



النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development

YOUR HOTLINE

CALL ECHOES IN OUR HEARTS:

Exploring the Impact, Opportunities,
and Challenges of Emergency
Hotlines in Jordan



0777387221



24 Hours
7 Days



2024

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Executive Summary

This brief outlines the context, operational aspects, and impact of Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) hotline, highlighting its critical role during crises such as refugee and the COVID-19 pandemic and its broad accessibility to both refugees and local citizens.

The Legal Aid Unit at ARDD operates through 8 offices across the Kingdom, staffed by a team of 34 full-time expert lawyers and 22 case managers and referral/support officers. The unit provides free legal aid services to all individuals in need, covering both prevention and response services. Prevention services include legal awareness, outreach, and community education, while response services encompass legal consultations, mediation, court representation, and assistance in navigating official departments. These services are further strengthened by a dedicated hotline, available 24/7, ensuring immediate legal support and guidance in urgent situations.

Established in 2006 during the Iraqi refugee crisis, ARDD's Hotline provides access to vital legal aid services to refugees and continues to serve as a critical resource today. Operating 24/7, the hotline addresses various urgent needs, from legal assistance to connecting callers with essential services, while ensuring that every call is treated with the same seriousness, regardless of complexity. ARDD's Hotline is part of the larger Jordanian social support system, offering a critical lifeline to individuals facing legal and personal crises. Its ongoing adaptation and responsive service continue to enhance its impact, making it an indispensable tool for emergency response in Jordan.

1. Introduction

An emergency hotline is reserved for handling extensive incoming calls, particularly during emergencies and crises, to ensure uninterrupted service to people in need. Emergency hotlines have several characteristics. In essence, they rely on trained and qualified staff members to provide service and assistance 24 hours a day, either directly or by referring the caller to the concerned authorities who can assist him. Each call in this context is taken as a call in which the caller suffers from an emergency that affects his physical or psychological well-being¹.

The idea of a hotline appeared for the first time at the beginning of the 1900s. In 1906, Baptist minister Harry Marsh Warren founded the first suicide prevention organization, the 'Save-a-Life League,' in the United States. During his stay in New York, he did not have the time to talk to a young woman who requested his help due to his rush; as a result, the woman committed suicide by overdosing. One of his thoughts, when he sent her off, was that her death could have been avoided if he had talked to her; ergo, Warren initiated a telephone crisis service to offer support to people in need and eventually established a clinic that provided both psychological and material assistance. Similarly, in 1953, British Anglican priest Chad Varah founded the 'Samaritans' in London to address the challenges faced by suicidal individuals; furthermore, he placed a notice on his church door to promote the term crisis hotline.

Emergency Numbers and Hotlines

Emergency numbers and hotlines both serve critical roles in assisting, but they operate with distinct purposes and functions. Emergency numbers, like 911 or 112, are government-designated lines that connect callers to immediate physical or law enforcement responses in life-threatening situations. Available 24/7 and accessible to everyone, these numbers are essential for emergencies such as accidents, crimes, or medical crises, with the primary goal of delivering swift action by dispatching emergency personnel.

In contrast, hotlines are specialized phone services designed to provide advice, emotional support, or guidance for specific issues such as mental health, legal aid, or domestic violence. While some hotlines also operate 24/7, their focus is on offering tailored consultations and connecting individuals with the resources they need rather than providing on-the-spot physical intervention. Hotlines serve as vital long-term support systems, addressing particular needs and often offering follow-up care or referrals to additional services.

Emergency Numbers in Jordan

Like other countries, Jordan includes a set of emergency numbers for each governmental or security institution separately, intending to help individuals access the services they provide in emergencies. These numbers include control room 196, public relations 196, security radio 2810 sub-196, civil defense 199 or 2810, governorate emergency phone 199, and Greater Amman Municipality emergency 065359970.

As part of its work in developing the emergency system in the Kingdom, in 2009, Jordan launched the toll-free emergency number 911 in the Jordanian capital, Amman, which included more than 22 security and humanitarian institutions under the management of the Public Security Directorate in cooperation with the Civil Defense to provide rescue, police, ambulance, and traffic services². The 911 emergency number responds to incoming calls and forwards the call to the concerned authorities to deal with emergencies and accidents that individuals face daily. In 2013, the second phase of the emergency service began by expanding the service to include all governorates of the Kingdom³.

