

Community Sponsorship Free Legal Advice Panel

Context

Community Sponsorship is a unique opportunity for communities to welcome refugee families arriving in Ireland and help them rebuild their lives. It is a positive and tangible way to respond to the refugee crisis, mobilising the skills, resources and compassion of individuals and groups to change the life of a refugee family.

Challenge

Due to the complexity and variety of needs, as well as the number of supports that CSGs are expected to provide to the family, CSGs and/or the family may encounter issues that require legal advice and guidance at any point throughout the 18-month sponsorship period.

Solution

Establish a dedicated panel of expert legal firms available to offer pro bono legal advice to families or groups on a referral basis as the need arises.

What is the purpose of the legal panel?

The Legal Panel provides a highly valuable resource and essential safeguard for Ireland's community sponsorship programme. Throughout the course of the 18-month sponsorship period CSGs and/or the family may encounter issues that would require legal advice and guidance. The Community Sponsorship Legal Panel is composed of 4 leading Irish legal firms who are available to offer pro bono legal advice on a referral basis as needs arise.

The Community Sponsorship Legal Panel is coordinated in partnership with the Public Interest Law Alliance (PILA) who facilitate the placing of legal requests. PILA are not responsible for the quality or delivery of the legal advice or representation offer by the respective firms. Each firm will assume a solicitor/client relationship with the CSG or family. The legal firms that comprise the panel include:

- **Mason, Hayes and Curran**
- **Arthur Cox**
- **A&L Goodbody**
- **Matheson**

What are the legal needs that can be addressed by the panel?

The Legal Panel can provide advice for issues that may arise as CSGs plan for the arrival or after the arrival of the sponsored family or individual. Examples of advice include areas such as: housing rights, social welfare, family law, immigration, and employment rights. Please note however that these examples are non-exhaustive as the legal needs that arise are likely to be varied and dependent on the specific circumstances of the CSG and/or resettled family.

How can a referral/request for advice be submitted to the panel by CSGs?

CSGs should complete the Referral Form available on The Open Community website and submit it via email to: info@theopencommunity.ie. The Referral Form asks CSGs to outline the legal need and detail the activities or efforts that have been undertaken already to address the identified issue. The Referral Form will be provided to The Public Interest Law Alliance (PILA) who will assess each request and, where a legitimate legal need is found, will identify the most appropriate legal firm based on their areas of expertise to provide legal advice to the CSG.

How can a referral/request for advice be submitted to the panel by families?

A family can complete and submit the Referral Form directly to The Open Community. The Referral Form will be provided to PILA who will assess the request and identify the most appropriate legal firm to provide legal advice to the family or CSGs. While every effort will be made to place each referral this may not always be possible and The Open Community will not be responsible for sourcing alternative legal assistance.

How is information shared?

By submitting a referral you authorise The Open Community to share information, for the purposes of facilitating a legal referral, including personal information and all other information provided in the Legal Panel Referral Form, to the Public Interest Law Alliance (PILA); and, at the discretion of PILA, to a legal firm, who is a member of the Community Sponsorship Legal Panel, for the purposes of an onward legal referral.

What happens if the legal issue is not resolved at the end of the sponsorship period?

If a legal issue is ongoing at the end of the 18-month sponsorship period, the support will continue until the issue is legally resolved but no new issues can be referred to the Legal Panel after this period.