



LawWorks Clinics Network Report

Analysis of clinic activity between
January 2022 – December 2022

June 2023

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Introduction

For over 20 years, LawWorks has championed access to justice through its support of free legal advice clinics across England and Wales. This report covers the calendar year 2022, a year where clients and volunteers have been affected by the cost of living crisis, following the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. Clinics have once again shown great resilience and this report highlights how clinics have responded to the continued challenges they have faced.

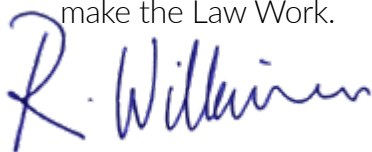
Pro bono efforts do not only enhance the quality and availability of legal advice but also foster a sense of social responsibility within the legal profession, empowering individuals to participate in and support the justice system. Ultimately, pro bono services serve as a vital tool for promoting equal access to justice and upholding the fundamental principle that no one should be deprived of their rights due to financial limitations.

A recently published report by LexisNexis¹ highlights the millions of people throughout the UK who live in legal aid deserts with limited or no access to legal aid providers. One of the biggest challenges facing the legal aid system is money. As I pointed out when interviewed for the report: If you want a robust system that works for everyone geographically, it costs money. In the same way, we have funded an expensive health care system because we think it's an important part of our society, so too should we be investing in our legal aid system. Although not a replacement for a properly funded legal aid system, pro bono work is another way to provide additional ad-hoc support and LawWorks has seen a growing awareness in the legal community of the impact pro bono work can have².

Clinics across the Network offer a lifeline to vulnerable populations, including low-income individuals, marginalised communities, and underserved groups. Despite the many challenges they face, which include lack of capacity, lack of funding and increased complexity of issues, clinics handled nearly 69,000 enquiries in 2022 and helped over 51,000 people.

Some of the key findings in this year's report include an increase in number of enquiries and number of people helped, a significant perceived increase in demand of 64% and more clinics have offered representation compared to the year prior.

The work of the clinics and the LawWorks Network, remains a vital part of our legal support eco-system, and we are delighted to have collaborated with so many advice agencies, law schools, law firms and individual solicitors, to support the work that is captured within this report. Thank you to everyone who has provided data and insight to this work, and thank you to all the pro bono solicitors who give of their time to help improve the lives of others. Together we are helping to make the Law Work.



Rebecca Wilkinson
Chief Executive

1 The LexisNexis Legal Aid Deserts report, <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/research-and-reports/legal-aid-deserts-report.html>

2 Ibid

Methodology

Each year in January, LawWorks collects data from its growing network of clinics to reflect the breath of pro bono activity conducted across England and Wales. Both quantitative and qualitative data is gathered through a survey, covering the previous twelve month period between January and December.

The survey focuses on key aspects of each clinic's pro bono activities, including enquiries received, in which areas of law advice was provided, volunteer numbers, and the diversity of clients accessing the clinic. It has been especially challenging for some clinics to gather equality and diversity data in addition to the information on enquiries and areas of law. This has various reasons; some clinics are unable to collect the data due to lack of capacity or low return rates.

Although clinics have their own ways of collecting this data throughout the year, LawWorks provides access to tools and resources to support them in monitoring and recording this information.

Whilst not all clinics are able to provide all of the requested data, reporting levels have increased in recent years, with a return rate of 80% this year. Following the Covid-19 pandemic clinics had to grapple with closures and shifting their services to be accessible remotely. Meanwhile, another crisis has hit the country so this report will address the effects of the cost of living crisis on clinics and their clients.

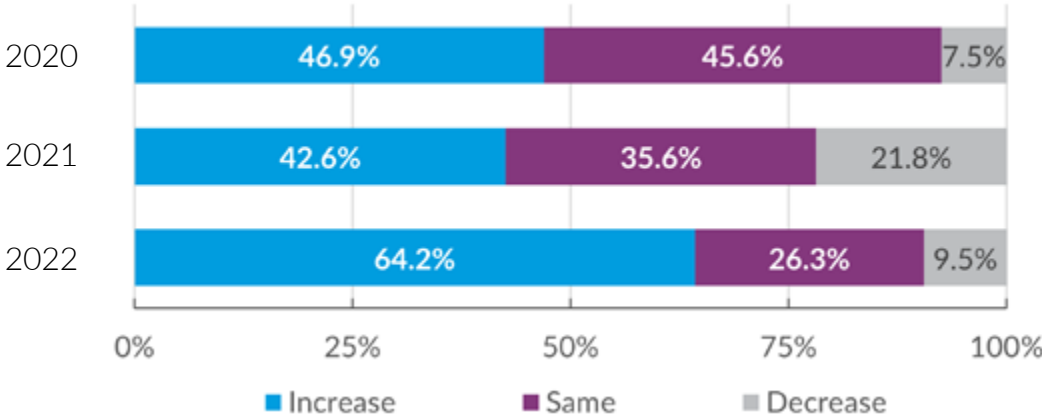
Despite the many challenges, clinics have continued to collect and provide data crucial in reflecting the work done to support clients across England and Wales. We recognise that this is a task that requires significant time and effort from everyone involved, and we are committed to ensuring that we only collect essential data.

