

## DLA Piper New Zealand

### IMPACT

### FINALIST



### THE STORY

By donating hundreds of hours of legal services to reunite refugee families, DLA Piper New Zealand is removing a key barrier that prevents these new settlers to Aotearoa from being work-ready and able to use their skills to support the New Zealand economy.

DLA Piper is a global business law firm, with 120 people operating in New Zealand in offices in Auckland and Wellington, and is one of the top contributors of pro bono legal services locally. Since 2016, it has worked with the Refugee and Immigration Legal Advice Service (RILAS), assisting with Immigration New Zealand (INZ) Refugee Family Support Category applications, which allow former refugees to sponsor their families to come to Aotearoa.

‘Refugees who have come to New Zealand without a spouse or family member are often in a difficult position – far from home, and without support. Some have dependent children they are raising alone. The family reunification scheme exists to help these individuals have better support around them, whilst assisting their family members who come from difficult circumstances themselves,’ says DLA Piper Country Managing Partner, Laura Scampion.

Since the end of May 2023, 110 million people globally have been forced to flee their homes because of conflict, persecution, human rights violations, and the effects of climate change. The

hardships people endure through forced displacement include losing track of their relatives, assets and livelihoods, leaving them vulnerable and unable to plan their future.

In the past year, DLA Piper has donated 355 hours to family reunification, and is currently working on 11 different matters. Each case requires a minimum of two lawyers and, depending on the circumstances of the clients being represented, it can take several years and numerous hours of work for matters to be resolved.

Recently two cases were concluded, leading to the successful reunification of two families in Aotearoa.

One is a family with seven children who had been separated for six years after fleeing civil unrest. After being forced to escape their home country of Eritrea, the family was separated, with three of the children (the eldest only 14) fleeing to a compound in Ethiopia and the other family members fleeing to Sudan. One of the children is blind due to a mine explosion, so initially, Immigration New Zealand deemed him to have an unacceptable standard of health. DLA Piper was able to help the family meet the INZ requirements by providing a medical waiver, based on his independence, education and skills.

The second is a family from Ecuador who were required to leave the country to ensure their safety from cartel violence. Unfortunately, in coming to New Zealand, they were separated from their son, partner and grandchildren. Work on the case began in 2018, and the family was successfully reunited at the end of 2022.

“Although the numbers are relatively small, unification of families also allows us to enhance Aotearoa’s diversity of talent, as the individuals’ lived experience and the challenges they have had to overcome to live and work here, are incredibly unique,” Laura says.

The impact for the families DLA Piper supports is unparalleled.

“Their individual mental health and wellbeing improves by being unified with their families, who were often in incredibly challenging situations, with their lives being at risk.”

The pro bono work also has positive career benefits for the lawyers involved. DLA Piper’s commercial lawyers are given exposure to new areas of law and

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the opportunity to broaden their experience and develop new legal skills. For junior lawyers, this pro bono work is often a core part of their training and development.

“We have found that encouraging our people to partake in meaningful pro bono work has led to higher engagement.” In New Zealand, 92 per cent of the firm’s lawyers actively participate in pro bono work, averaging 37 hours per lawyer each year.

Pro bono work is central to DLA Piper’s mission to make business better, and an essential part of the firm’s business culture.

“We believe that the inequality that leads to social and economic exclusion undermines society, damages business and threatens our ability to help our clients succeed. Businesses thrive in communities where there is equal access to education and opportunity, underpinned by robust rule of law, and, as an international law firm, we have the skills, reach and influence to drive targeted societal change.”