

**Office of the Refugee Applications  
Commissioner**



**Strategy Statement 2016-2018**

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## **Foreword by the Refugee Applications Commissioner**

I am pleased to present the fifth Strategy Statement for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner covering the period 2016 to 2018.

This Statement aims to provide clear direction for ORAC's activities over the coming years and in advance of the commencement of the International Protection Act, 2015 which will see the Office subsumed back into the Department of Justice and Equality within an independent framework contained in that legislation.

In the interim, ORAC will continue to undertake its existing statutory responsibilities in an efficient and fair manner in respect of our mandate which covers refugee status, subsidiary protection and family reunification under the Refugee Act, 1996, relevant statutory instruments and EU law. We will also carry out our new role in relation to processing asylum applications from persons who are transferred to Ireland under the EU Relocation Programme which is provided for by two EU Council Decisions adopted in the latter half of 2015.

Our Strategy Statement reflects the framework of previous Statements in terms of High Level Goals, associated objectives, strategies and performance indicators and sets a clear direction for the organisation generally and for our staff. As well as undertaking our existing functions, a key work priority in the short term will be planning for the commencement of the International Protection Act, 2015 and the introduction of a single application process for international protection and permission to remain in the State.

Another key priority will be the maintenance of our organisation's customer service ethos and the development of quality decision making in all work areas.

The objectives in this Statement will not be achievable without the continued commitment of our staff. In this regard, I would like to pay tribute to staff members and to members of the ORAC Case Processing Panel and express my appreciation for their ongoing hard work and commitment to our statutory duties in respect of applicants for international protection and for continuing to ensure a high level of professionalism in their important investigation and decision making functions.

Thanks also to our key stakeholders for their co-operation and support within our respective statutory frameworks.

David Costello  
Refugee Applications Commissioner.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner in accordance with the Refugee Act, 1996, the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013 and other relevant national<sup>1</sup> and international law 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,*
  - (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,*
- and*
- (iii) *to investigate applications for subsidiary protection and to issue appropriate recommendations 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 and open, treating all applicants with courtesy and sensitivity.

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<sup>1</sup> The statutory functions of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) are set out in the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) and relevant secondary legislation such as the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations, 2006 (S.I. No. 518 of 2006), European Communities (Asylum Procedures) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No. 51 of 2011) and Refugee Act, 1996 (Asylum Procedures) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No. 52 of 2011), European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013 (S.I. No 426 of 2013) and the European Union (Dublin System) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No 525 of 2014).

# Our Values and Guiding Principles

In carrying out the work of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner we are guided by the following key values and principles:

## **Independence**

- To maintain independence of process and decision making.

## **Fairness and Respect**

- To provide fair, transparent and quality procedures which are notified to applicants where available in a language they understand and having regard to the requirement under national law to protect the identity of applicants.
- To treat applicants with respect.
- To provide all interested parties with all available information regarding our procedures, services and decisions.
- To acknowledge the contribution, input and views of other agencies involved in the asylum area.

## **Firmness**

- To ensure firmness in implementing our statutory obligations.

## **Service**

- To provide a high quality service to applicants and other stakeholders.
- To deliver that service in a manner that is at all times professional, effective and respectful.

## **Accessibility**

- To make our services and information accessible to people with disabilities in line with the requirements of national disability legislation.

## **Commitment to Staff**

- To foster an environment in which staff can work effectively and develop their potential for the benefit of the Office specifically and their careers generally.
- To enable staff to operate in a knowledge intensive environment, which requires an in-depth understanding of a wide range of complex, legal, cultural and human issues.

## **Commitment to Excellence and Professionalism**

- To encourage the highest standards of job performance possible from each member of staff.
- To perform every aspect of our work to the highest professional standards ensuring high quality outputs.

## **Openness**

- To seek and recognise the views of applicants, their representatives and relevant stakeholders.
- To demonstrate accountability for our actions through transparent procedures.

**Efficiency in the Use of Available Resources**

- To ensure efficiency in our response to challenges in the optimum use of available resources without compromising quality.
- To utilise new technology to improve services, performance and the working environment.

**Partnership**

- To have a consultative approach to workplace innovation and management of change.
- To value diversity, actively seek contributions and commit to open discussion.
- To foster a culture of participation, openness and mutual respect.

**In holding all these values and principles, it is critical to maintain flexibility in both our structures and strategies so that we can respond appropriately to changing demands.**

# INTRODUCTION

## Our Mandate

### **Refugee Status and Family Reunification**

The Refugee Act, 1996 states that the Refugee Applications Commissioner shall be independent in the exercise of his or her functions which are of a statutory and non-statutory nature. Our key statutory responsibilities are:

- to investigate applications from persons seeking a declaration for refugee status and to issue appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality,
- 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,
- to investigate applications for subsidiary protection and to issue appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality, on such applications.

Under the Refugee Act, 1996 it is also the Commissioner's responsibility to:

- issue Temporary Residence Certificates to asylum seekers.
- comply with any Ministerial Directives concerning the prioritisation of certain categories of applicant.
- direct the presentation of the Commissioner's case to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal where recommendations made by the Commissioner are appealed to the Tribunal.
- furnish to the UNHCR, as well as relevant Government agencies, information as provided for in legislation.
- refer unaccompanied minors to the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) in line with section 8(5) of the Refugee Act, 1996, (as amended).

While ultimately responsible for fulfilling these statutory functions under the 1996 Act, the Commissioner may delegate these functions to any member of his staff.

### **Subsidiary Protection**

ORAC also has responsibility for the investigation and determination of subsidiary protection applications under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013 ("the 2013 Regulations").

Under the 2013 Regulations, the Commissioner is independent in the exercise of his functions.

### **Relocation**

Operate mechanisms set out in the EU Relocation Decisions in conjunction with the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.

## **Our Strategy Statement**

Our Strategy Statement continues to build on the considerable achievements of the ORAC since its establishment in 2000. As we implement the strategies and related process changes set out in this Statement, we will ensure that our structures continue to evolve to support our strategies, by developing Annual Business Plans, giving effect to our Customer Service Action Plan and reviewing our progress in Annual Reports. Our aim continues to be the development of an integrated organisation, which brings a case and risk management approach to the way we do our business. Our strategies, structures and processes must all be aligned for ORAC to be effective.

The Strategy Statement and its implementation will be subject to ongoing review to ensure its responsiveness and relevance to our legislative and business environment including in relation to the subsuming of ORAC into the Department of Justice and Equality in the context of the independent framework provided in the International Protection Act, 2015.

## **Statement Structure**

The Statement sets out five High Level Goals which will guide us over the period of its application together with the objectives, associated strategies and indicators against which progress can be judged.