A responsive network

For the last 22 years, LawWorks has supported a growing network of independent pro bono clinics stretching across the English regions and Wales (and some beyond). In 2022, the LawWorks Clinics Network was 311 clinics strong.

Pro bono services have been inundated since the scope of legal aid was restricted in 2013 by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act. As reflected in Figure 1 below, year on year clinics in our Network indicate an increase in demand for their services, with an increase of 64% in 2022 compared to 42% in 2021. In an already underfunded and understaffed legal aid system, the need for legal assistance continues to rise and individuals residing outside of major cities or in rural areas are facing increasing challenges in obtaining access to legal support.

Figure 1: Increase in demand for advice

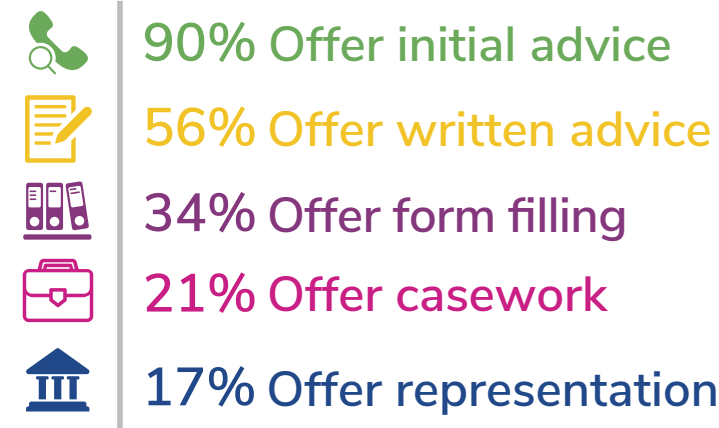


The relationship between pro bono and legal aid can seem conflicting at times with the expectation that pro bono will fill the ever widening gaps in legal aid provision. However, we know that pro bono does not serve as a substitute for legal aid. Pro bono clinics cannot and should not shoulder the responsibility of addressing the widening gaps in legal aid. Nevertheless, as many clinics invested in technology during the Covid-19 pandemic, clinics have been able to expand their presence beyond their locality, often prioritising areas with significant unmet legal need. The adoption of hybrid advice models allow people to digitally connect to an advice session remotely or attend in-person. This flexibility helps people in remote areas without a physical clinic nearby, people with disabilities, and people who are digitally excluded to access much needed advice.

Whilst the majority of clinics operate the traditional model of offering initial advice, an increasing number of services are also supporting clients with form filling and representation. The initial advice stage offers an opportunity to determine if clients are eligible for legal aid, and frequently, clinics serve as a gateway for accessing local legal aid or other forms of funded support where relevant and appropriate.

The figure below sets out what services are offered by clinics.

Figure 2: Types of clinic service



These figures do not add up to 100% as some clinics offer more than one service.

Figure 3: Map of clinics on the LawWorks Clinics Network in England and Wales



A committed network

Regardless of the makeup of a clinic, volunteers truly are at the core of every service. Clinics are supported by a wide variety of committed volunteers which include students, trainees, paralegals, solicitors, barristers and administrators. By leveraging their expertise and skills, volunteers across the network extend a helping hand to assist individuals navigate complex legal processes, advocate for their rights, and address pressing legal issues. LawWorks is committed to continue facilitating pro bono volunteering and support the clinics' dedicated volunteers by responding to their needs through training and resources.

In 2022, over 11,400 volunteers supported clinics in the network across England and Wales. With most clinics up and running again following the pandemic, there has been an increase in volunteers compared to previous years – over 9,700 in 2021 and just over 9,000 in 2020. This year, only a couple of clinics specifically indicated a loss of volunteers in the survey, compared to over 30 clinics highlighting this in 2021.

