
CENTRE *for* JUSTICE *and* LAW REFORM

AT THE LAW SOCIETY OF IRELAND

CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AND LAW REFORM

First Programme of Research
2025 – 2027





Centre for Justice and Law Reform

The Centre for Justice and Law Reform is a research centre established by the Law Society of Ireland in 2025.

The purpose of the Centre for Justice and Law reform is to improve the justice system and shape law reform to better serve the public interest.

The Centre's mission is to:



This work is guided by an Advisory Board of leading experts in their respective fields.

First Programme of Research

A multi-annual Programme of Research will provide the framework under which the Centre for Justice and Law Reform will carry out its work. This First Programme of Research, prepared under the guidance of the Advisory Board, will underpin the Centre's work in the initial three-year period. Further Programmes will be developed for future years of operation.

Research Themes

Under this First Programme of Research, the Centre for Justice and Law Reform's research will be guided by the following research themes:



Research Outputs

Each year, the Centre for Justice and Law Reform will publish up to four research papers and host a number of events. This First Programme of Research comprises 12 topics under the four research themes. In determining the projects for inclusion, the Centre for Justice and Law Reform's research team has been guided by the advice and feedback of the Advisory Board and also received input from the Committees of the Law Society.

While this Programme of Research will guide the Centre for Justice and Law Reform's work over the next three years, some flexibility within the Programme will be required so as to enable the Centre to take account of other organisations, including policy and legal developments and to adapt priorities as deemed necessary by the Advisory Board.

Some of the proposed projects will lend themselves to a number of publications (e.g., a consultation paper, followed by a research paper containing final recommendations), whereas others will be explored through the Centre for Justice and Law Reform hosting public debates or roundtable discussions. In addition, other events and engagement projects are planned, such as an annual Summer School and a commemorative lecture. Some of the proposed topics may be explored through the 2026 and 2027 summer schools, or through Research Fellowships.

The Centre for Justice and Law Reform will aim to work collaboratively with other organisations, including civil society groups, academic institutions, other research organisations, and government agencies, where appropriate.

The Centre for Justice and Law Reform will award at least one Fellowship annually to an experienced researcher or mid-career legal professional. The selected Fellow will undertake legal research aligned with the Centre's thematic priorities and will be required to produce a monograph based on their findings.



Projects Included in the First Programme of Research



Theme:
Access to Justice

Justice Indicators

A **Discussion Paper** setting out a number of justice indicators against which the effectiveness and efficiency of justice across a number of institutions within the State can be measured.

This publication will aggregate publicly available statistics and information (from multiple sources) related to different aspects of the justice system in Ireland. It will then compare this information against corresponding information from other jurisdictions to assess the effectiveness of the justice system in Ireland as against that of other jurisdictions.

The paper will both assess the information that is available and highlight where improvements can be made to data collection and reporting to facilitate meaningful analysis and inform policymaking.

It is planned that the Centre for Justice and Law Reform will revisit this project on an annual basis to evaluate the latest available information to ascertain whether justice is more efficient in certain parts of the justice system, whether new issues or causes of concern have emerged, and whether improvements have been made in the collection and reporting of information. Additional indicators may be developed over time.

Anticipated publication date: **Q1 of 2026**.

Advocacy in the Age of AI

In 2025, the Centre for Justice and Law Reform hosted the **Robert Purcell Commemorative Lecture** focused on the topic of advocacy in the age of AI and was delivered by Brendan Grehan SC.

Date: **Q3 of 2025**.





Theme: Democratic Norms

Defending Democracy: Legal Responses to Emerging Threats

The Centre for Justice and Law Reform's inaugural **Summer School** focused on the topic of *Defending Democracy: Legal Responses to Emerging Threats*. The Summer School explored this topic from a variety of perspectives through a combination of keynote addresses, lectures, panel discussions, and interviews. Some of the topics that were explored at the Summer School included electoral law and protecting democracy in the digital age, countering the rise of extremism, and public protests and civil disobedience in democratic societies.

Event dates: **26 and 27 June 2025**.

Accessibility of Criminal Offences Legislation

An **Issues Paper** explaining the difficulties that arise in fully deciphering what criminal legislation in Ireland actually provides and why accessibility and transparency are even more crucial in this context – due, for example, to the fact that ignorance of the law is not a defence. This project will set out specific examples in criminal legislation to illustrate the accessibility issues that arise.

Anticipated publication date: **Q3 of 2026**.

Maintaining Election Integrity

A **Discussion Paper** setting out the status quo and the legal framework in respect of election integrity.