Part 1 of the Statement provides an analysis of our policy and working environment and sets out three High Level Goals covering the operational areas of the Office:

- to investigate applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and for family reunification within minimum timeframes.
- to maintain the highest standard of investigation and decision-making.
- to ensure applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and family reunification are dealt with in an open, fair and impartial manner and that the integrity of the process is preserved.

Part 2 focuses on two High Level Goals which cover our customer and business strategies:

- to maintain excellent customer service.
- to efficiently and effectively manage our organisation and its resources in line with best practice, taking into account allocated resources and having regard to the development and training of our staff.

## **Consultation**

The Strategy Statement has been informed by the views and feedback received on foot of consultations held within the Office.

## **Implementation and Review**

The implementation of this Strategy Statement is relevant to all staff in ORAC. It will be reflected in our business planning process and service delivery.

At unit level, business plans will contain annual action programmes to implement strategies and achieve goals and will provide for regular reviews of progress throughout the year.

At individual level, the business plans will be used as a basis for role profiles and goal setting in the Performance Management and Development System. Progress in achieving our stated goals will be set out in the Annual Report which the Commissioner presents to the Minister for Justice and Equality.

## **Critical Success Factors**

The following factors have been identified as being critical in determining our ability to achieve our goals and objectives:

- **Sufficient resources and appropriately trained staff**  
The availability of sufficient resources and suitably trained staff to complete our work without compromising quality is fundamental to the achievement of targets.
- **The support of our staff and our support of them**  
Well trained, committed and motivated staff are crucial to the successful delivery of services.
- **Independent Status**  
Independence guaranteed by statutory provisions is important for the effective working of the Office within its present statutory framework.
- **Access to Information**  
Appropriate information on the countries of origin of protection applicants, international reports and relevant jurisprudence are essential for the evaluation of applications for refugee status, subsidiary protection and other relevant services delivered by our Office.
- **Standards, Systems & Procedures and Work Practices**  
The work of the Office must be organised and based on the application of the highest professional standards and practices for the performance and management of the work with clear guidance and good communication.
- **Information and Communications Technology**  
Maximising the application of Information and Communications Technology is key to the efficient discharge of the functions of the Office.
- **Co-operation of applicants and legal representatives**  
Timely and complete responses required from asylum, subsidiary protection and family reunification applicants and their legal representatives in order to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives.

- **Liaison with other Government agencies and offices, including relevant international bodies**

Effective and co-ordinated liaison with other agencies providing services to asylum and subsidiary protection applicants is important to the effective working of the Office.

## **Structure**

The work of the Office is structured around the following Units:

- Administration, Arrangements and Presenting Unit
- Asylum Case Processing Unit
- Corporate and Customer Service Centre
- Dublin Unit
- Family Reunification Unit
- Judicial Review and Investigation Unit
- Procedures, Training and Organisation Development Unit
- Reception Unit
- Reporting and Analysis Unit (ORAC aspects)
- Single Procedure Planning Unit
- Staff Support, COI/Research and Legal Analysis Unit
- Training and Freedom of Information Unit
- Subsidiary Protection Unit
- Relocation Unit

# **Part 1**

## **Policy and Working Environment and High Level Goals 1-3**

# **Policy and Working Environment and High Level Goals 1-3**

## **Overview**

ORAC undertakes its work within a challenging environment with both internal and international factors influencing the operations of our organisation. For example, the evolving global environment with changing conflicts and country conditions can result in refugee movements, which in turn affect the number of applications for asylum in Ireland. Trends in application numbers are also influenced by a multiplicity of other factors such as changing migration patterns, into and within Europe. Domestic asylum and immigration policies and changing Government priorities can have a direct impact on our workload and on the nature and type of cases that we receive. Policy development in the area of asylum in the European Union and in other fora also has an important impact on ORAC's mandate. In this context, it is necessary to be flexible enough to adapt quickly to changing demands and trends. Some of the main factors affecting our organisation and the environment in which we operate are set out below.

## **Diversity, Quality, Scale and Complexity**

ORAC is fully committed to applying fairness to all aspects of our work. We recognise that some applicants who apply for refugee or subsidiary protection status have experienced particularly difficult and traumatic circumstances and, accordingly, we respect the diversity of cultures of applicants with whom we deal. Importantly, this means that we acknowledge that the determination of each individual application directly affects the lives of people. One of the challenges facing us is the fact that even though approximately half of our current applications arise from 2 countries, over 80 countries are represented in our current case load. The considerable cultural and language diversity among our applicants raises ongoing communication issues, as well as issues related to interpretation and translation to and from a large number of languages. At the time of drafting, the number of asylum applications in the State was increasing very substantially again on 2014 and are more than triple 2013 numbers. The unpredictability of asylum trends, in particular, will continue to provide an ongoing test of the flexibility and versatility of our staff and other resources. Along with those making applications for asylum in the State, Ireland, in response to an international refugee crisis has established the Irish Refugee Protection Programme which will see over 2,500 asylum seekers relocated to the State from Greece and Italy under two EU Council Decisions for processing by ORAC.

## **Legislative Environment**

Legislation in the area of international protection will continue to evolve and change having regard to developments at both national and international levels. This will require flexibility in our systems and procedures. At domestic level, the International Protection Act, 2015 is expected to become law in 2016 and will see the transformation of the existing multi-layered process into a single application procedure for protection and permission to remain in the State. At EU level, ongoing changes in the legislation governing the Common European Asylum System will also have an impact on the first instance protection process in Ireland.

## **Jurisprudence**

ORAC must follow decisions of the Irish Superior Courts (High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court) and this requires appropriate responses from us to court judgments. ORAC must also take account of jurisprudence emanating from the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights.

## **Liaison with other public bodies and with civil society generally**

ORAC continues to build on efforts we have initiated over the past years to establish new and flexible mechanisms to enhance ongoing dialogue and to ensure that we are responsive to the issues raised during ongoing consultations with our stakeholders. This includes meetings with stakeholders on specific issues.

The continued enhancement of our Customer Service ethos is important for this purpose.

## **International Developments**

ORAC must also take account of and, where possible, input into, asylum practice and procedures in the European Union. This includes developments in relation to the operation of the Common European Asylum System and the European Asylum Support Office. The work involved is multi-faceted and impacts on policy, legislation and operations.

A particular priority will be ORAC's input into the implementation of the EU Relocation Programme which will see applicants for asylum transferred under EU Decisions from Greece and Italy (and possibly other Member States in the future) to the State to have their protection applications dealt with here.