Figure 4: Number of volunteers



As over 50% of clinics on the network are attached to universities, this is also reflected in the number of volunteers by setting (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Number of volunteers by region and setting

	Court based	Law Centre	Law Firm	Law School	Local Citizens Advice	Other	Other non-profit	Total
East			3	438	90		175	706
East Midlands			42	392		13		447
Greater London	174	624	277	2,439	327	71	772	4,684
North East		1		662				663
North West			3	1,140			73	1,216
South East				201			59	260
South West		70		628				698
Wales		45		203			47	295
West Midlands			2	399		71	11	483
Yorkshire			320	1,679			1	2,000
Total	174	740	647	8,181		155	1,138	11,452

Figure 6: Number of clinics by region and setting

	Court based	Law Centre	Law Firm	Law School	Local Citizens Advice	Other	Other non-profit	Total
East			2	15	5	1	4	27
East Midlands			2	9		2		13
Greater London	1	25	6	29	6	3	40	110
North East		2		8			1	11
North West		1	1	21			2	25
South East				20			3	23
South West		1		11	1	1	3	17
Wales	1	1	2	5			16	25
West Midlands	1		1	17		1	4	24
Yorkshire			1	13			2	16
Outside E&W				4				4
Total	3	30	15	152	12	8	75	295

Clinics in focus: enquiries and advice

In 2022, clinics across the Network received nearly 69,000 enquiries and were able to help over 51,000 clients. Whilst we write this report each year to show the critical work of pro bono clinics, it is also to celebrate the far-reaching impact they have on access to justice in England and Wales.

Figures 7: Enquiries and how they are dealt with



Although not every enquiry leads to the provision of legal advice, clinics have different processes and policies in place to ensure clients are supported to the greatest extent possible. Where clinics are unable to advise clients, they will instead offer information, guidance, or refer the client where appropriate. Different factors affect a clinic's capacity to advise on matters, such as volunteer availability, expertise, holiday period closures, funding requirements, case complexity and current workload. Clinics have also reported instances where individuals fail to follow up after their initial contact.

It is important to note that these statistics do not provide an entirely complete picture, there are variations and outliers in the datasets that can impact the overall numbers. For example, different clinics use different intake forms that record varying client information, and subsequently coding methods and recording systems.

Number of enquiries

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of enquiries to clinics rose year on year. In 2020, we saw a significant dip in numbers, during which clinics received nearly 50,000 enquiries, this rose the following year in 2021 with 64,000 enquiries. For this reporting year (2022), the total number of enquiries – 68,883 – increased once more but has not quite returned to the 2019 level of over 77,000 enquiries.

Figure 8: Enquiries and how they are dealt with by clinic setting

	Enquiries	Provided advice	Given information or referred
Court-based	330	330	0
Law Centre	8,726	6,576	1,520
Law firm	1,529	995	417
Law school /college	24,844	7,297	9,485
Local Citizens Advice	7,761	4,534	3,213
Non-Profit (Other)	25,483	11,590	4,912
Other	210	142	50
Total	68,883	31,464	19,597

Figure 9: Enquiries and total number of people helped by region

	Enquiries	Provided advice	Given information or referred
National	11,037	5,125	3,520
East	10,519	3,798	402
East Midlands	2,591	572	1,353
Greater London	27,251	14,972	8,412
North East	1,498	243	209
North West	4,651	1,340	2,092
South East	1,809	873	723
South West	2,460	888	1,241
West Midlands	2,974	1,771	725
Yorkshire & Humber	2,692	1,130	782
Wales	1,401	752	138
Total	68,883	31,464	19,597

Number of people helped

Across the Network, clinics were able to provide advice, information or signpost 51,061 help seekers. Almost two-thirds of clinics (64%) reported an increase in demand for legal advice, a sharp increase from the previous couple of years, as shown in Figure 1 (page 5).

Clinics also reported that they were unable to help 17,729 individuals. There are different reasons as to why clinics are not able to advise everyone who sought advice – this includes geographical limitations, lack of resources or capacity, legal scope, or due to a loss of contact and no-shows. Below are some of the explanations provided by clinics in this year's survey.

“We cannot consistently meet that demand largely due to capacity and in spite of increasing the number of volunteers supporting our Legal Advice Centre.”

