

The Organisation

- Citizens Advice Redbridge (CAR) is a part of the national Citizens Advice network of charities giving confidential, independent and impartial advice on issues affecting everyday lives
- CAR offers advice by telephone, email and limited in-person sessions to people living in the London Borough of Redbridge
- Clients use the service for support with issues such as claiming benefits, housing, civil disputes and family matters and consumer issues
- CAR also provides outreach sessions in the local community and specialist debt advice



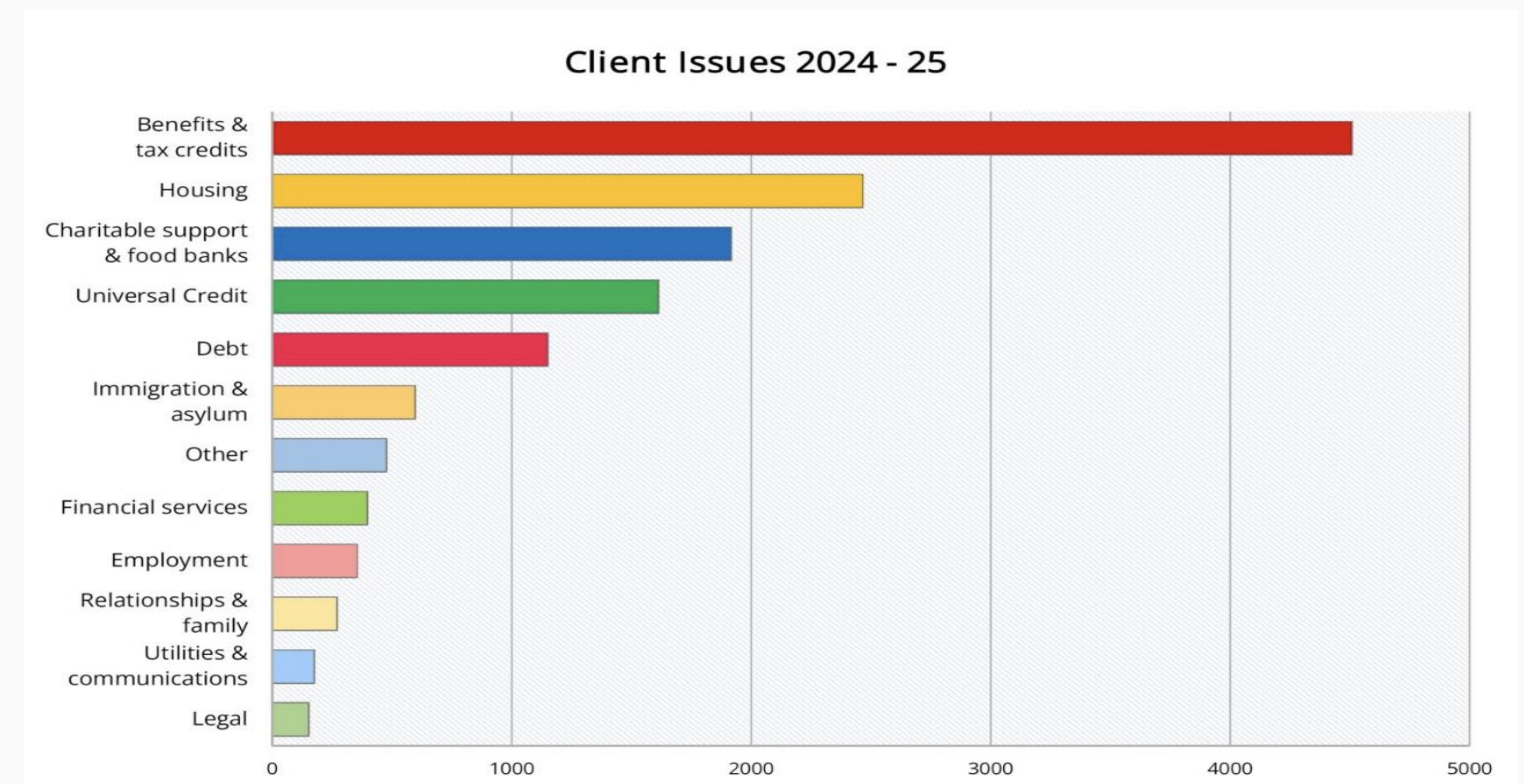
Need and Impact

- Citizens Advice helped 2.71 million people in the UK in 2024/25.
- The national service aims to reduce the impact of structural inequalities that prevent people from accessing paid support services such as private legal advice and debt management. The service also offers immediate support. For issues such as energy security, 50% of clients needed immediate crisis support and relied on Citizens Advice services. The need for the service is underscored by the cost of living crisis in London, leading over 2000 people to CAR.
- In 2023/24, Citizens Advice Redbridge assisted 4,069 clients with 9,890 different issues. CAR clients gained £15,452,383 in income, and £2,964,043 in other financial gains

Project overview

Giving advice

- During the project, I worked as an advisor for the core Citizens Advice service. At CAR, this involved receiving cases from clients who submit forms to the online portal
- Once the case is reviewed, advisors conduct preliminary research on the issue at hand using internal Advisernet information banks and trusted third party sources
- Each client is called to learn more about specific circumstances ensuring advice is tailored and accurate
- We then build client templates detailing our research into issues before giving personalized advice to the client by phone call, send a summary email with links and referrals and guide the client to suitable next steps
- We frequently direct clients to services at Redbridge Council, the police, local legal service providers and our own family solicitor who gives in person appointments to clients one day a week for no charge
- Over the 6-week course of the project, I helped 66 clients offering advice on issues including benefits and benefits appeals, social housing claims and waitlist form-filling, housing condition issues, neighbour disputes, evictions, domestic abuse support, disability support, immigration issues, and divorce
- The course also involved an intensive training programme (Adviser Learning Plan) under which I learnt in depth about laws and processes for advising clients with above mentioned issues and how to speak to clients who may have difficulty accessing the service due to language barriers and disabilities



Reflections

Advising clients goes well beyond researching legal issues and providing the information which taught me a significant amount about provide pastoral support alongside advice and ensuring clients understanding of advice enabling them to take next steps.

A significant challenge for the service is lack of funding to assist clients in person with administrative tasks which are heavy for issues such as benefit claims and difficult for more vulnerable clients. CAR's form-filling service was ended during my project due to funding. I learnt how to adjust advice to provide as much help as possible remotely and to work with partner organisations such as Redbridge Council who can offer some in-person services.

Cuts to legal aid in England also mean clients are left without options in many cases with no representation in court for appeals and family disputes. The job showed me how this often leaves clients without sufficient income to live and division of families