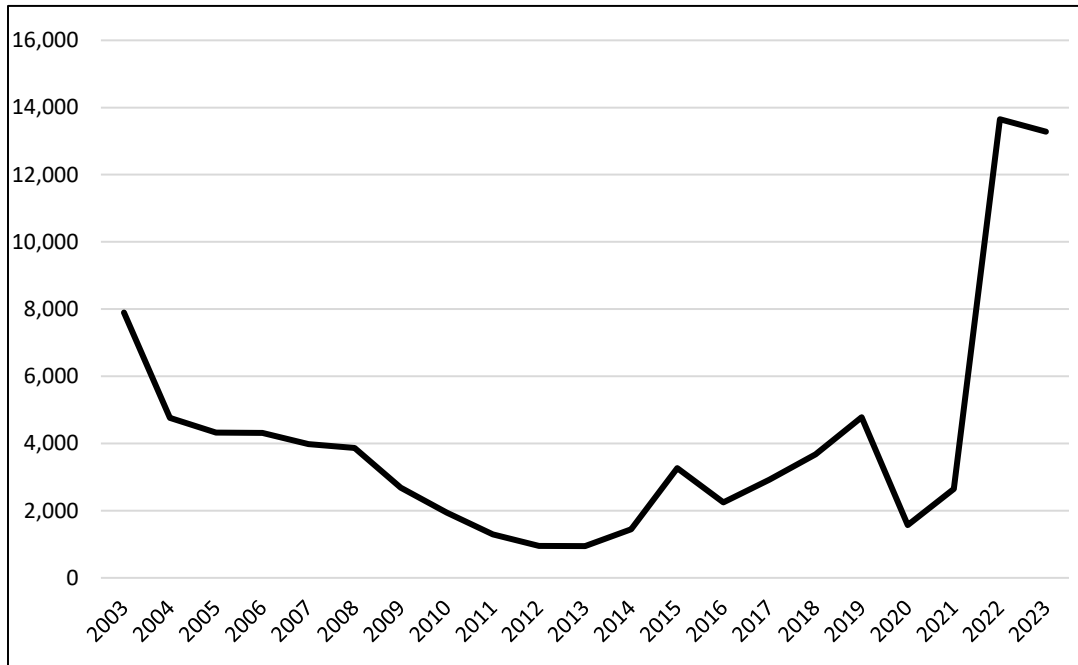


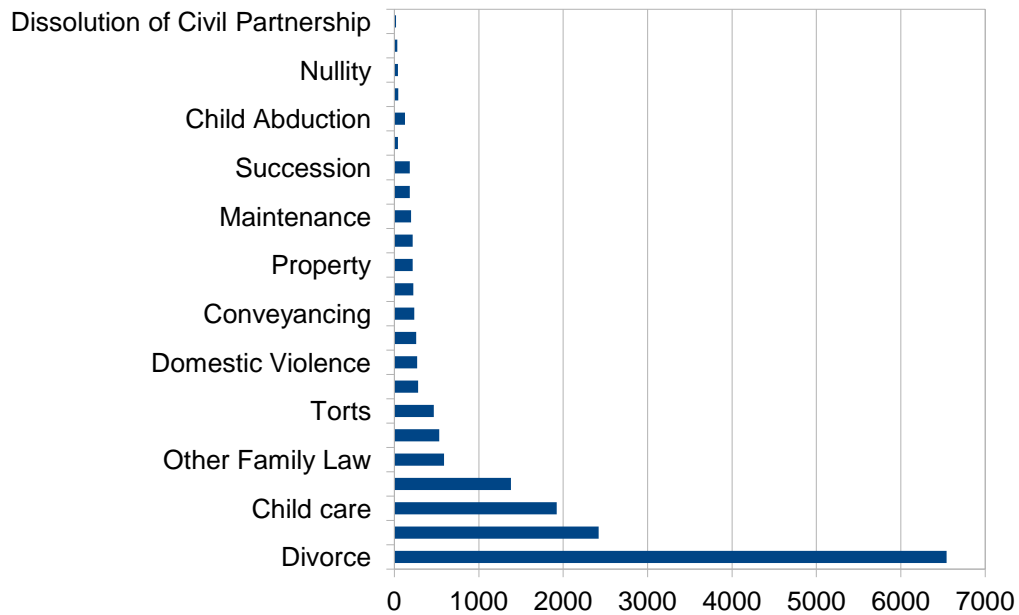
## Governance and Participation

Chart 6.1: Applications for International Protection, 2003 to 2023



Source: International Protection Office, Monthly Statistical Report, various years.

Chart 6.2: Legal Aid Board - Cases by subject matter 2022



Source: Legal Aid Board (2023), Annual Report 2022, Dublin

## Governance and Participation

### *Asylum Seekers*

Asylum seekers are defined as those who come to Ireland seeking permission to live in Ireland because there are substantial grounds for believing that they would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to their country of origin. In contrast to programme refugees, asylum seekers must have their immigration status defined when they arrive. Chart 6.1 shows the number of applications for International Protection made to Ireland between 2003 and 2023.

Between January and December 2023, Ireland's International Protection Office received 13,277 applications for International Protection.<sup>1</sup> This marked a significant increase compared to previous year, with the number of asylum seekers in 2023 being approximately nine times that of 2020, reflecting worldwide geopolitical events. As 2024 sees half of global adults heading to the polls across 70 countries, there is concern that this may result in a clamp down of human rights, alongside escalating incidents of climate chaos and conflict, leading to an increase in many more individuals seeking safety and security in Ireland.

The 'Day Report'<sup>2</sup> recommends a time limited system that will deliver decisions faster and makes proposals to bring about an end to the current system of accommodation provision. The Report recommends that the new system be fully in place by 2023, requiring a whole of Government response. This process appears to have completely stalled and the 'White paper'<sup>3</sup> will need to be revisited.

### *Legal Supports and Access to Justice*

Access to justice is a basic human right, however in order to achieve equality of access, there must be a balance of power on both sides. In a legal context, the balance of power almost always rests with those who can afford counsel. Redressing this balance requires the availability of free and low-cost legal services to those who need advice but who cannot afford the costs associated with it.

The Legal Aid Board (LAB) provides advice and representation on criminal and civil matters for those on low income. In 2022, there were 20,705 applications for legal aid made, of which 9,339 related to general family law, 2,540 were in relation to separation/divorce/nullity, 6,889 were about International Protection/Human Trafficking (an increase of 368 per cent on 2021), 719 were about the possible State care of children and 1,218 referred to all other civil matters (Chart 6.2). As of the 31st December 2022, the average waiting time for legal services with a solicitor at a law centre was 14.5 weeks. As highlighted by the numbers above, the 'White Paper' initiated proposals brought by the LAB to the Department of Justice by 2022 on an estimated additional allocation of €8.8 million to support 3,500 applicants for international protection per year was wholly inadequate.

### **Policy Priorities**

- Adequately fund Legal Aid Board.
- Deliver on the Day Report.
- Invest in skills transfer programmes and encourage participation of immigrants in all aspects of economic and social life in Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/statistics>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/93440/05b40003-242c-4549-88a5-ba8fcdc20f60.pdf#page=null>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/124757/ef0c3059-b117-4bfa-a2df-8213bb6a63db.pdf#page=null>