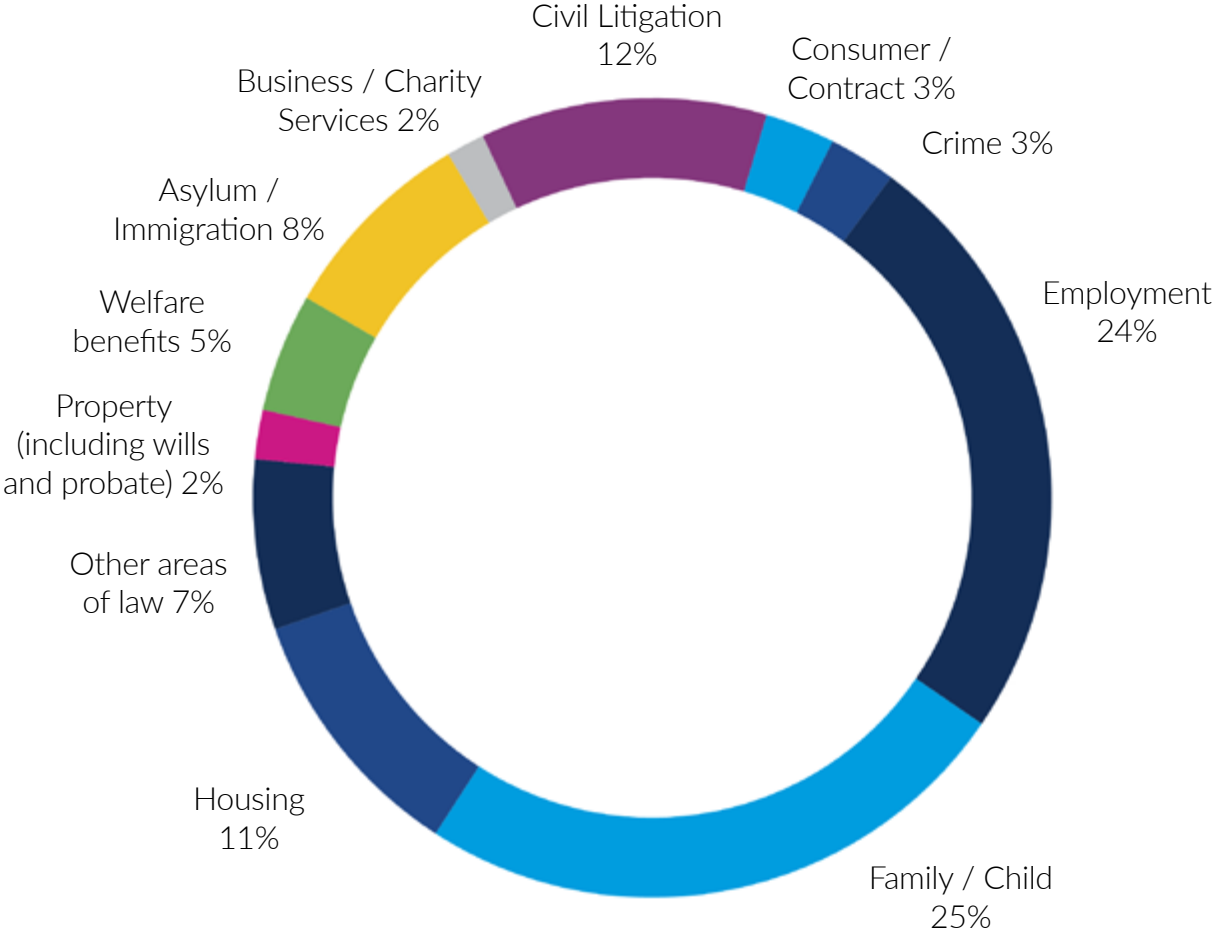
“Just demand - we are currently full with appointments until October - currently March.”

“Our biggest challenge is one of capacity and meeting the demand for our services. The demand for our service far outweighs the capacity of our staff to undertake the work, and as we receive an ever-increasing number of enquiries, managing this in itself is almost a full-time role. Finding funding for more staff is therefore a related challenge.”

Areas of law

The legal issues that prompt individuals to seek assistance from pro bono clinics can vary greatly, but are primarily focused on social welfare and family law matters. Each clinic determines the specific areas of law in which they will provide advice, driven by local need, internal priorities, and the expertise of supervisors and/or volunteers. Traditionally, clinics are categorised as 'generalist' covering a broad range of legal issues or 'specialist' providing more in depth advice on one or more areas of law. Due to the wide variety of clinics and their expertise, most areas of law are covered by services across the Network.

Figure 10: Enquiries by categories of law



The most commonly advised area of law is family (25%), closely followed by employment (24%), together totalling almost half of the total cases advised on. Third comes civil litigation (12%), closely followed by housing (11%). This ranking has stayed mostly consistent in the last four years.

