



Office of the **Refugee Applications Commissioner**

Corporate Plan 2012 - 2014



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Foreword by the Refugee Applications Commissioner

I am pleased to introduce the Corporate Plan for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) for the period 2012 to 2014.

This Corporate Plan has been developed with a view to this Office continuing to lead the way forward as both a high quality asylum determination agency and an efficient and effective public service organisation. Consultation with staff has taken place on the development of this Plan.

The targets we have set ourselves for the duration of the Plan are practical, ambitious and challenging.

The asylum determination structures in the State will be entering a period of change over the coming years with the enactment of the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill (subject to Oireachtas approval). ORAC will be subsumed into the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) which will then be responsible for determining applications for refugee status at first instance as part of a wider single procedure which will also consider subsidiary protection and other residence permission issues.

We are also entering a new and crucial stage in the reform of the Public Service and we will face significant challenges and choices in the coming years. In the current environment we will need to continue to ensure optimum use of resources and maximum value for money but always having due regard to our statutory framework. We must also reinforce the traditional values applied in our organisation of integrity, professionalism, impartiality and commitment while also strengthening and fostering greater openness, accountability and performance at all levels.

This Plan provides us with a framework for excellence which we will continue to monitor, review and adjust, if necessary, to ensure its continued relevance. In doing so, it reiterates and builds on much of our first Corporate Plan.

I would like to express my appreciation to everyone involved for their contribution to the preparation of, and commitment to, this Plan.

David Costello
Refugee Applications Commissioner



Introduction

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner was established on 20 November, 2000, as an independent statutory Office, to consider applications for refugee status and to make recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality on whether such status should be granted and to also investigate applications from refugees for family reunification.

Since our establishment we have shown that we are a progressive and responsive organisation. Much progress has been made with the elimination of backlogs and the introduction of much shorter waiting times for interviews and recommendations. We have operated throughout in a constantly changing environment and while we have made considerable progress to date, it is timely for the Office to take a look at what we have put in place and decide on future priorities.

We must continue to ensure that we are in a position to respond effectively to future challenges. With the enactment of the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill (subject to Oireachtas approval), ORAC will be subsumed into the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) which will then be responsible for determining applications for refugee status at first instance as part of a wider single procedure which will also consider subsidiary protection and other residence permission issues.

Before ORAC joins INIS, this plan has been developed with a view to the Office continuing its journey as a highly professional organisation committed to providing high quality asylum determinations and with the ability to adapt to forthcoming changes when new legislation is enacted. Notwithstanding the current financial constraints, we need to continue to develop and provide an excellent service to our customers and stakeholders. We also need to maintain a working environment where people feel that they have a voice and that their individual contribution is valued.

We will need to be proactive, continue to focus on excellence, ensure that processes and procedures are more streamlined and that we have all the necessary skills which will allow us continue to develop an organisation capable of fulfilling its statutory role.

Finally, this Plan will continue to be reviewed to ensure its relevance to the context within which we operate and our effectiveness as a public service organisation.



The focus of this Corporate Plan will be:

To deliver high quality refugee status determinations through an organisation committed to continual improvement where people are valued.

Its main themes will be:

- Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Decision-making Process
- Quality Customer Service
- Effective Communications
- Development of Human Resource Management
- Effective Use of Information Technology
- International Cooperation

The Plan will be elaborated and implemented through strategy statements and business plans with progress reviewed and reported on in our annual reports. It will be guided by our mission statement, goals and key values.

The mission of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner is:

- (i) to investigate applications from persons seeking a declaration for refugee status and to issue appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality; and*
- (ii) to investigate applications by refugees to allow family members to enter and reside in the State and report to the Minister for Justice and Equality on such applications*

and in so doing, to provide a high quality service to our customers through the implementation of policies and procedures which are fair as well as treating all applicants with courtesy and sensitivity.

In delivering our mission we will work closely within our statutory framework with other relevant bodies such as the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT), the Refugee Legal Service (RLS) and the Health Service Executive (HSE). We will also work with relevant interests in civil society dealing with asylum seekers and refugees.

To deliver this mission ORAC seeks to:

- investigate applications for refugee status and for family reunification within minimum time frames;
- keep the number of cases on hands to a minimum;



- develop the highest standard of investigation and decision-making;
- contribute to the preservation of the integrity of the asylum process; and
- manage our organisation and its resources efficiently and effectively having particular regard to the development of our staff and the delivery of quality customer services.

The key values which guide our work are:

- Independence
- Fairness
- Firmness
- Serving key stakeholders
- Commitment to staff
- Commitment to excellence
- Openness
- Efficiency in the use of resources

Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Decision-making Process

The most vital business of ORAC is decision-making in respect of applications for refugee status. Service delivery both in quantitative and qualitative terms is the central organisational challenge.

