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Publication of the 2012 Annual Report of

THE OFFICE OF THE REFUGEE APPLICATIONS COMMISSIONER (ORAC)

The twelfth Annual Report of the Refugee Applications Commissioner has now been published.

The Annual Report details the progress made during 2012 in delivering on the goals and objectives set out in the Office's *Strategy Statement 2010 - 2012*.

The Refugee Applications Commissioner, David Costello, reported that in 2012 the total number of applications for refugee status received was 956. This represents a 25.9% reduction in applications compared to 2011 and asylum applications are now at their lowest levels since the mid-nineties.

Significant progress continued to be made in 2012 in the processing of applications with a total of 1,198 cases being finalised. At the end of the year there were some 219 cases on hands, only 11 of which were on hand for over 6 months.

Prioritised applications were completed within a median processing time of 20 days from the date of application, 10 days ahead of the 2011 time period. Non-prioritised cases were processed to completion within a median time of 9.1 weeks which was some 13 days ahead of the time period in 2011.

During 2012, ORAC continued to utilise the Dublin II Regulation, which determines the Contracting State responsible for processing an asylum application, with some 144 determinations being made.

Some 714 sets of fingerprints of asylum applicants were sent to the EURODAC fingerprinting system with 108 hits, showing those applicants had made asylum applications in other Contracting States.

The Commissioner continued to be represented at appeal hearings before the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) and, in consultation with the Tribunal, ORAC ensured that the maximum number of hearings per week could be serviced by its Presenting Unit. Some 510 hearings were serviced during 2012.

A new Strategy Statement and a new Customer Service Action Plan were developed for corporate planning and service delivery purposes to cover the 3 year period 2013 - 2015. These are available on the ORAC website (www.orac.ie).

Note: The Annual Report is available on the website of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner at www.orac.ie.

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Notes for Editors

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner is an independent Office established under the Refugee Act, 1996, which considers applications for refugee status at first instance and makes recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality on whether such status should be granted. It is also responsible for the investigation and preparation of reports to the Minister on applications from those granted refugee status who subsequently seek permission for a family member to enter and live in the State.

Additional key points in the Report include:

- The top five applicant countries for 2012 were Nigeria (16.9%), Pakistan (11%), Democratic Republic of Congo (6.1%), Zimbabwe (5.1%) and Albania (4.8%) as compared to Nigeria, Pakistan, China, Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan for 2011.
- In 2012, 23 applications were received from Unaccompanied Minors seeking asylum, which accounted for 2.4% of the total number of applications received.
- Nearly 80% of asylum applications were made in Dublin at the ORAC Headquarters with the remainder being made at other locations such as airports.
- ORAC continued to prioritise applications made by persons in detention in line with statutory requirements. A total of 50 applications were received from persons in detention in 2012. This figure constituted 5.2% of all applications received.
- 206 applications for Family Reunification were received from the Minister for Justice and Equality for investigation in 2012, a decrease of 15.6% over the 2011 figure.
- A total of 244 asylum applications were deemed withdrawn from the asylum process for various reasons including applicants failing to co-operate or attend for interview.
- 29 legal challenges were taken against ORAC during 2012 compared with 79 cases during 2011.
- Through various initiatives highlighted in the Annual Report 2012, ORAC continued to underline the importance of quality in the investigation and processing of asylum applications supported by ongoing staff training and development.
- ORAC wishes to thank the Dublin Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its ongoing assistance during the year including its support for staff training and development initiatives.