Figure 11: Most commonly advised area of law

Most commonly advised on area



Family Law

Clients in focus: demographics and trends

Client demographics

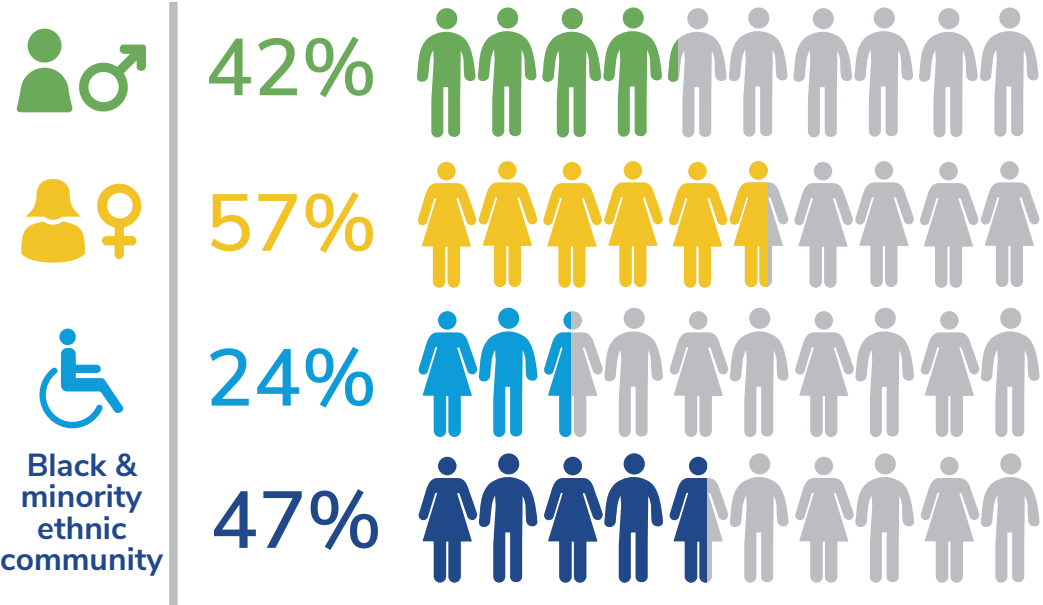
Each year, LawWorks asks clinics to collect anonymised data on the clients they assist to help understand clinic beneficiaries. This demographic information plays a vital role in assessing the extent to which communities with protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) can access pro bono legal advice. However, feedback from clinics on the qualitative questions shows that clinics find it challenging to collect client data. Whilst 72% of clinics provided us with some data on client demographics, only 38% of clinics were able to complete all of the categories.

“It has been challenging to gather equal opportunities data, we have received virtually no forms back. We could potentially provide clients’ age data. However, this would be a manual process that we have no capacity to complete within the required timeframe.”

“Not all clients complete the E&D surveys.”

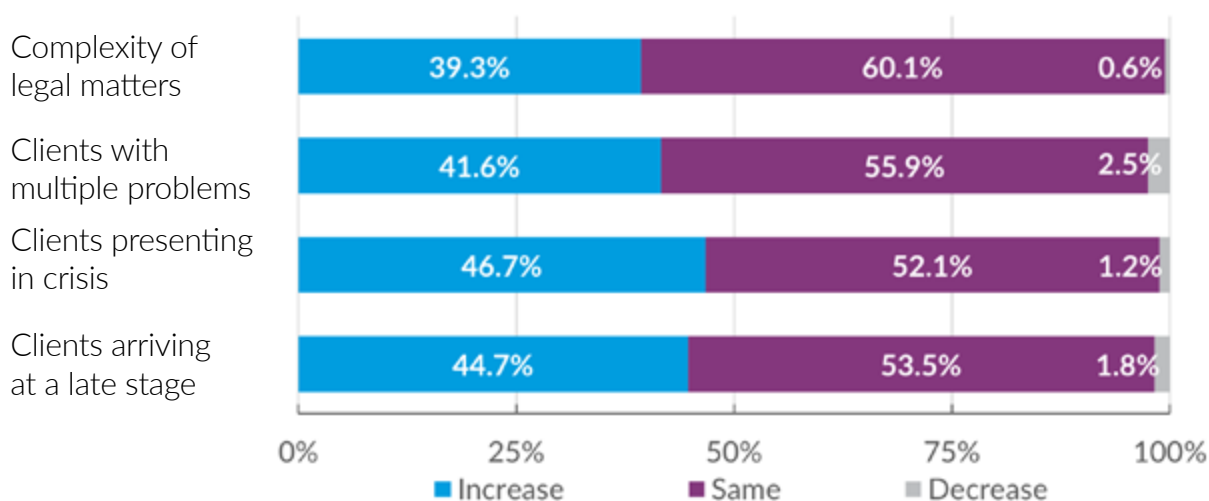
“We have huge gaps in collection of demographic data due to the lack of staff and tech infrastructure for this.”

Figure 12: Client demographics



Trends identified

Figure 13: Trends identified complexity of legal matters



In 2022 nearly 47% of clinics perceived an increase in the complexity of legal matters that were brought to them. Clinics have provided us with some further explanations around the challenges faced in relation to complexity of legal matters:

“Ensuring enough resources are available to provide a service that can react quickly to a growing number of complex client issues.”