## **High Level Goal 1**

### **To investigate applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and for family reunification within minimum timeframes**

#### **HLG 1 Objective No 1**

**To ensure the maximum number of recommendations in respect of protection applications issue within minimum timeframes, in line with fair procedures and having due regard to legislative requirements on prioritisation as set out by the Minister for Justice and Equality.**

Over the next three years, the priority of this Office is to continue delivering quality recommendations in a consistent, timely and legally robust manner in respect of international protection applications to the Minister for Justice and Equality. Our continued focus will be to schedule interviews for applicants on the day they apply for protection. Where possible, we will ensure all new Ministerial prioritised cases are dealt with within seventeen to twenty days from the initial date of application and process all other cases as quickly as possible. In line with international trends, the number of asylum applications is increasing and this trend is expected to continue over the period of this Statement. Coupled with this we expect to process over 2,500 additional cases under the EU Relocation Programme. As a result our caseload for processing has increased substantially.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Process all new prioritised asylum cases within 17/20 days of initial application and reduce existing processing times for other (non-prioritised) cases predicated on having the necessary resources available and all sanctioned staff in place and fully trained. Special arrangements will continue to apply to applicants in detention and to unaccompanied minors.
- Process all new asylum cases under the EU Relocation Programme expeditiously on arrival in the State predicated on having the necessary resources available and all sanctioned staff in place and fully trained.
- Process all subsidiary protection cases, including prioritised cases, on a chronological basis predicated on having the necessary resources available and all sanctioned staff in place and fully trained.
- Special arrangements will continue to apply to unaccompanied minors.
- Maximise monthly protection interviews scheduled, completed and recommendations made, including through use of the ORAC Case Processing Panel, having due regard to resources available and changing trends in application numbers.
- Apply processes and procedures to effectively implement the directives of the Minister for Justice and Equality.

- Ensure sufficient case workers available for processing including members of the ORAC Case Processing Panel.
- Prepare, implement and review annual business plans with a strong focus on outputs.
- Maintain an effective pre-interview preparation process in respect of our international protection mandate. The expertise of legal support from within and outside ORAC will be maximised for the more difficult and complex cases.
- Apply a proactive scheduling policy to make use of interviewer availability including the ORAC Case Processing Panel in order to maximise the number of interviews completed and recommendations made. This policy will ensure interviews are scheduled in a manner which reduces the likelihood of call back interviews having due regard to fair procedures.
- Streamline operational processes to maximise productivity in processing applications and monitor and review processes (including those in relation to quality) on an ongoing basis to ensure that planned outcomes are achieved, having due regard to changing trends in international protection applications and resources available.
- Support Case Processing Units, ORAC Case Processing Panel and staff in their work through the provision of training, accessible, reputable and timely country of origin information and policy guidelines.
- Ensure that we have the necessary training resources in place to cater for our current and future training needs including in relation to the implementation of the planned new legislative framework under the International Protection Act, 2015. For this purpose, intensive co-operation will be maintained with UNHCR.
- Maximise the use of information and communications technology including the ORAC Management Live system, the Asylum and Immigration Strategic Integration Programme (AISIP), the EU Dublin Net system, EURODAC and related immigration systems.
- Build on our internal quality assurance programme to ensure the monitoring of the recommendations issued.
- Ensure statistical reporting requirements are delivered on time.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Processing times are within guidelines set down.
- Maximisation of scheduling, interviews and recommendations made on a monthly basis, having due regard to changing trends in international protection applications, resources available, quality decision making and fair procedures.
- Compliance with directives of the Minister for Justice and Equality under national law.
- Effective and timely delivery of the actions and projects set out in ORAC's Business Plans.

- Focused interviews and reports in line with standard templates developed with UNHCR with reduction in the number of call backs, complaints and potential judicial reviews.
- Extent to which interviewer availability including that of the ORAC Case Processing Panel is fully optimised as evidenced by monthly reports.
- Achievement of set targets of interviews completed and recommendations finalised within agreed timeframes, having due regard to changing trends in international protection applications, resources available, quality decision making and fair procedures.
- Efficient and timely access to Country of Origin Information (COI) systems in place, in liaison with the Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC), together with relevant training and policy guidelines.
- Adequately trained staff including the ORAC Case Processing Panel - appropriate staff training delivered as required.
- Maximum use made of information and communications technology.
- The issuing of quality and legally robust recommendations ensuring the number of judicial reviews are minimised.
- Maximum use made of resources of the Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC) in order to provide comprehensive and impartial country of origin information.
- Statistical reporting requirements delivered on time.

## **HLG 1 Objective No 2**

**To achieve the full and efficient application of EU and national legislation relating to the Dublin process hereafter referred to as “the EU Dublin Regulation”, having due regard to the criteria for determining the Member State responsible for processing asylum applications.**

### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Investigate and prepare determinations (transfer decisions) on all Dublin cases in an effective, efficient and fair manner having due regard to legislative and regulatory timescales.
- Maintain links with other Member States and relevant agencies to achieve effective implementation of the EU Dublin Regulation.
- Liaise with other relevant Units within ORAC, with relevant Divisions of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) and with the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) to ensure that all provisions of the EU Dublin Regulation are implemented to maximum effect.

- Streamline procedures to maximise productivity in processing cases under the EU Dublin Regulation particularly by ensuring that all staff have the necessary training to multi-task and monitor and review policies and procedures continuously to ensure planned outcomes are achieved.
- Ensure that the use of relevant information and communications technology including EURODAC, Dublin Net and AISIP and other relevant IT systems are maximised.
- Ensure that relevant domestic case law and that of the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights is made available and that this case law informs the determinations prepared under the EU Dublin Regulation.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Processing times are within guidelines set down.
- Maximum use made of the EU Dublin Regulation in order to transfer cases to/from other Member States within prescribed timeframes and the relevant statutory frameworks.
- Active co-operation with relevant Units in ORAC and enhanced co-operation with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) and with the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) in relation to the operation of the EU Dublin Regulation process within relevant statutory framework.
- Planned outcomes achieved within agreed timeframes.
- Maximum use made of relevant information and communications technology including EURODAC, DublinNet and AISIP.
- EU Dublin Regulation determinations are legally robust having regard to domestic and international case law.

#### **HLG 1 Objective No 3**

**To achieve optimum productivity in processing applications for family reunification within minimum timeframes.**

ORAC will continue to prepare and complete comprehensive legally robust reports, within minimum timeframes (from the date of referral to the Commissioner by the Minister for Justice and Equality), on family reunification applications from those granted refugee status under the Refugee Act, 1996 who subsequently seek permission for family members to enter and reside in the State. In preparing these reports, we set out the relationship between the refugee concerned and the subject(s) of the application, the domestic circumstances of the person(s) and forward these reports to the Minister for Justice and Equality for consideration and decision.

### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Process all applications for family reunification within minimum timeframes and, to the fullest extent possible, in chronological order of receipt from the Minister for Justice and Equality.
- Liaise with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) to achieve effective processing of family reunification applications within the statutory framework.
- Deliver the actions and projects set out in ORAC's Business Plan in relation to family reunification.
- Monitor and review family reunification procedures to ensure objectives are being achieved and to ensure that the procedures continue to be relevant.
- Monitor and review the questionnaires to be completed by applicants to ensure that they capture all the necessary information while remaining accessible to the applicants.
- Ensure that we have the necessary training resources in place in relation to family reunification to cater for our current and future training needs and to ensure that staff are in a position to carry out all the functions of the Unit.
- Enhance the quality of investigations and reports by making maximum use of research material provided by the RDC and by using AISIP as an investigative tool.
- Examine the feasibility of using other assessment techniques to establish the bona fides of an applicant for family reunification and his/her relationship to the subject(s) of the application.
- Engage fully in the business transformation process by working with other areas of INIS with particular reference to family reunification aspects to ensure smooth transition following commencement of the International Protection Act, 2015.
- Ensure that the appropriate guidance notes and training are in place to enable staff to have a clear and shared understanding of the mission, policies and procedures of the unified Family Reunification Unit.

### *Performance Indicators*

- Section 18 (Refugee Act, 1996) reports prepared within agreed timeframes.
- Effective communications with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service.
- Achievement of set targets in the Business Plan in relation to family reunification within agreed timeframes including in relation to completion of quality reports.
- Family Reunification procedures and documentation, including questionnaires, reviewed and amended as appropriate.

- The use of other assessment techniques examined to determine if they could enhance the quality of investigation of family reunification applications.
- Maximum use made of resources of the Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC) in order to provide comprehensive and impartial country of origin information on matters such as formalities of marriage and adoption.
- Effective engagement with the business transformation process to ensure smooth transition following the commencement of the International Protection Act, 2015 with agreed procedures, processes, documentation and training in place.

#### **HLG 1 Objective No 4**

**To prepare and plan for the introduction of a single procedure in the context of the commencement of the International Protection Act, 2015 and address fully and effectively any amendments to other legislation as they arise.**

The International Protection Act, 2015 provides for the introduction of a single procedure to determine all aspects of a person's application to remain in the State (refugee status, subsidiary protection and permission to remain type issues), and will result in ORAC being subsumed into the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) within the statutory independent framework provided.

ORAC will continue to work with INIS in regard to the commencement in full of the new legislation and transition to the single procedure.

ORAC will continue to review and, where necessary, revise its procedures and policies to take account of emerging trends and challenges in the international protection area, and of national and international jurisprudence.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Continue to engage fully in the business transformation process in INIS and with other relevant agencies and stakeholders regarding planning for the new legislative framework associated with the commencement of the International Protection Act, 2015 and the single procedure.
- Prioritise the work of a transition team to plan and prepare for the introduction of the International Protection Act, 2015.
- Inform staff about the legislative amendments and particularly those with direct implications for ORAC.
- Develop and deliver the required training, in co-operation with UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders, to facilitate efficient and effective implementation of new legislative changes as they occur.

- Ensure that the required changes to structures, processes or procedures are developed to cater for the proposed legislative amendments.
- Ensure that ORAC has the necessary resources in place to implement legislative changes.
- Liaise with relevant stakeholders about transition process.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Effective and full participation in the relevant project groups in INIS planning for the new legislative framework and the single procedure.
- Work of Transition Team prioritised to plan and prepare for the introduction of the International Protection Act, 2015.
- Staff informed about the new legislation especially any aspects with direct implications for ORAC.
- Trained staff in place to effectively implement the legislative changes.
- New structures, processes and procedures in place within agreed timeframes.
- Relevant stakeholders are informed about transition process.
- Planned outcomes achieved within agreed timeframes.
- Maximum use made of relevant information and communications technology.
- New work practices in accordance with legislative amendments implemented within agreed timeframes.
- Procedures and policies are in line with developments in legislation, jurisprudence and international best practice.

#### **HLG 1 Objective No 5**

**To ensure the successful operation of the EU relocation mechanisms, support the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) and support EASO and other Member States.**

As part of its response to the migration crisis in central and southern Europe, the Government decided to opt into EU Council Decisions 2015/1523 and 2015/1601 establishing the EU relocation

mechanism. Under the relocation mechanism over 2,500 asylum seekers will be brought to Ireland from migration hotspots in Greece and Italy (and possibly other Member States in the future).

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Provide liaison officers for IRPP.
- Provide Seconded National Experts to ‘hotspots’ in other Member States, as required.
- Provide orientation material to applicants in Member States.
- Transmit numbers and preferences to EASO/Member States.
- Forward proposed relocation candidates to Irish Refugee Protection Programme.
- Transmit decisions on acceptance to EASO/Member States.
- Liaise with Irish Refugee Protection Programme, the International Organisation for Migration and Member States on transport and other logistical arrangements.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Liaison Officers in place.
- Seconded National Experts in place, as required.
- Orientation material to applicants in Member States provided.
- Numbers and preferences transmitted to EASO/Member States.
- Proposed relocation candidates forwarded to Irish Refugee Protection Programme.
- Decisions on acceptance transmitted to EASO/Member States.
- Effective communication with Irish Refugee Protection Programme, the International Organisation for Migration and Member States on transport and other logistical arrangements.

## High Level Goal 2

### **To maintain the highest standard of investigation and decision-making**

#### **HLG 2 Objective No 1**

##### **To investigate and assess applications to a consistently high standard.**

The focus of ORAC since its establishment is to deliver well reasoned, legally robust, consistent and high quality recommendations on applications for refugee status, family reunification and, since November 2013, subsidiary protection in an efficient and fair manner and in accordance with the law and best international practice.

This will continue to be achieved by developing and enhancing our training practices, policies and procedures and research arrangements prior to interview, in conjunction with the use of the various internal and external research facilities available to our organisation. Our quality assurance systems ensure that up to date research information is being used taking into account the requirements of vulnerable applicants such as persons with disabilities, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors and victims of torture. Our procedures are also being continually monitored and developed to ensure the requirements of these vulnerable groups are met. The work of the European Asylum Support Office in the area of best practice training and quality will continue to guide our processes and standards.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Develop staff and the ORAC Case Processing Panel, by continuing to invest in high quality training, in conjunction with the UNHCR and the European Asylum Support Office, on the job mentoring and feedback as well as support structures.
- Ensure case processing staff and the ORAC Case Processing Panel are fully supported in carrying out their work responsibilities and are enabled to do so in a dignified manner.
- Continue to develop and apply processes and procedures designed to standardise case processing methodology.
- Ensure that all ORAC areas are consulted, as appropriate, in relation to the development and introduction of any new or changed procedures and standards.
- Maintain and further develop Country of Origin Information (COI) resources, in liaison with the Refugee Documentation Centre, including training on accessing the resources provided by the RDC such as the eLibrary system as well as relevant, reliable and reputable websites where quality and concise information is available as a source of guidance on recurring and complex issues arising in protection applications.
- Provide support (with training and input by legal experts) to ensure the legal rigour and language of the statutory reports supporting ORAC recommendations, as appropriate.

