on housing and social welfare law and general fundraising.

The value of our service far exceeds the cost as a result of a large number of in kind donations we receive for example:

- Reduced rent & utilities
- Free conference and reception facilities
- Pro bono legal services by Barristers
- Pro bono expert reports from Doctors/ Engineers etc.
- Discounted auditing & accounting services
- Support from volunteers & Interns





Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Funders

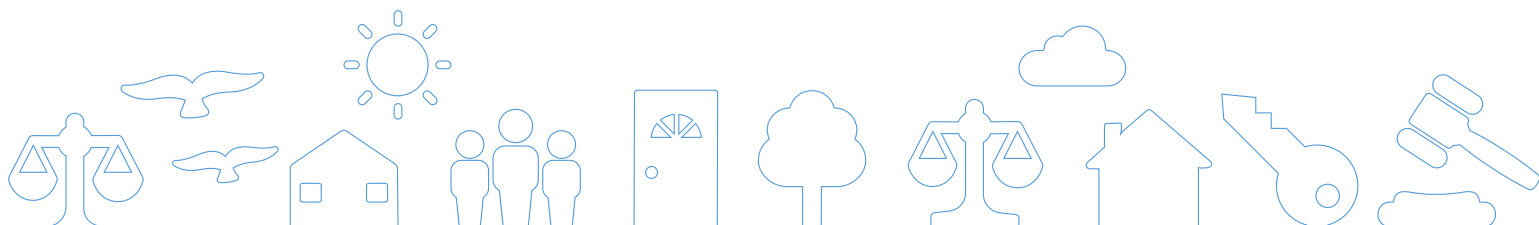
MLRC would like to acknowledge and thank our funders for their generous support in 2022. MLRC’s funders are a combination of corporate, philanthropic organisations and individuals.

In particular, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Sisters of Mercy who have substantially supported our legal service from inception, and to our other major donors in 2022, Religious of Christian Education, Archdiocese of Dublin, Pobal (through the Scheme to Support National Organisations), Mason Hayes & Curran and A&L Goodbody.

We are extremely grateful to every organisation and individual who supported our work in 2022, whether through financial or in-kind donations, pro bono services or volunteering.

Our main funders in 2022 include:

- The Sisters of Mercy
- Religious of Christian Education
- Archdiocese of Dublin
- Pobal - SSNO
- Mason Hayes & Curran
- A&L Goodbody
- IHREC
- Mental Health Ireland
- Our Lady of Charity (OLC) Ireland Trust Fund (administered by The Community Foundation for Ireland)
- Christian Brothers – Edmund Rice Fund
- The Cork Street Fund

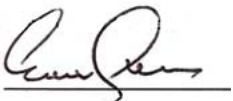


Appendix: Finance Report

Fixed Assets	1st January to 31st December 2022	1st January to 31st December 2021
Intangible Assets	0	0
Tangible Assets	2,171	5,375
	2,171	5,375
Current Assets		
Debtors	7,704	6,004
Cash at bank and in hand	442,589	453,425
	450,293	459,429
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	- 35,221	- 35,427
Net Current Assets	415,072	424,002
Total Assets less Current Liabilities	417,243	429,377
Funds		
Restricted Trust Funds	0	0
General Fund (Unrestricted)	417,243	429,377
Total Funds	417,243	429,377
Approved by the Board on	18th July 2023	21st June 2022

*The 2022 & 2021 financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 2014, FRS 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland" and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102).

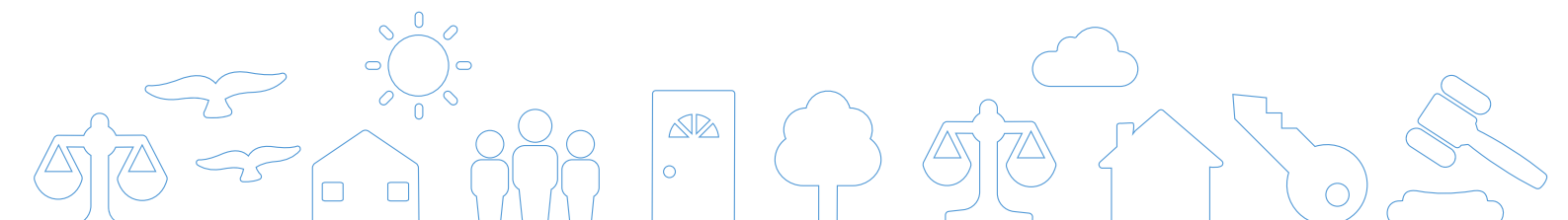
Signed on the Board's behalf by:



Edward Gleeson, Director and Chairperson



Liam Twohig, Director



12. Acknowledgements

The value of our service far exceeds the cost as a result of the large number of in-kind donations and pro bono support that we receive. MLRC would like to acknowledge and thank all those who provide services to us.

Sophia Housing

We are particularly grateful to Sophia Housing, who support our service in a number of ways, including provision of free conference and reception facilities and assisting with maintenance.

Barristers & Pro Bono support

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the following barristers who provided us with assistance such as pro bono opinions, drafting, and advocacy in tribunals in Residential Tenancies Board, Circuit Court Applications, High Court Appeals and High Court Judicial Reviews:

- Michael Lynn S.C.
- Sunniva McDonagh S.C.
- Cormac O'Dúlacháin SC
- Derek Shortall SC
- Nuala Egan SC
- Helen Callanan SC
- Cillian Bracken BL
- Deirdre Moore BL
- Alan DP Brady BL
- Eoin Coffey BL
- Marie Flynn BL
- David Leonard BL
- Lewis Mooney BL
- Nóra Ní Loinsigh BL
- James Rooney BL
- Gavin Rothwell BL

Auditor

Crowleys DFK

Volunteers

Volunteer Administrator: Sr. Kathleen Byrne

2022 Interns and work experience:

- Kim Rolston (NUIG)
- Hunter Tracey (Boston College)
- Ciara O'Reilly (TCD)
- Emmanuel Ntemuse (TCD)
- Rachel Ardiffe (TCD)
- Hannah Grouse (Arthur Cox)
- Bronagh Kennedy (Arthur Cox)
- Rosanna McAleese (Arthur Cox)
- Kate Heffernan (Arthur Cox)

Annual Report Designer:

whitespacedesign.ie

General Acknowledgements

Others:

- Sophia Housing
- John Gaynor & Co Solicitors
- Staff of Liberties Citizens Information Centre
- Staff of Focus Ireland
- Staff of Crosscare
- Staff of Exchange House Ireland National Traveller
- Staff of A&L Goodbody Pro Bono Clinic
- Arthur Cox research volunteers
- The Carmelite Centre
- The PILA team



Providing free legal advice and representation
to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

25 Cork Street, Dublin 8, D08 YD91, Ireland

T: 01 453 7459

F: 01 453 7455

Email: info@mercylaw.ie

Website: www.mercylaw.ie

Facebook: [@MercyLawResourceCentre](https://www.facebook.com/MercyLawResourceCentre)

Twitter: [@MLRCLaw](https://twitter.com/MLRCLaw)

LinkedIn: [@mercy-law-resource-centre/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mercy-law-resource-centre/)



Mercy Law
Resource Centre

