



20 June 2008

Publication of the 7th Annual Report of THE OFFICE OF THE REFUGEE APPLICATIONS COMMISSIONER

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

The Annual Report details the significant progress which was made during 2007 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 2007 the number of applications for refugee status received averaged 332 per month. The total number of applications received was 3,985, which represents over a 7% reduction in applications compared to 2006 and also the lowest number of applications since 1997.

During 2007, progress continued to be made in the processing of applications and at the end of December 2007 the number of cases on hands was 1,279, of which only 159 were over 6 months old. During the year, some 4,161 interviews were scheduled, with some 4,152 decisions made.

Applications which were subject to a Ministerial Prioritisation Directive were processed in the main within 17/20 working days of the date of application. Non-prioritised cases were processed to completion within approximately 13 to 15 weeks of the date of application during the first six months of 2007. The timeframe for processing these cases was slightly extended during the latter half of the year due to the increase in complexity of cases and high turnover of experienced staff. Ongoing monitoring of processing timescales was carried out during the year and delays were kept to a minimum.

During 2007, the maximum use possible was made in ORAC of the EU Dublin II Regulation, which determines the EU State responsible for processing an asylum application, with 368 determinations made. Some 3,840 sets of prints of asylum applicants were sent to the EU EURODAC fingerprinting system with 468 hits confirmed.

A new Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) was introduced in October 2007 to support the Dublin process, changing the capture of fingerprints from a manual to an electronic system and providing an enhanced fingerprinting capacity for ORAC with better capability for exchange of information with the EURODAC.

Other achievements during the year included the maintenance of processing times for Family Reunification cases at 2.5 months and for cases being considered under the EU Dublin II Regulation at 27 days.

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

Contact: 01- 602 8170/8094 oracmail@orac.ie

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 2007 were Nigeria, Iraq, China, Pakistan, Georgia and Sudan as compared to Nigeria, Sudan, Romania, Iraq, Iran and Georgia for 2006.
- Applications for asylum from unaccompanied minors (some 88 applications) decreased by some 32.8% on 2006.
- 373 applications for Family Reunification were received in 2007, representing a 22.8% decrease on the applications in 2006.
- Some 689 asylum applications were deemed withdrawn from the process for various reasons including applicants failing to co-operate or attend for interview.
- Some 440 Judicial Reviews were received in 2007, compared with 233 in 2006. ORAC continues to review its processes and procedures to reduce the potential for judicial review proceedings. However, all asylum applicants, subject to law, have the right to have the procedural arrangements leading to their first instance decisions reviewed.
- The results of a number of customer surveys showed considerable satisfaction with the quality and fairness of the interview process.
- 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.

ENDS