- Enhance co-operation with UNHCR in relation to the effective and fair operation of the first instance asylum process, including the development of Quality assurance initiatives and the delivery of training.
- Maintain, further develop, implement and monitor a Quality Assurance system.
- Continue to implement procedures, including ongoing training programmes, to take account of the special needs of vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors and victims of torture.
- Provide quality and timely interpretation and translation needs.
- Attend EU including EASO and other relevant international fora to keep up-to-date with developments in relation to asylum matters and provide reports to all relevant staff.
- Implement the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and strengthen cooperation among EU Member States.
- Provide timely and appropriate responses to requests from the Refugee Appeals Tribunal under section 16(6) and 16(7) of the Refugee Act, 1996. The same applies to requests from the Tribunal under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations, 2013.
- Cooperate with EU and other states in the exchange of information (including under the EU Dublin Regulation) to protect the integrity of the asylum process within relevant statutory frameworks.
- Utilise the AISIP and AVATS IT systems as a reference for applications.
- Utilise the ORAC Investigation Unit in liaison with INIS investigations where required.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Quality training (including standards developed by the European Asylum Support Office) and development opportunities and other necessary support provided to ORAC staff including the ORAC Case Processing Panel.
- Standardised and up to date policies and procedures developed in relation to the management and investigation of applications.
- Satisfactory cross unit communications in place.
- Quality, up-to-date, reliable, objective COI systems maintained and developed in liaison with the RDC, with particular reference to selected countries where recurring and complex issues arise.
- Efficient and timely COI systems including maximum use made of the resources of the Refugee Documentation Centre.
- Legally robust recommendations in accordance with relevant legislation leading to a minimum number of judicial reviews.

- A Quality Assurance system in place which provides information for monitoring and review in relation to quality and consistency of investigations.
- Enhanced liaison with UNHCR generally and UNHCR confidence in our Quality Assurance systems.
- Procedures and trained caseworkers in place to deal with the special needs of vulnerable groups.
- An interpretation and translation service with a quality assurance mechanism.
- EU including EASO and other relevant international meetings and workshops attended and reports and relevant information on best international practice disseminated within ORAC.
- Implementation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and strengthening of cooperation between EU Member States.
- All section 16(6) and 16(7) requests from the Refugee Appeals Tribunal responded to promptly. The same applies to requests from the Tribunal under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations, 2013
- Misuse of the asylum process identified in cooperation with other EU states and integrity of process protected on an ongoing basis.
- To ensure that AISIP and AVATS IT systems are used to their full effect, and the information and data accessed through AISIP will lead to better and more efficient decision making.
- To ensure that AISIP, Management Live and other IT systems are used to provide optimal management information and statistics.
- To ensure that there is maximum co-ordination between the various IT systems in ORAC and other relevant agencies.

## **HLG 2 Objective No 2**

### **To continue to have transparent and impartial procedures.**

ORAC will carry out its statutory responsibilities in a manner which is clear, professional and efficient thereby ensuring all applicants are treated with fair, open and impartial procedures. ORAC will continue to endeavour to consult with, as appropriate, and to issue clear and precise information to all the relevant stakeholders in order to keep them updated on relevant changes to procedures, legislation and service delivery.

### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Provide comprehensive information concerning the international protection application process to applicants, where available, in a language they understand, in line with our statutory obligations.
- Undertake initial and substantive interview for international protection with the assistance of an interpreter, if required, in line with our statutory requirements.
- Provide information on an ongoing basis especially with regard to changes in procedures - to the Refugee Legal Service, Customer Service Liaison Panel, the UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders.
- Enable applicants who have special needs to access and participate in the international protection process.
- Support vulnerable applicants insofar as practicable to access and participate in the international protection process.
- Maintain and further develop current procedures for referral of applicants who appear to be unaccompanied minors to TUSLA (Child and Family Agency).
- Seek the views of the Customer Service Liaison Panel in relation to procedural issues, where appropriate.

### *Performance Indicators*

- Applicants provided with comprehensive information regarding the international protection process in a language they understand, in line with our statutory obligations.
- Initial and substantive interviews for international protection completed with the assistance of an interpreter, if required, in line with our statutory requirements.
- Refugee Legal Service, Customer Service Liaison Panel, UNHCR and other stakeholders informed of changes to processes and procedures.
- Access to the international protection process complies with the legislative requirements in relation to applicants with special needs.
- Fair and effective procedures in place in relation to vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors.
- TUSLA referral procedures in respect of those who appear to be unaccompanied minors, monitored and updated where necessary.
- Customer Service Liaison Panel feedback on ORAC's procedural matters considered and addressed as appropriate.

## High Level Goal 3

**To ensure applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and family reunification are dealt with in an open, fair and impartial manner and that the integrity of the process is preserved**

### HLG 3 Objective No 1

**To identify as quickly as possible, in an effective and fair manner, those applicants who come within the definition of a refugee contained in Section 2 of the Refugee Act, 1996 or persons eligible for subsidiary protection in the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013.**

For an applicant to be granted refugee status, he/she must establish that he/she has suffered past persecution and have a well founded fear of persecution based on one of the grounds set out in the Refugee Act, 1996, i.e. race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

For an applicant to be granted subsidiary protection, he/she must establish that he/she has suffered past serious harm based on one of the grounds set out in the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations, 2006 or the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations, 2013.

Serious harm means –

- (a) death penalty or execution; or
- (b) torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of a person in his or her country of origin; or
- (c) serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict.

Interviews are conducted on a one to one basis within ORAC in a non-adversarial manner to ensure the interviewer is able to get the full facts from the applicant in relation to their background, history and their activities in their country of origin. The forward looking fear of returning to their country of origin is covered as well as any past persecution or serious harm in their country. In addition to material submitted by applicants to support their claims, caseworkers should have timely access to relevant country of origin information to consider conditions in the applicant's country of origin as well as assessing the credibility of the applicant.

This Office will continue to ensure that unfounded claims are dealt with in a speedy manner while also ensuring our protection obligations under national and international law are met.

