

# IJGlobal ESG Award – Social – DLA Piper

Angus Leslie Melville

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DLA Piper was voted by the independent panel of judges to win the IJGlobal ESG Award in the Social category with one lauding it for “good efforts from the team and contribution to the society challenges”.

Another of the judges recognised the law firm for having found a “good way to intertwine CSR focused activities (pro bono) with business solutions (D&I index)”.

The judge went on to celebrate DLA’s “diversity of social topics including very challenging areas such as war and climate refugees” adding that it wins “extra points for a timely response to impacts on Ukrainians”.

The DLA submission identifies 2 key aspects of its social impact work: community outreach programmes that address social inequality; and volunteering and awareness-raising activities to support disadvantaged groups. Together, it states, these initiatives “provide many opportunities for our people to make a positive difference in society and support their local communities”.

## How to make an impact

One of DLA’s key strategies for making an impact starts early on with advice to clients – many of them large multinational companies whose activities have a major societal and economic impact. That legal guidance at a grass roots level has a significant influence on that impact.

But DLA recognises the need to walk the walk on this front and makes an impact through its internal diversity initiatives and work with supply chain. It does what it advises clients to do, setting an example for them to follow.

Through its community partnerships – led by members of the DLA team – the law firm engages with schools, universities and charities to improve lives and access to opportunities.

This is matched by its outreach programmes that respond to the needs of communities and help it improve internal processes and policies, with the goal of improving diversity in the legal profession.

On the social mobility front, DLA was the first law firm to sign the Social Mobility Pledge, and published *Levelling Up Law*, the legal sector’s first social mobility impact report.

As to pro bono team, as a major international law firms, it provides free (pro bono) legal advice “at a scale unlike any other law firm” according to DLA.

The submission states: “In 2021, the firm contributed almost 200,000 hours of pro bono legal services globally. Working pro bono is a vital part of our culture, and central to fulfilling our purpose to make business, and the world around us, better.”

## Human displacement

DLA Piper, in its submission, points to “innovative finance strategies to tackle social challenges” and key among that is human displacement which is currently at a record high.

The submission states: “International agencies are overwhelmed by the scale of this crisis and are largely focused on immediate humanitarian relief. Business can play a critical role in filling gaps and assisting with the economic components of the response.

“DLA Piper has joined forces with the non-profit actors, the business community and the public sector, the firm launched a strong innovative finance strategy, aimed at catalysing a paradigm shift in the inclusion and humanitarian responses to the refugee crisis. This focused on recognising and building upon the capabilities of refugees and conflict-affected communities.

“As part of this work, we have provided pro bono advice to KOIS – an impact investment and finance advisory firm – on the structuring and implementation of a Development Impact Bond (DIB) for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.

“The DIB – whose first tranche was issued in 2021 – will fund a micro-enterprise creation programme delivered by the Near East Foundation, to help refugees and vulnerable host communities. Over 4 years the first tranche will support 4,380 refugee and host population trainees and provide 3,400 business start-up grants in Jordan.

“The project aims to target up to 9,000 refugees across Jordan and Lebanon, countries where – despite the formidable efforts of host governments and foreign donors – 8 out of 10 Syrian refugees live below the poverty line.”

Debt financing is being provided by the US Development Finance Corporation and Ferd. Outcomes-based funding is being provided by the IKEA Foundation, the Novo Nordisk Foundation, and Norad.

“The DIB offers an innovative solution through multi-year, outcome-driven funding that shares performance risk between investors and donors. It will enable the Near East Foundation to deliver coaching sessions, market-linked technical training, and one-to-one mentorship. This will help both the forcibly displaced and host communities to achieve economic independence and become self-reliant,” the submission states.

“Innovative finance can help the most vulnerable in our communities achieve better outcomes by unlocking new resources, developing new financial solutions, and bringing the financial sector into the heart of social and business issues such that it becomes a partner, investor, and social beneficiary. The sector can play a pivotal role in inserting forced displacement in the ESG agenda and – therefore in changing often-biased narratives towards refugees.”

The DLA continues to delve into its activities across diversity and inclusion having developed a D&I Index – a solution to assist businesses in assessing current strategies, identifying gaps and adopting remedial steps.

According to the submission: “This is critical at a time when ESG frameworks are being developed, social inequalities are in sharp focus and the government is moving the improvement of employment rights and the protection of workers up its legislative agenda.

“The D&I Index is an innovative, creative and powerful digital solution which addresses six key themes of the employment relationship, such as training and leadership. It contains carefully targeted assessments for each theme, which highlight potential areas of concern. The completed assessments produce both a score and RAG rating, with the opportunity for the organisation to download a report of bespoke results.”



Picture added after IJGlobal ESG Awards 2022. Pictured with the DLA Piper team are IJGlobal editor Ila Patel and editorial director Angus Leslie Melville.



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