The Office needs to ensure maximum efficiency in the use of its resources. ORAC must continue to respond flexibly to application trends. Targets in annual business plans should stretch the organisation, units and individuals to optimum levels of performance; levels recognised by our peers and, more importantly, our customers.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Continue to ensure maximum efficiency in the use of processing resources with a view to finalising cases within minimum time frames.
- Continue to build on and implement formal systems of Quality Assurance for the asylum process, in line with, inter alia, UNHCR, EU and international best practice, in order to guarantee, in a structured way, the quality of the investigation and determination process.
- Contribute to new initiatives in the area of asylum at EU level including in the context of the development of the mandate of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO).



Quality Customer Service

Quality Customer Service is a fundamental core value of this Office. During the life of this Plan ORAC will continue to deliver a quality customer service culture driven by staff who have an attention to detail and commitment to excellence.

A commitment to Quality Customer Service is required by each member of staff in the organisation whether front-line dealing with external customers or support dealing with internal customers. This commitment is outlined in our Customer Service Action Plans.

ORAC will continue to review Customer Service in the organisation and introduce improvements where it is deemed necessary. Consultation with customers is a key element in identifying areas for improvement. In this regard, regular meetings with the Customer Service Liaison Panel will continue, at which the views and concerns of non-governmental organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees are taken on board.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Continue to promote a customer service culture throughout the organisation, founded on an informed assessment of customer needs and driven by staff commitment to excellence.
- Continue to ensure service delivery consistent with best equality practice and responsive to the needs of a wide and ethnically diverse customer base.

Effective Communications

ORAC will continue to place much emphasis on communications, both internally and with external customers and stakeholders.

In addressing workplace change and the management and organisation culture needed, ORAC recognises that good communications are central to the achievement of ORAC's vision. Good internal communications will ensure that all staff know and understand corporate aims and objectives as well as their personal role in their attainment.

As a public body, ORAC recognises the importance of external communications both in the context of its transparency and responsiveness to stakeholders and to the delivery of public services of a high standard.

Communications, whether for internal or external purposes, should be clear, focussed, timely, resourced and sustained. Effective communication benefits not only those with whom we interact but also the learning culture of ORAC.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will continue to:

- Ensure comprehensive and effective communication within the organisation.
- Optimise levels of communication with external agencies and other relevant interests and ensure a consistent approach to such communication.



Development of Human Resource Management

The continued development of appropriate management and leadership skills and capabilities and fostering behaviours that facilitate organisational change is critical. The underlying objective of our HR Strategy will be to build long-term capacity for the organisation and to help us to anticipate and adapt to change. We must ensure that we set and achieve high standards of service; use resources effectively; innovate and improve; and develop the most effective means of service delivery. It is our staff, their skills, knowledge, capabilities, personal development and efforts which will enable this Office to achieve the vision for our organisation. The development of human resource management will also need to take into account the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 (Croke Park Agreement) and the impact of reduction in staff numbers.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Continue a strategic approach to human resource management and development aimed at optimising the availability of well trained and motivated staff required to meet business needs; and the flexibility to deploy people to best effect.

Effective Use of Information Technology

Like all organisations processing large volumes of transactions, modern computer-based information systems have become a central component in managing this organisation's information and communication flows. A new Asylum and Immigration Strategic Integration Programme (AISIP) has recently been introduced within INIS and ORAC played a lead role in the development of this new system. AISIP will increase functionality and will facilitate appropriate data exchanges, within relevant statutory frameworks, across the asylum and immigration areas and will provide the required statistical and management information. We also place continued importance on our Management Live IT System and other systems such as:

- AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System)
- AVATS (Automated Visa Application and Tracking System)
- EURODAC (EU Fingerprinting System)
- DubliNet.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Improve business processes effectiveness and integration through the strategic and effective use of information and communications technology.

International Cooperation

ORAC continues to recognise the importance of international cooperation with key partners in the field of asylum determination and best practice.

This particularly applies to areas such as:

- Building effective and efficient business processes.
- Quality Assurance.



- Utilisation of Country of Origin Information.
- Staff Training and Development.

We will continue to cooperate with colleagues in other states on asylum issues both bilaterally and in such fora as the European Union, European Asylum Support Office and the InterGovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC).

Enhancing cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the context of the delivery of both our mandates, will also be important.

Implementation

The Corporate Plan will be implemented in accordance with the principles of good corporate governance and best practice in the fields in question. Strategic objectives, actions and time frames will be incorporated in strategy statements and business plans.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the Plan will proceed at unit and corporate level and will aim to:

- Provide information which may indicate required changes in strategy.
- Inform priority actions and plan for subsequent strategies.

A comprehensive evaluation of the Plan will be conducted as its life-span draws to a conclusion.

Reporting

Progress on implementing the Plan will be reported internally through management and partnership structures and externally in ORAC's Annual Report to enable:

- Developments to be recorded and reviewed.
- Removal of obstacles to progress where identified.
- Revision of priorities or action time frames where required.
- Comment and input from stakeholders and staff.

The priority will be the efficient and effective utilisation of resources having due regard at all times to the fair and impartial implementation of our statutory obligations.



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