The introduction of mobile technology significantly improved accessibility compared to traditional landline systems, which posed challenges in terms of remote access and required substantial resources to maintain 24/7 operations. Mobile phones are more user-friendly for staff and offer individuals a convenient, private, and confidential way to communicate. In contrast, landlines, often located in shared household spaces, provided little privacy. The widespread availability of mobile devices and increasing internet access further enhanced communication, making it easier to reach individuals and offer services more efficiently and securely.

2. About ARDD's Hotline

ARRD's Hotline began operating in 2006, in response to the Iraqi refugee crisis, serving as a vital tool for delivering legal aid to refugees. It is noteworthy, that this service was in place even before the official establishment of the ARDD in 2008. During this period, the hotline was managed by the founders of ARDD, who were dedicated to assisting Iraqis at that time.

Iraqi asylum seekers in Jordan faced numerous challenges, including limited resources and widespread confusion about their asylum status in the country. This influx created a significant demand for legal assistance and clarity regarding their legal rights. At the time, with few organizations providing legal aid -UNHCR being the primary one- ARDD's Hotline became a crucial resource for refugees, offering legal guidance and support. The hotline's number, 0777387221, quickly spread among refugee communities, and it continues to serve the same purpose today, demonstrating its sustainability and long-standing commitment to legal assistance. The line remains operational and available to those in need.

ARRD's Hotline operates from a humanitarian perspective, underlining the importance of addressing all situations and issues with the same urgency as traditional emergencies. The guiding principles of ARDD's Hotline are twofold:

1. Treating all incoming communications with utmost seriousness, regardless of their complexity. ARDD acknowledges that individuals' perceptions of an emergency vary, and what may seem trivial to some could be a dire emergency for others. As such, ARDD endeavors to assist every consultation, request, or call received on the hotline to the best of its ability.
2. Assisting beneficiaries irrespective of the nature of their inquiry. ARDD believes that the hotline should be versatile in addressing callers' needs beyond mere legal advice. While its primary focus is on legal assistance, the hotline strives to offer help in various situations, from providing legal guidance in criminal matters or accidents like traffic collisions to connecting callers with ambulance services, specific hospitals, or family protection resources.

How ARDD's Hotline Works

ARRD's Hotline operates 24 hours a day and is available seven days a week, regardless of holidays.

The human aspect is one of the unique aspects of the emergency; once the phone is answered, a trained and professional hotline officer will be in the service instead of answering a machine, auto-replying, or waiting. This human aspect of the ARDD hotline is one factor that makes it highly appropriate for the beneficiaries, as many of them express their need to talk with another human being instead of the answering machine.

A fully trained and qualified team manages the hotline. In this regard, the hotline officers periodically undergo training on handling the calls they receive, whether during the day or at night. This is critical, as people reaching out through the hotline are dealing with emergency or urgent cases that cannot wait until the morning hours.

A constant development of the hotline officer skills is also critical. In this context, based on the diversity of issues and inquiries that reach the hotline, ARDD sought to develop and enhance the skills of hotline officers so that they can provide legal or general information to individuals, especially at night and on holidays, to provide assistance and ensure the legal rights of individuals in a quickly understanding way.

In addition to providing initial assistance and information, hotline officers are trained to refer individuals to the specialized legal team in ARDD for legal aid or refer them to other specialized and qualified networks and institutions capable of assisting.

3. ARDD's Hotline in Times of Crises

The ARDD hotline was created for the first time to face the Iraqi refugee crisis, ever since the hotline has provided a vital tool for many people in Jordan during these challenging times.

The Hotline as a Resource for Refugees

The wide spread of hotlines among refugees is considered one of the essential criteria for its success, as well as its ability to provide various types of assistance to refugees and enable them to reach the largest possible number.

In addition to the spread of hotline number through refugee communities inside Jordan, the partnership and cooperation of ARDD with the UNHCR constituted an additional impetus that contributed to increasing the spread of the hotline among refugees, especially with the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan. The UNHCR officially adopted ARDD's Hotline in its various publications to provide assistance and legal advice to Syrian refugees. It also worked to circulate the hotline number to refugees through multiple means, whether through phone messages, brochures, social media posts, awareness messages, or awareness campaigns etc.