This project will aim to contribute to informed discussion regarding the threats posed to election integrity in Ireland and will discuss potential safeguards and future developments in the area. It will focus on the evolving threat of mis- and disinformation and the use of generative AI on social media to influence elections. The project will review international examples of instances in which elections have been targeted and threatened by the use of technology. It will also provide a status quo analysis of European and domestic legislation that safeguard elections from disinformation. The project may aim to identify opportunities for Government, civil society, and other actors, to take further action to safeguard election integrity.

Anticipated publication date: **Q2 of 2026**.

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation

An **Issues Paper** that will highlight the phenomenon of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) being utilised to silence journalists and activists, including social, environmental, and climate change activists. A report published by Article 19 in 2022, on SLAPPs found that, in Ireland, the majority of SLAPPs are taken as actions in defamation and found further that 80% of all defamation actions taken in Ireland are brought against the media. Additionally, Ireland has been the subject of multiple media freedom alerts.

Anticipated publication date: **Q1 of 2027**.



Theme:
Economic, Social, and Social Rights

Approaches to Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

A **Discussion Paper** that explores, from a high-level, the varying approaches that other jurisdictions have taken to incorporating economic, social, and cultural rights into their respective legal systems in order to discern international best practice. The Discussion Paper may make recommendations as to the approach that the State could consider adopting.

Anticipated publication date: **Q4 of 2026**.

Assisted Dying

A **Roundtable Discussion and / or Issues Paper** that explores legal aspects relating to the topic of assisted dying. Such an event or publication would explore the various arguments in favour of and against legalising assisted dying, examining experiences in other jurisdictions and comparing international practices and legal frameworks. The purpose would be to contribute, in a wholly objective way, to the ongoing debate and provide a comprehensive analysis of the different legal approaches to the issue which would inform future policy development in the area.

Anticipated date: **Q4 of 2026**.

Right to Housing

Building on the research findings of the Discussion Paper on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights implementation methods, this project will focus on the right to housing by conducting in-depth research into the legal frameworks and experiences of other jurisdictions with a view to ascertaining whether a right to housing in principle has real-world impact in practice. The paper may also include discussion of whether constitutional reform is needed. Depending on the research findings, the paper may recommend appropriate legislative reform.

Anticipated publication date: **Q2 of 2027**.

Right to Health

Continuing this series of papers, a **Discussion Paper** exploring the right to health, focusing on the extent to which the right is legally recognised and practically implemented.

The project would consider the various sources of law in this area, including constitutional provisions, relevant case law, and international and EU human rights instruments; and critically assess how they shape access to healthcare, accountability mechanisms, and the protection of vulnerable sections of society (for example, people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, ethnic minorities, and international protection applicants).

The project will identify legal and policy gaps and will seek to identify some of the obstacles or challenges to addressing any such gaps (for example, the allocation of resources and separation of powers issues).

Anticipated publication date: **Q4 of 2027**.





Theme:
Evolving Legal Services

Legal Deserts

An **Issues Paper** that explains the emergence and pattern of legal deserts, explains the impact of emerging legal deserts both on the legal profession but also on wider society and endeavours to identify the root causes of the issue.

The term “legal desert” typically refers to a geographical area in which there are few to no options in respect of legal representation due to an absence of solicitors. The term was originally coined by the American Bar Association which defines every US county with fewer than one attorney per 1,000 inhabitants as a legal desert.

Data available to the Law Society of Ireland indicate that legal deserts may be developing in Ireland due to a number of factors. It is proposed that the Centre for Justice and Law Reform will undertake a project to carry out in-depth research into the causes and social impacts of legal deserts.

Anticipated publication date: **Q2 of 2026**.

Pre-nuptial Agreements

A **Discussion Paper** that examines the arguments in favour and against the enactment of legislation to provide for the recognition of pre-nuptial agreements in Irish law with reference to the law in other comparable jurisdictions.

Anticipated date: **Q3 of 2027**.



Research Output Timeline

2025

Q2

**Summer School:
Defending Democracy:
Legal Responses
to Emerging Threats**
(event)

Q3

**Advocacy
in the Age
of AI**
(event)

2026

Q1

Justice Indicators
(publication)

Q2

Summer School: TBC
(event)
Legal Deserts
(publication)
**Maintaining
Election Integrity**
(publication)

Q3

**Accessibility of Criminal
Offences Legislation**
(publication)

Q4

Assisted Dying
(event and / or
publication)
**Approaches to
Economic, Social,
and Cultural Rights**
(publication)

2027

Q1

**Strategic Lawsuits Against
Public Participation**
(publication)
Justice Indicators
(publication)

Q2

Right to Housing
(publication)
Summer School: TBC
(event)

Q3

**Prenuptial
Agreements**
(publication)

Q4

Right to Health
(publication)



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