“The demand for our support has increased, with more clients presenting with more complex issues that require multi-disciplinary resolution.”

“Clients presenting with more complex issues we cannot assist with.”

Whilst the number of volunteers across the network has grown, an increase in complexity of legal issues also means more clinics are in need of lawyers with a certain area of expertise. One of the clinics highlighted this particularly well as a challenge in the survey:

“Finding enough volunteers who can deal with the specialist areas of housing, employment and family law.”

Clients with multiple problems

42% of clinics identified an increase in clients approaching them with multiple legal issues, compared to the previous year.

“We have indicated that the number of clients with multiple problems or problem clusters has increased because we are seeing more clients with combined employment AND benefits/financial issues, because of the cost of living.”

Clients arriving at a late stage

Clients arriving at a later stage in their legal journey places additional pressures on pro bono clinics, which are often set up to deal with initial or one-off advice only. In 2022, 39% of services indicated that clients arrived at the clinic’s physical or virtual doorstep at a later stage.

Sunderland Student Law Clinic

A change our clinic has seen this year is just how urgently clients are needing advice, they seem to be coming to us as a last resort and then needing advice immediately. This has meant that we have had to turn away a lot of enquiries - probably around 50% of the enquiries we received we have signposted elsewhere due to lack capacity and expertise. This is something we need to consider for the next academic year and are in the process of changing some procedures in clinic to allow the students to take on cases at a quicker pace and expanding the expertise within the law clinic by employing more general practitioners so that we can take on more enquiries.

Hertfordshire Law Clinic

Hertfordshire Law Clinic opened in October 2019 and provides one-off advice on a range of legal areas. Our busiest clinic by far has always been family. Since March 2020 all our main clinic work is done online (using Zoom) which means if we want to see a document a client is referring to we need to get them to email it over to us in advance – so both the supervising lawyer plus the student advisors have the chance to consider the same. We have seen an increase in the number of clients who are in the midst of family court proceedings and want us to try and provide advice on the basis of just the most recent court order. The client has usually either had a solicitor acting for them, but they have run out of money, or they started the application in person and it then gets too complicated for them to deal with in person. Either way it is a real problem for us to try and get a real feel on what has happened in the proceedings and why, unless we review ALL papers which we simply don’t have the time and resources to do. We also have to be careful about whether we can even offer them an appointment, as after factoring in our timescales to get a letter of advice sent out to the client, they may miss court deadlines or not have enough time to then prepare for the next hearing date. Unfortunately, there is no simple solution to this issue – we (like many university law clinics) are not in a position to offer casework.

Clients presenting in crisis

It is not difficult to imagine that these trends, whether combined with one another or exacerbated by the recent Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis, can easily lead to clients presenting in crisis. This year, 38% of clinics noted an increase in clients presenting in crisis, compared to the year prior.

“We have definitely noticed an increase in the number of people presenting in distress, who cannot afford a solicitor, and who require advice desperately because they are worried that they cannot afford to pay e.g. unable to pay bills/rent/legal fees.”

Whilst the report indicates an increase in clients presenting in crisis, there are varying degrees of how legal issues affect individuals. Throughout 2022, clinics were seeing an increased number of clients with mental health struggles and suicide ideation.

Teesside Law Clinic

This academic year the enquiries received by Teesside University (TU) Law Clinic have indicated a large quantity of cases that have had an impact on client mental health and wellbeing. One of the main concerns is the client not being able to afford the financial cost of a solicitor, therefore, TU Law Clinic provides pro bono legal services to the Tees Valley community in an advice-only capacity. TU Law Clinic works in partnership with several charities and voluntary organisations in the Tees Valley. The partnerships allow us to signpost our clients to help them get the support they need specifically with the client’s mental health and wellbeing whilst going through legal proceedings. In the last 12 months, the clinic has assisted around 150 clients on a pro bono basis and a further 100 on a signposting or referral basis.