Moreover, through its cooperation and partnership with official Jordanian institutions, ARDD has sought to strengthen the hotline's position and spread through various means, including receiving official transfers from the relevant ministries via e-mail or landlines. Additionally, in ARDD's partnership with a group of national projects in cooperation with ministries, a hotline number was adopted next to the numbers for other parties.

ARDD was an official partner in the campaign to rectify the situation in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, the Syrian Refugees Affairs Directorate (SRAD) and UNHCR, the campaign to exempt marriage fines from the CSPD, UNHCR, the Ministry of Interior, and the Supreme Judge Department, and birth certificate holders' campaign in cooperation with the Directorate, Civil Status, and Passports Department (CSPD). UNHCR, and the Ministry of the Interior. Within all these campaigns, the hotline was placed on the campaign's advertising and awareness brochures, which enhanced the status and reliability of ARDD's Hotline among the beneficiaries.

Over the past few years, the hotline has become not limited to receiving calls from refugees but has expanded to include several different groups, such as Jordanians and foreigners. Moreover, during the past years, the hotline has also witnessed a qualitative shift in receiving a group of calls from outside Jordan, including Arab and Western countries, reflecting growing confidence in the hotline's ability to provide advice and assistance to individuals.

ARDD's Hotline in the Time of COVID-19 Emergency

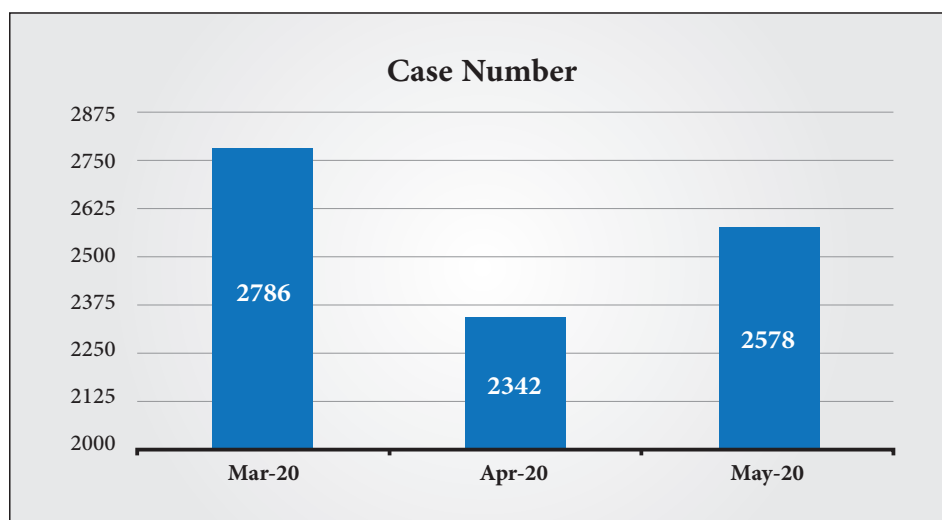
At the onset of the pandemic, widespread shutdowns created challenges for government institutions to maintain operations. Many agencies set up dedicated emergency lines, but the high demand underscored the need for more coordinated efforts to address public concerns and reduce uncertainty around the new defense orders.

Amid this turmoil, the national emergency hotline 911 faced overwhelming demand, making many individuals unable to reach it. ARDD's Hotline, which remained operational throughout the pandemic, emerged as a vital lifeline for various groups, including refugees, foreigners, and Jordanians.

Within this context, ARDD's Hotline served as a complementary support tool for other national emergency hotlines, significantly raising awareness about alternative emergency hotline numbers in Jordan beyond 911. By redirecting callers to emergency services for ambulances, police, civil affairs, and other relevant bodies, the hotline alleviated some of the burdens placed on the 911 hotline, thereby aiding in the efficient management of emergency responses.

