



16th June 2009

Publication of the 2008 Annual Report of

THE OFFICE OF THE REFUGEE APPLICATIONS COMMISSIONER

The eighth Annual Report of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) has now been published.

The Annual Report details the progress which was made during 2008 in delivering on the goals and objectives set out in the Office's *Strategy Statement 2007-2009*. The Refugee Applications Commissioner, David Costello, reported that in 2008 the total number of applications received was 3,866. This represents a 3% reduction in applications compared to 2007 and is also the lowest annual number of applications since 1997.

During 2008, significant progress continued to be made in the processing of applications. 4,581 decisions and determinations were made, which represents an increase of over 10% on the previous year. At the end of the year, there were some 1,200 cases on hands, only 116 cases of which were over 6 months old.

Applications processed under the Ministerial Prioritisation Directive were completed within 17 to 20 working days from the date of application. Non-prioritised cases were processed to completion within 22 to 23 weeks of the date of application. Towards the end of the year, the processing times for these cases were reduced to 19 to 21 weeks, due to proactive management and increased capacity of the interviewing schedule.

During 2008, ORAC continued to make the maximum possible use of the EU Dublin II Regulation, which determines the EU State responsible for processing an asylum application, with some 385 determinations being made, compared with 368 in 2007. This represents an increase of 4.6% on the previous year. Some 3,402 sets of fingerprints of asylum applicants were sent to the EU EURODAC fingerprinting system with 359 hits, showing those applicants had made asylum applications in other Member States.

Access to the Automated Visa Application and Tracking System (AVATS) of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) was introduced in both ORAC's Reception and Dublin Units in order to detect applicants for asylum where the applicant had applied for an Irish visa on their passport, but no passport or relevant documentation was declared in ORAC.

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 Presenting Officers. This resulted in some 2,091 hearings being serviced, compared to 1,672 in 2007, which represents an increase of 25%.

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 which considers applications for refugee status at first instance and makes recommendations to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform 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 six applicant countries for 2008 were Nigeria (26.1%), Pakistan (6.1%), Iraq (5.3%), Georgia (4.7%), China (4.7%) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (4.4%), as compared to Nigeria, Iraq, China, Pakistan, Georgia and Sudan for 2007.
- During the year, some 4,876 interviews were scheduled.
- In 2008, 98 applications were received from Unaccompanied Minors seeking asylum, which accounted for 2.5% of the total number of applications received.
- There was an increase of 9.4% in the number of applications for family reunification during the year with 408 applications received, compared with 373 in 2007.
- Some 567 asylum applications were deemed withdrawn from the process for various reasons including applicants failing to co-operate or attend for interview.
- ORAC continued to prioritise applications made by persons in detention in line with statutory requirements. A total of 261 applications were received from persons in detention in 2008. This figure constitutes 6.8% of all applications received.
- Work was finalised in 2008 on the establishment of a temporary Presenting Panel, comprising of barristers, solicitors and legal graduates to represent the Commissioner at appeals before the Refugee Appeals Tribunal. The Panel

commenced operations in February 2009 to clear a specific backlog of cases in the RAT.

- There was a decrease in the number of legal challenges against recommendations of the Office in 2008, by some 30%. 266 legal challenges were taken during the year, compared with 378 cases during 2007.
- A major change management process is underway in ORAC to plan for the commencement (subject to approval of both Houses of the Oireachtas) of the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, 2008 which will see the ORAC subsumed into the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and new arrangements introduced for the processing of protection applications as part of a single procedure.

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