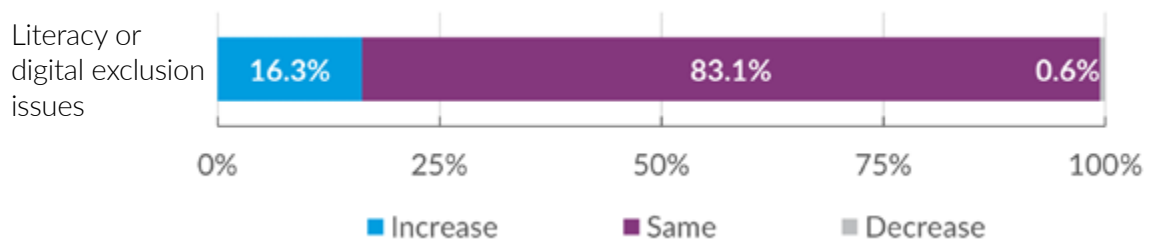
Literacy or digital exclusion

Clinics reported a notable spike of 46% in literacy or digital exclusion during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, compared to 12% in 2019. Looking at the figure for 2022, clinics reported an increase of 16%. Whilst it may seem that the percentage is dropping back to pre-pandemic levels, it is important to note that a perceived increase in this case is always compared to the year before. Whilst there are likely various factors playing into this, it is clear that clinics able to provide hybrid services are able to again reach those that are digitally excluded. Although this was a very highly commented on trend for the 2020 report, there are still some clinics that reflected on this in particular during the 2022 data collection period:

“We’ve had multiple clients who aren’t literate, and some with no access to technology.”

“Contact with service users is via telephone as many do not have access to computers etc to take part in video calls.”

Figure 14: Literacy or digital exclusion



Responding to the cost of living crisis

Rocketing energy bills, rising rents and an increase in food prices have been the major drivers behind the UK's rising living costs, disproportionately affecting households on low incomes. This means that fewer and fewer people are able to afford private legal support and instead must rely on pro bono or legal aid services for help. Unfortunately, many of these individuals are turned away as more legal aid providers shut down and advice services are overwhelmed by demand.

In addition to witnessing the impact of the cost of living crisis on client queries, some clinics are themselves grappling with the effects of increased prices, which pose a risk to their ability to operate in-person services. When asked about the challenges faced in 2022, one clinic highlighted the increase in everyday running costs of the clinic, such as heating and electricity.

Cost of Living Crisis Clinic

Westway Trust launched their twice weekly Cost-of-Living Crisis Clinic, funded by an international city law firm, in March 2022; initially, in North Kensington, this was followed quickly by an outreach site in South Islington, at St Luke's Community Centre, EC1.

Along with helping clients maximise their income, by assisting them with benefit checks and better-off calculations, the clinic also helps clients look for cheaper energy, water and broadband tariffs; apply for crisis grants and discretionary payments and; generally, help them become more financially capable. The clinic also represents clients at disability appeal tribunals, at which a panel of two/three, including a judge and a doctor, determine the outcome of appellants' disability benefit awards.

The clinic fills in a lot of forms, to date they have encountered over 17 different types of benefit forms, the longest being the form that pensioners complete to claim attendance allowance, if they are struggling to live independently. This particular form is 30 pages long with many of the pages having supplementary questions, advisers are fortunate to finish one of these forms in less than two hours.

Calls to the DWP, to help sort out a clients' disability benefit claims take about

40 minutes. More than 40% of clients are illiterate/digitally illiterate and many don't have the social capital to find help with challenging decisions, looking for cheaper tariffs, or applying for grants and benefits. This is why it was necessary to start a cost-of-living crisis clinic, delivered by corporate, law student and local volunteers, who pride themselves on making deep value relationship with our clients who, over time, feel confident that they can return to us for help with different matters.

The clinic has been a huge success and an enjoyable and rewarding project for the volunteers who contributed. The clinic would like to acknowledge and thank Yasmin Waljee, International Pro Bono Partner at Hogan Lovells, who came up with the concept of starting the cost-of-living crisis clinic.

NLS Legal: Welfare benefits and housing clinic

Our firm relies on Nottingham Law School student volunteers, involving them in all aspects of client work from shadowing through to representing clients in courts and tribunals. Our students gain an insight into access to justice issues and the realities faced by many in our community, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis being one such example, and one that many of our students can relate to.

Most of the queries arising from the cost-of living crisis for the welfare benefits and housing service areas seem to have two main causes: the first are those who suddenly find themselves with little to no disposable income after a major life change, such as loss of a job, a relationship breakdown etc. The second are those who had no disposable income to begin with and who cannot make their income stretch any further. What unites both causes is that there is no real safety net afforded by our welfare benefits system any more. It does not seem to provide sufficient money to meet even the basic and most essential outgoings.