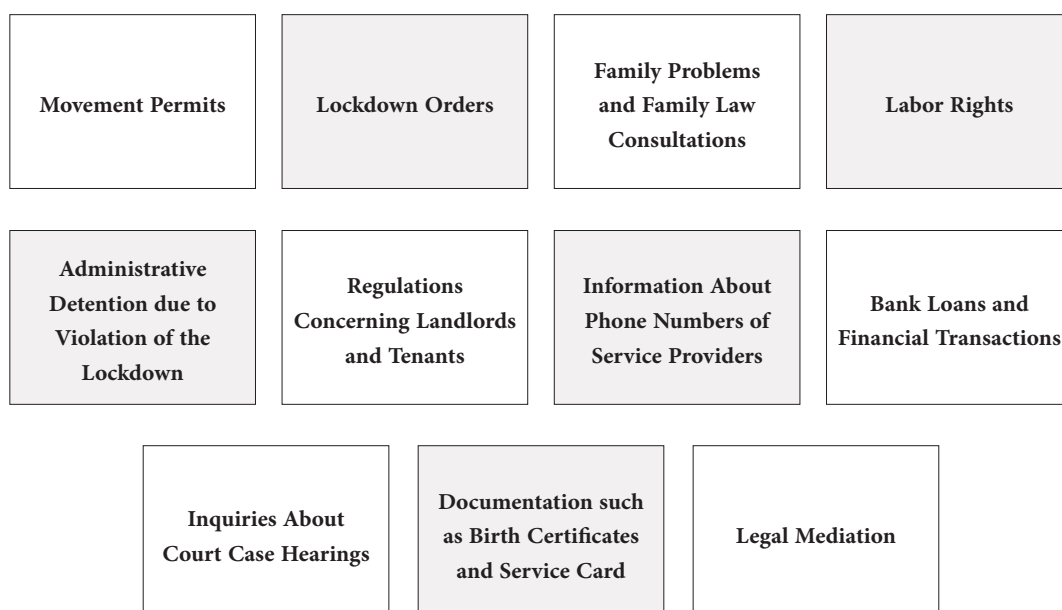
The unprecedented circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant surge in calls received by the hotline, with inquiries pouring in from all segments of society, including both Jordanians and non-Jordanians.

Emergency calls evoked a wide range of concerns, with widespread confusion surrounding state of emergency declarations and defense orders. Between March and May 2020, ARDD provided its services to individuals through phones due to the lockdown and the total closure of the country.



The ARDD hotline received calls and inquiries from various nationalities in Jordan, who found the hotline an effective tool to help and aid them. These nationalities included Iraqi, Jordanian, Yemeni, Sudanese, Somali, Croatian, American, Saudi, Emirati, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Eritrean, and Egyptian.

During this period, many concerns arose regarding people's unusual situation with the lockdown, the order defense, and the closer imposed on the country. Hence, the ARDD line received calls on a variety of topics and inquiries, which included:



During COVID-19, many sought clarities on the legalities and repercussions of defying curfews. Lockdown-induced job losses, especially among informal workers, deepened poverty, leading to numerous calls to seek financial aid and inquiries about eligibility. The Lockdown confined many to their homes without adequate supplies, leading to heightened anxiety and food insecurity. Consequently, numerous calls were from individuals seeking assistance due to fear and lack of food provisions. Furthermore, health-related concerns also took precedence, with many callers urgently requesting ambulance services or seeking information about nearby hospitals. Moreover, refugees faced acute livelihood losses and hindrances to accessing vital services, in addition to fears of aid discontinuation, rent affordability, and access to necessities like food and supplies.

4. ARDD's Hotline Today

Since its establishment, refugees, whether registered with UNHCR or not, have comprised a significant portion of those seeking legal advice or assistance through the hotline. These range from asylum seekers seeking assistance upon arrival at the international airport to enter Jordan to refugees who have suffered abuse and feel hopeless about accessing their legal rights.

In one call, a hotline officer successfully prevented an Iraqi refugee from attempting suicide. The officer achieved this by engaging in calming conversation and encouraging the refugee to open up about his problems, following specific procedures learned in training.

Furthermore, the main issues the hotline receives calls about regarding refugees are Administrative Detention and associated Deportation orders; many refugees are facing fragile legal status in Jordan due to lack of proper documentation or unintentional violation of laws and regulations due to their misinformed or lack of awareness of such laws, which puts them under a continuous threat of being arrested and deported.

The hotline officers at ARDD have a direct connection to the UNHCR. This enables them to report cases directly to the designated section, facilitating follow-up and the provision of necessary support to resolve detention cases, secure the release of refugees, and prevent deportation.

