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INFORMATION UPDATE

Publication of the 2013 Annual Report of

THE OFFICE OF THE REFUGEE APPLICATIONS COMMISSIONER

The thirteenth Annual Report of the Refugee Applications Commissioner has now been published on the ORAC website.

Our Annual Report 2013, which the Refugee Applications Commissioner is required to submit to the Minister for Justice and Equality under the Refugee Act, 1996, provides an update on the activities of the office for the year with particular reference to delivering on the goals and objectives set out in the Office's *Strategy Statement 2013-2015*.

Key points in our Annual Report for 2013 are:

- The total number of applications for refugee status received was 946. This represents a 1% reduction in applications compared to 2012 and asylum applications are now at their lowest level since 1995.
- Significant progress continued to be made in 2013 in the processing of applications with a total of 1,122 cases being finalised. At the end of the year there were some 248 cases on hands, and of these, only 17 were on hand for over 6 months.
- Prioritised applications were completed within a median processing time of 25 working days from the date of application. Non-prioritised cases were processed to completion within a median processing time of 12 weeks.
- Some 160 determinations were made under the EU Dublin II Regulation, which determines the Contracting State responsible for processing an asylum application in Member States.
- Some 696 sets of fingerprints of asylum applicants were sent to the EURODAC fingerprinting system with 100 hits, involving 65 applicants indicating that those applicants had made asylum applications in one or more 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. 342 hearings were serviced during 2013.
- The number of judicial reviews against ORAC continued to fall in 2013 with 7 legal challenges taken compared with 29 cases during 2012.

An important development during the year was the broadening of ORAC's jurisdiction in the area of international protection. This resulted from the transfer of responsibility for processing all existing and future subsidiary protection applications from the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service to ORAC under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013 with effect from 14 November 2013. These Regulations provide for a system for the investigation and determination of applications for subsidiary protection in the State by way of interview. A panel of qualified persons was established to assist the Commissioner in undertaking interviews and making submissions on applications. Training was provided in conjunction with the UNHCR and other experts and the process of interviewing applicants began in December 2013.

Additional key points in the 2013 Annual Report include:

- The top five applicant countries for 2013 were Nigeria (13.6%), Pakistan (9.6%), Democratic Republic of Congo (7.6%), Zimbabwe (7.4%) and Malawi (5.8%) as compared to Nigeria (16.9%), Pakistan (11%), Democratic Republic of Congo (6.1%), Zimbabwe (5.1%) and Albania (4.8%) in 2012.
- As in previous years Nigeria remained the top applicant country.
- 20 applications were received from Unaccompanied Minors seeking asylum, which accounted for 2.1% of the total number of applications received.
- 78% 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 24 applications were received from persons in detention in 2013. This figure constituted 2.5% of all applications received.
- 162 applications for Family Reunification were received from the Minister for Justice and Equality for investigation, a decrease of 21.4% over the 2012 figure.
- A total of 219 asylum applications were deemed withdrawn from the asylum process for various reasons including applicants failing to co-operate or attend for interview.
- Through various initiatives highlighted in the Annual Report 2013, ORAC continued to highlight the importance of quality standards in the investigation and processing of asylum applications supported by ongoing staff training and development.

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