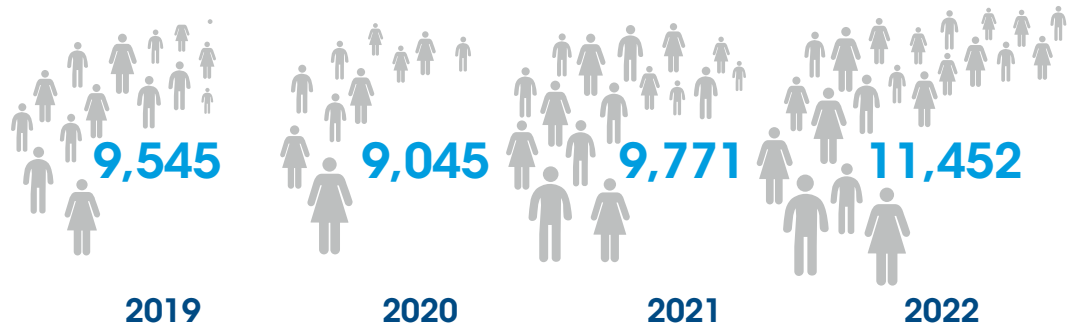
Not only have we seen an increase in the volume and complexity of queries that we are dealing with as a pro bono service, but we are also seeing more enquirers requiring urgent advice. This is often because legal issues are put to one side as people prioritise managing daily stressors, such as affording food, heating and dealing with stress and health pressures. Clients are telling us that they cannot afford the travel costs of attending appointments and that they cannot afford food or the utility costs to meet their basic needs. Debt is a spiralling issue.

There has been an increase in the last 6-12 months of referrals from other agencies who have taken cases as far as they can, but they then need to refer cases to other agencies when things maybe stretch outside their area of expertise. It shows how many legal issues develop, then compound, squeezed by having no/a low income and very limited access to advice on how to enforce your rights.

With regards to how NLS Legal have had to pivot, the main way is that we have employed more paralegals to increase our capacity, but we are also dealing with more long-term, complex cases too.

Reflecting on the last four years

Number of Volunteers in clinics



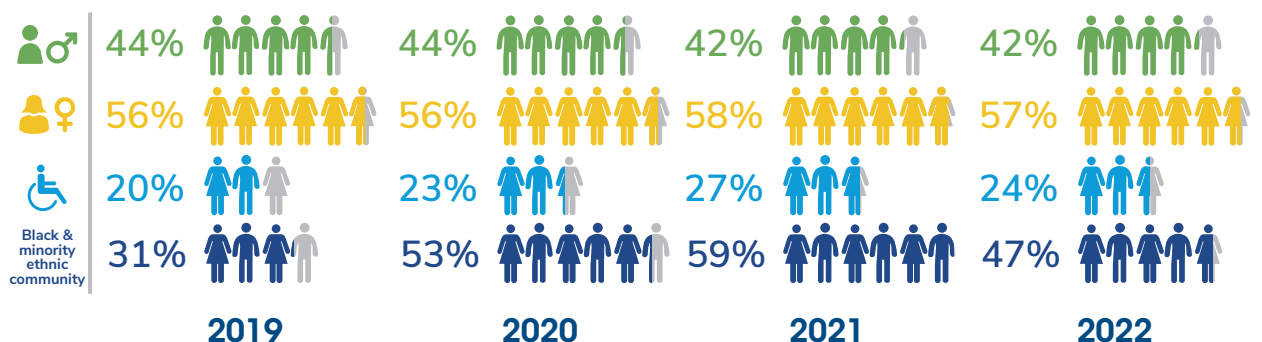
Clinic client enquiries

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total number of enquiries	77,550	49,651	64,194	68,883
Number of people helped	70,261	43,018	48,477	51,061
Number of people receiving legal advice	37,551	27,648	32,881	31,464
Number of people given information or referred to other services	32,710	15,370	15,596	19,597

Types of clinic service

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Offer initial advice	90%	90%	89%	90%
Offer written advice	50%	55%	52%	56%
Offer form filling	30%	33%	30%	34%
Offer casework	21%	21%	18%	21%
Offer representation	15%	16%	13%	17%

Clinic client demographics



Conclusions

With the Covid-19 pandemic in the recent past and a cost of living crisis hitting hard, clinics continue to show their resiliency and agility in the face of rising demand for services and increasingly complex legal issues. This is not to say that it is easy for clinics to pivot and adapt each time crisis hits – as reflected throughout this report, services are limited by capacity, expertise, resources and funding.

Comparing some of the headline figures and trends across the last four years illustrated on the previous page, we see that: more clients are being signposted, clinics are increasingly providing representation, and clients with disabilities make up a larger percentage of clients helped.

LawWorks is committed to continue to provide strategic and practical support to clinics in the Clinics Network to ensure pro bono services can focus on meeting an ever-growing demand for legal advice. We will also continue to work with frontline organisations, law schools and lawyers to develop new clinics that can help meet legal need.

Lastly, we want to wholeheartedly thank all clinics (coordinators, administrators and volunteers) for continuing to provide access to justice to those in need and for continuing to share their data and trends identified with us.



LawWorks is a charity working in England and Wales to connect volunteer lawyers with people in need of legal advice, who are not eligible for legal aid and cannot afford to pay and with the not-for-profit organisations that support them.



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