In addition, several vulnerable groups who often use the hotline include foreign workers and tourists facing legal issues or obstacles. Frequently unaware of Jordan's legal framework, they seek guidance on matters like residency, visas, landlord-tenant disputes, or criminal incidents.

In one case, a Somali national was persuaded by the emergency hotline officer that resorting to the police was a safer option than attempting to secure his rights forcibly.

Although refugees and foreigners constitute the most significant percentage of beneficiaries of the hotline, recent years have witnessed a substantial increase in Jordanians resorting to the use of the hotline in various cases to obtain legal aid, which shows the increased confidence in the services provided by the hotline among many community groups in Jordan.

- A Jordanian woman reached out for help late at night regarding issues of domestic violence. The emergency hotline attendant promptly offered aid, directing her to safety at a nearby police center.
- In another case, a Jordanian woman facing domestic abuse was encouraged to seek support from the Family Protection Department, exploring alternative options to address her predicament a Jordanian woman facing domestic abuse was encouraged to seek support from the Family Protection Department, exploring alternative options to address her predicament.

Based on the principles on which the hotline was founded, all incoming calls are taken seriously, whatever their type or nature. Based on this, the hotline for many callers has been a tool for psychological discharge by talking to competent and qualified people. Hence, many calls extend beyond seeking legal advice to simply wanting someone to listen and empathize with their problems. Listening to the callers and providing them with emotional support is critical within the hotline work:

- In one case, a widow regularly called the emergency hotline seeking solace and companionship despite knowing its primary function was legal aid. Recognizing the need for emotional support, the emergency hotline became a vital platform for her to share her burdens.
- In a second case, a Syrian refugee grappling with the loss of his son while working received emotional support and consolation from the emergency hotline officer, significantly impacting his psychological well-being.

Additionally, based on the idea that the hotline is concerned with all the problems it receives, many calls mainly seek help and guidance from the hotline administrator on how to deal with the day-to-day issues they face, whether at work or family level.

In one case, the caller overwhelmed by financial troubles was comforted and reassured by the hotline officer, who helped devise strategies to address the issue.

On another call, the emergency hotline was contacted to find practical solutions to the caller's specific problem; in one case, the caller was trying to find a solution to his financial problems, and during the call, he even restores to involve his wife by encouraging her to talk about their financial needs with the emergency officer.

In humanitarian crises, the importance of a compassionate touch cannot be overstated. A dedicated emergency hotline, available around the clock, can sometimes be the difference between life and death. Sometimes, it serves as a lifeline for individuals facing desperate situations.

5. Lessons Learned

1. In emergencies, we must be prepared to scale up our services to address the increased demand for protection and general services. It is essential to remain ready and adaptable to any evolving situation within the emergency context.
2. Challenges: Meeting the service requests that come through emergency/hotline calls is critical, and it is both difficult and unacceptable to have to apologize for not providing the required service after receiving an emergency call. The actual needs often exceed the number of calls received.
3. Additionally, there is a noticeable gap in usage: females are not utilizing the hotline as frequently as males, and young people, particularly those under 18, are also using it less than adults.

6. Recommendations:

1. Increase Investment in Services: Emergency services must be enhanced to meet the rising demands during crisis situations. The hotline should be fully supported by comprehensive services to ensure a timely and effective response.
2. Ensure Sustainability of the Hotline: Allocate sufficient resources to guarantee the continuous operation of the hotline, regardless of changing circumstances in the emergency context.
3. Strengthen Coordination Among Hotlines: Improve coordination between existing hotlines to streamline referrals and ensure that callers are efficiently directed to the appropriate services.
4. Build Trust Among Underrepresented Groups: Conduct in-depth analysis to understand the lower usage rates of the hotline by females and young people under 18. Address the identified barriers to increase trust and engagement with these groups.
5. Leverage Technology for Efficiency: Simplify the access procedures for ARDD's Hotline and other hotlines operated by organizations working in the humanitarian response, by shortening the number (e.g., 3-4 digits) and making the service free to users. Utilize technology to enhance response times and ease of use, while avoiding complex systems like automated answering machines that could confuse users during emergencies.