### *Strategy to Support Objective*

- Maintain and support an environment which facilitates the applicant in freely communicating the circumstances surrounding his/her application including with the use of interpretation and translation services.
- Apply processes and procedures to implement effectively the directive of the Minister for Justice and Equality in relation to the prioritisation of certain applications being processed.
- Maintain and review procedures in relation to a detained person wishing to apply for protection recognising that such a person is prioritised under the terms of the Refugee Act, 1996.
- Analyse and screen applications for the early identification of possible well founded cases. This may include the use of language analysis where appropriate.
- Maintain an effective and proactive scheduling policy to enable applicants to be scheduled for interview as quickly as possible.
- Maintain an effective pre-interview preparation process to ensure focused interviews and reports.
- Analyse and investigate issues in order to support and enhance interview preparation.
- Provide timely and well reasoned recommendations aided by information technology and supported by good report writing, quality templates and reliable country of origin information and other protection research material.
- Maximise monthly interviews scheduled and completed and recommendations made having due regard to resources available including through the use of the ORAC Case Processing Panel.

### *Performance Indicators*

- Quality information collected and recorded.
- The directive of the Minister for Justice and Equality in relation to the prioritisation of applications fully implemented.
- ORAC notified as soon as a detained person wishes to make a protection application and the person visited at the place of detention by ORAC staff within three working days for their application to be processed.
- Early identification of possible manifestly well founded applications.
- Applicants scheduled for interview on day of application in so far as possible.
- Effective pre-interview preparation as evidenced by quality, up-to-date, reliable and objective COI and protection determination research material.

- Effective investigative framework in place to support the interview process.
- Objective research and analysis of claims completed and legally robust and high quality recommendations made to the Minister for Justice and Equality in respect of applications for international protection.
- Maximisation of monthly interviews scheduled and completed and recommendations made having due regard to changes in protection trends and resources available.

### **HLG 3 Objective No 2**

#### **To detect and minimise abuse of the protection process.**

It is essential that we fully honour our obligations under national and international law in relation to protection applicants who have a genuine fear of persecution or serious harm. This is the basis for the processes and procedures in place in ORAC in order to fully assist those seeking protection. Regrettably, it has been found that some applicants make claims which cannot be substantiated or which prove fraudulent, unfounded or fail in other ways to co-operate with the protection process. These applications do a disservice to genuine protection applicants and the public at large and can result in the resources of the organisation being utilised in less than the most efficient and effective manner. It is important for the integrity of the Irish protection process that those who do not meet the statutory requirements for refugee status or subsidiary protection, or who should be excluded from protection, are not allowed to avail of or misuse this important process.

The AISIP IT system, AVATS (visa system), DublinNet, EURODAC and other relevant IT systems enable staff in ORAC to access up to date details regarding a person, any applications they have made in the past or are in the process of making and the status of those applications. These systems will continue to be utilised in order to verify and support applications for international protection or to identify any inconsistencies.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Continue to work with UNHCR with a view to improving procedures including quality templates for protection reports to preserve the integrity of the protection process.
- Carry out any investigation necessary to maximise outcomes.
- Provide an investigative support to other areas in ORAC.
- Assess and translate relevant documents (or parts thereof) submitted by applicants as quickly and professionally as possible.
- Liaise and enhance co-operation with the Garda National Immigration Bureau, INIS and with other relevant State agencies, to detect and prevent misuse of the asylum process.
- Maximise use of fingerprinting, including the AFIS electronic fingerprint system and the EURODAC system, to detect applicants who may apply more than once in the State and/or, as

appropriate, to determine the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States in accordance with the EU Dublin and EURODAC Regulations and relevant national legislation.

- Maximum use to be made of the AVATS system to check if applicants have previously been issued visas to enter Ireland.
- Maintain and review security features on Temporary Residence Certificate.
- Identify as quickly as possible those who fail to co-operate with the investigation of a protection application and take appropriate action.
- Investigate possible misuse of the protection process as provided for in national and international law, in order to protect its integrity.
- Liaise with the Reception and Integration Agency to update addresses of applicants.
- Implement legislative provisions designed to identify unfounded applications.
- Continue to develop COI resources, in liaison with RDC, to assist in the identification of false claims.
- Continue to use language analysis, where appropriate, in order to assist in establishing the veracity of an applicant's claim to be from a particular geographic area or speech community.
- Identify swiftly applicants who may have to be excluded from protection in accordance with the law.
- Continue to implement procedures to assist in arriving at an opinion as to whether a person should be deemed an adult or a minor in relation to their protection application.
- Continue to implement procedures to detect impersonation of applicants.
- Use AISIP and other relevant IT systems to the fullest extent, to establish an applicant's immigration history, and to identify any potential abuse of the system.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- The confidence of relevant stakeholders including the UNHCR in our process as evidenced by feedback, advice and comment.
- Maximum use made of investigative capacity in order to enhance the quality of determinations.
- All relevant documents assessed and translated professionally and promptly.
- Ongoing liaison with the Garda National Immigration Bureau, INIS and other relevant State agencies, to detect and prevent misuse of the protection process.

- Maximum use made of AFIS, AVATS, EURODAC and other relevant IT systems and multiple applicants identified.
- Security features on Temporary Residence Certificate maintained and reviewed.
- Applicants not co-operating with the protection process in line with their statutory obligations notified and a recommendation made in accordance with statutory requirements.
- Decisive action taken in respect of applicants who fail to cooperate with the investigation of their application.
- Misuse of the protection determination process investigated and dealt with having due regard to national and international protection obligations.
- Ongoing liaison with the Reception and Integration Agency maintained.
- Effective implementation of legislative provisions dealing with unfounded applications.
- Quality COI research developed and in place, in liaison with the RDC and other relevant sources.
- Language analysis interview carried out and report made available to caseworker in appropriate cases, in order to assist in establishing the veracity of an applicant's claim to be from a particular geographic area or speech community and to be considered in conjunction with all other elements of the protection claim.
- Exclusion clause applied appropriately in the report to the Minister for Justice and Equality and at oral hearings at the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.
- Agreed multi agency approach to age assessment best practice maintained.
- Early detection of impersonation by checking the details of applicants on arrival for interviews.
- Better informed protection recommendations.

### **HLG 3 Objective No 3**

#### **To represent the Commissioner at appeal hearings at the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.**

We will continue to provide high quality and maximum possible representation at oral appeal hearings in the Refugee Appeals Tribunal in respect of applications for refugee status, subsidiary protection and cases under the EU Dublin Regulation. Hearings will be serviced by Presenting Officers, including members of the ORAC Case Processing Panel, with the required knowledge, training and expertise to represent the Commissioner.

### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Continue to provide and train ORAC staff and the ORAC Case Processing Panel, to represent the Commissioner to the maximum extent possible having regard to resources available at Appeal Hearings of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT).
- Consider grounds of appeal and prepare a strategy to address the issues raised by the applicant and their legal representative(s).
- Work closely with the Refugee Appeals Tribunal within respective statutory frameworks, to ensure that the maximum number of hearings are scheduled for respective Presenting Officers.
- Respond at appeal hearings to the issues raised in the applicant's appeal and to assist the Member of Tribunal in reaching a fair and just decision.
- Provide timely and appropriate responses to requests from the Refugee Appeals Tribunal under section 16(6) and 16(7) of the Refugee Act, 1996 and under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations, 2013.

### *Performance Indicators*

- ORAC represented with a quality input at oral hearings in RAT.
- All grounds of appeal considered and a strategy prepared to respond to the grounds of appeal.
- Number of appeal hearings at which ORAC can be represented is maximised.
- Effective responses provided at appeal hearings to the issues raised in the applicant's grounds of appeal.
- Timely and appropriate responses to Refugee Appeals Tribunal requests under section 16(6) and 16(7) of the Refugee Act, 1996 and under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013.

### **HLG 3 Objective No 4**

**To develop our own policies and procedures to preserve the integrity of the protection process.**

We are committed to equipping our caseworkers (including ORAC Case Processing Panel) and decision-makers with the knowledge and skills to deliver high quality, fair, consistent and legally robust recommendations by providing high quality and objective Country of Origin Information (COI) including via the Refugee Documentation Centre (RDC), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), UNHCR and other relevant sources.

ORAC will also manage in a proactive, effective and efficient manner its judicial review caseload.

### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Ensure that the necessary policies and procedures are in place to support caseworkers in the investigation and determination of protection applications.
- Continue to deliver in-depth training in refugee status and subsidiary protection determination and COI research, in liaison with the RDC, to ORAC staff and the ORAC Case Processing Panel.
- Manage the provision of objective COI and refugee status and subsidiary protection determination material including making maximum use of ORAC's internal investigation capacity and the services of the RDC and the EASO country reports.
- Ensure our COI sources are up-to-date, relevant and as reliable as possible, and available to ORAC staff and the ORAC Case Processing Panel in a timely manner.
- Manage ORAC's response to legal challenges in order to support the integrity of the protection process, in close cooperation with the Chief State Solicitor's Office, and with other stakeholders.
- Provide accurate and timely management information on legal challenges and contribute to the ongoing review of such challenges and their implications for policies and procedures in the protection process.
- Continue to develop in-house knowledge of historic and evolving caselaw, including national, CJEU, ECtHR and that from other States.
- Minimise the costs arising from legal challenges to ORAC, in liaison with the Chief State Solicitor's Office and other relevant stakeholders, and contribute to the payment of Bills of Costs within the legislative timeframes.
- Prepare quality responses to judicial review applications.
- Provide feedback to caseworkers and other relevant staff on issues which gave rise to a successful judicial review or RAT set aside decisions.

### *Performance Indicators*

- Legally robust policies and procedures in place to support ORAC refugee status and subsidiary protection determinations.
- ORAC staff and the ORAC Case Processing Panel members who are highly trained in refugee status and subsidiary protection determination with relevant COI material, in place.
- Reliable, up to date and good quality, objective COI, from a variety of professional sources, used to support ORAC refugee status and subsidiary protection recommendations, family reunification reports and ORAC's input at hearings of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.
- Maximum use made of ORAC's internal investigation capacity and the services of the RDC.

- Reliable, up-to-date and relevant COI from public sources, which has been assessed by the RDC and/or is available from recognised COI databases such as the UNHCR's RefWorld database and the European Asylum Support Office utilised.
- Continued to interact proactively with the Chief State Solicitor's Office and other stakeholders as necessary, in order to reach efficient decisions on finalising cases, in instances of clear error or mistake, thereby minimising costs to the Exchequer, and also to ensure robust defence of legal challenges where this is deemed appropriate.
- Observations, instructions and, where necessary, affidavits forwarded to the Chief State Solicitor's Office within court deadlines, in consultation with other relevant stakeholders.
- Resources to support in-house knowledge of caselaw, including participation in external networks, maintained and kept under review.
- Resources, such as statistical information, to support the provision of accurate and timely management information concerning legal challenges to ORAC are maintained and kept under review.
- Bills of Costs efficiently reviewed and processed, to meet legislative timeframes.
- Units in ORAC aware of relevant court judgments and legal opinions and Refugee Appeals Tribunal set aside issues/decisions.

## **Part 2**

### **Customer Services and Business Support and High Level Goals 4 and 5**

## High Level Goal 4

### To maintain excellent customer service

#### HLG 4 Objective No 1

##### **To deliver high quality customer service.**

One of our main priorities is the provision of a professional, high quality and efficient service to all our customers. Working with our Customer Service Liaison Panel we will seek to maintain our high standards of customer service and continue to develop systems to help those seeking protection to engage fully in the protection application process.

##### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Ensure that all customers are made aware of the standards as set out in the Customer Charter and review the Customer Charter annually.
- Implement and monitor the Customer Service Action Plan and report on performance against standards in the Annual Report.
- Implement and monitor the Customer Complaints Procedure.
- Carry out surveys of customers to determine the level of customer satisfaction with ORAC's service delivery.
- Ensure that internal and external communications are addressed in each Unit's business plan and that they are reported on in each Annual Report.
- Support continuous development of staff by investing in high quality customer service training, as required.
- Provide high quality information in response to enquiries.
- Record and monitor communications using correspondence tracking systems.
- Liaise with Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), Irish Refugee Protection Programme, Department of Social Protection, UNHCR, Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT), Refugee Legal Service (RLS), the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA), Health Service Executive (HSE), An Garda Síochána and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who represent the interests of asylum seekers and refugees as well as other relevant stakeholders.
- Ensure that all stakeholders are made aware of any relevant developments in ORAC (concerning the determination process), as required.

- Engage fully in the INIS business transformation process.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Customer Charter leaflet issued to every new applicant. Customer Charter reviewed annually and any issues progressed.
- Customer Service Action Plan implemented, monitored and reported on in Annual Report.
- Feedback from ORAC stakeholders including through customer surveys.
- An operational Customer Complaints Procedure in place and monitored.
- Focused programme of customer surveys in place.
- Internal and External Communications addressed in Units' business plans.
- Internal and External Communications reported on in the Annual Report .
- An established programme of customer service training in place.
- Targets in Customer Service Action Plan and Customer Charter generally achieved.
- Correspondence tracking systems in place.
- Liaison meetings held with relevant stakeholders.
- Information provided on relevant developments in ORAC to stakeholders.
- Full engagement in the INIS business transformation process.