References

- 1 Gabriela Socha. 2018. Emergency Hotline as a Communication Tool in Times of Crisis. ASEJ - Scientific Journal of Bielsko-Biala School of Finance and Law. 22(3). 35-39
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- 3 Public Security launches the second phase of the 911 emergency service. Al-Rai. 1\5\2013. See: <https://alrai.com/article/580294/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A6-911>

ARDD's Hotline in 2023: Analytical Snapshot

In 2023, the hotline received a total of **6,500** calls.

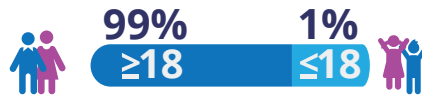
The hotline supported individuals from various nationalities, this indicates the hotline's importance as a support system for host community, refugees and migrants in Jordan, who often face unique legal and protection challenges.

Callers' Demographics

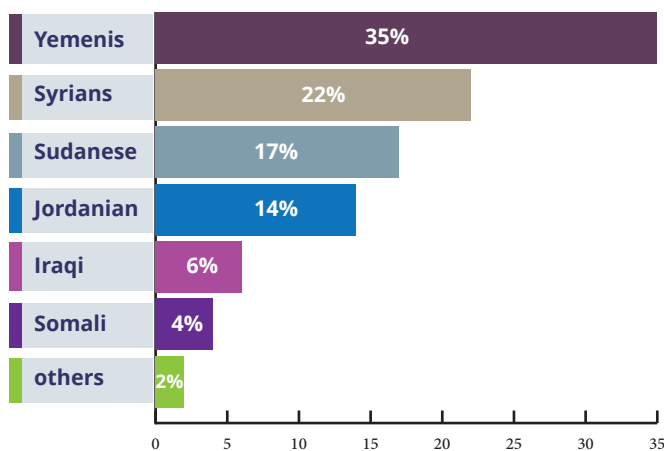
Gender Distribution:



Age Group:



Callers' Nationalities

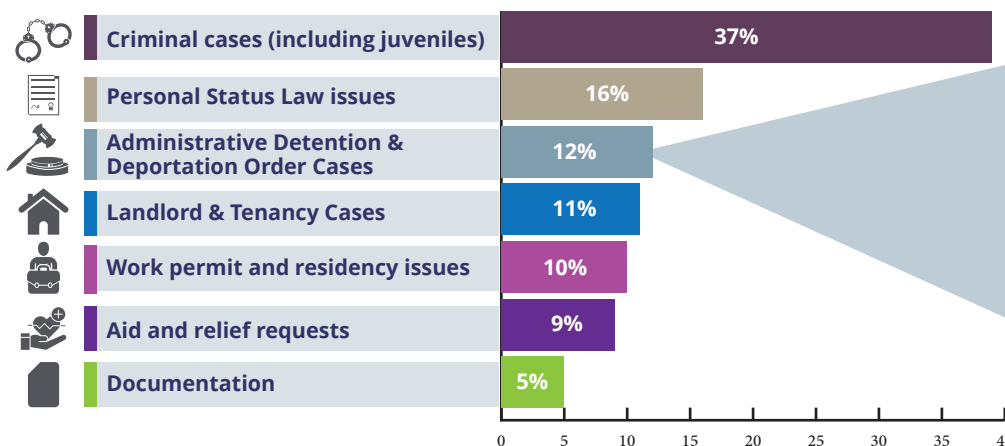


ARDD Hotline Number

0777387221

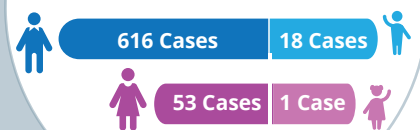
24 Hours
7 Days

Callers' Nature of Inquiries



Insight into Deportation Cases:

Age ≥ 18 < 18



Implications and Future Directions



The data from 2023 highlights the critical role of ARDD's Hotline in providing timely and necessary assistance to a predominantly adult, male demographic across several serious issues. Moving forward, it may be beneficial to explore strategies to:

Increase Outreach to women and younger generation: Developing targeted communications and services could encourage more callers from female and younger generation (below 18 years old) to utilize the hotline.

Expand Support Services: Given the high volume of calls related to criminal cases and personal status law, enhancing resources in these areas to continue providing service quality and outcomes.