#### **HLG 4 Objective No 2**

##### **To provide clear information to customers regarding the international protection process.**

Information on the protection and the family reunification processes will continue to be made available to customers in a clear, transparent and accessible manner. All enquiries (written, in person, telephone and/or email) will be dealt with promptly and completely, as far as is practicable with the resources available.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Ensure the Information Leaflet for Applicants for protection is available in a range of languages and that all forms which issue are up-to-date.
- Ensure that information is made available in a user friendly format.

- Assess the requirements of persons with a disability and those with special needs and provide the information in an appropriate format where possible.
- Ensure a comprehensive Records Management System is in place to support customer service provision.
- Respond to correspondence in a prompt manner.
- Update the Customer Service Liaison Panel on significant new developments at meetings of the Panel.
- Participate at seminars and other public fora where information on the protection process is made available.
- Ensure that corporate documents and information relevant to the asylum, subsidiary protection and family reunification process are available and up-to-date on the ORAC website.
- Carry out customer surveys to assess customer satisfaction.
- Update and make maximum use of ORAC website as means of communication.

*Performance Indicators*

- Information Leaflets for Applicants for protection available in a range of languages and all forms which issue to applicants up-to-date.
- Information provided in a user friendly manner to all applicants.
- Information available in appropriate formats to persons with a disability and special needs.
- Comprehensive Records Management System to support customer service process in place.
- Responses to correspondence issued within the timeframes set out in the Customer Service Action Plan.
- Customer Service Liaison Panel meetings held and any significant developments notified to members.
- ORAC participation as appropriate at seminars and other public fora.
- All corporate documents, information and website data available and up-to-date.
- General level of satisfaction with customer service as established by customer surveys.
- ORAC website updated and maximum use made of it for communication purposes.

### **HLG 4 Objective No 3**

#### **To provide a comprehensive and effective complaints procedure.**

Feedback and comment on all aspects of ORAC services are welcomed and encouraged. Having due regard to our statutory obligations, any customer who is not satisfied with the standard of customer service provided by the Office may contact us in writing. We will investigate the complaint promptly, through our complaints procedure.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Ensure that information regarding the Customer Complaints Procedure is available through the Customer Service Liaison Panel, ORAC website and other fora.
- Ensure the Customer Complaints Procedures are adhered to in full.
- Notify all applicants of complaints procedures.
- Utilise, as appropriate, methods of redress set out in Customer Complaints Procedures.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Information regarding the Customer Complaints Procedure available through the Customer Service Liaison Panel, ORAC website and other fora.
- Effective complaints procedure in place.
- Information regarding complaints procedure provided to all applicants.
- All avenues of redress set out in the Customer Complaints Procedures explored.

## **High Level Goal 5**

**To efficiently and effectively manage our organisation and its resources in line with best practice, taking into account allocated resources and having regard to the development and training of our staff**

### **Public Sector Modernisation**

ORAC will continue to respond to the challenges posed by the ongoing use of modern management practices and the effective and efficient use of resources. We will also continue to utilise strategic, contingency and operational planning as well as reviewing performance measurements and continuing to improve the quality, consistency and efficiency of our decision making.

Under current and future public sector reform agreements and in an environment where resources available may not be the optimum required, ORAC will endeavour to maximise the use of existing resources (both human and financial) and ICT solutions. We will also continue to optimise the use of flexible working practices.

Our organisational structure is reviewed continuously to ensure that it supports good internal and external communication. Our activities are co-ordinated to achieve effective and efficient outcomes having due regard to the planned organisational changes in the context of the International Protection Act, 2015.

### **HLG 5 Objective No 1**

**Ensure our strategic business planning and individual performance planning frameworks support optimum performance by the organisation.**

#### **Planning**

Strategic and business planning continues to be an integral part of the work of each unit within ORAC to ensure a coherent approach to the development, management and implementation of our goals. The Corporate, Strategic and Business Plans are reflected in the role profiles and goal setting of each staff member under the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS). This enables us to specify individual objectives in greater detail and to define the actions required to achieve them.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Respond to public sector reform and modernisation initiatives in a manner that sustains and enhances the capacity of the organisation to carry out its functions.
- Prepare annual business plans.

- Regularly monitor and review business plans and respond to findings as appropriate.
- Review the management of risk throughout the Office and report on a regular basis.
- Implement PMDS.
- Review Strategy Statement on an annual basis.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Priorities and objectives of Public Sector reform and modernisation programmes complied with.
- Agreed Business Plan ready for the start of each year following staff consultation.
- Quarterly Business Plan review reports completed and any relevant issues addressed.
- Quarterly Risk Management review reports completed.
- Individual PMDS role profile and goal setting forms and reviews completed within prescribed timeframe.
- Strategy Statement reviewed regularly.

### **HLG 5 Objective No 2**

**Manage human resources to meet the business needs of the organisation and the development needs of staff.**

#### **Human Resources**

The professionalism, commitment and integrity of ORAC staff are vital to our continued success. ORAC's staff are its most valuable resource and we fully recognise that a skilled, adaptable and motivated workforce will enable us to achieve the objectives and standards required to meet our business needs. Ensuring that we use staff resources effectively while at the same time facilitating staff to develop their careers will be a continuing priority but also a challenge. We are committed to improved human resource management through the development, implementation and ongoing review of a formal Human Resource Strategy.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Keep our organisational structure under ongoing review and deploy staff in the most efficient and effective manner to meet the requirements of the business and strategic objectives of the Office.
- Develop the expertise and capacity of staff members in the context of significant organisational change.
- Continue to implement and review our equality policies and programmes.

- Continue to implement PMDS.
- Continue to monitor and review the pilot e-working scheme and other family friendly policies in line with business needs.
- Engage fully in the INIS business transformation process in the context of the International Protection Act, 2015.
- Ensure staff posted abroad are well trained and briefed before departure, and fully supported while abroad.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Resources and organisational structure of office utilised in most efficient and effective manner and regular reviews conducted of organisation structure and staffing levels.
- Implementation of the equality programme and annual reports on progress provided to the Partnership Committee.
- Implementation of PMDS and its integration with HRM policies.
- Full engagement in the INIS business transformation process.

### **HLG 5 Objective No 3**

**Make optimum use of ICT solutions to support the business needs of the organisation.**

#### **Information and Communication Technology.**

Information Technology plays an important role in supporting ORAC's business objectives and in enhancing the service delivery of the organisation. This includes the ORAC website. ICT support is provided by the Department of Justice and Equality through the CITRIX framework.

The further development of IT systems, over the period of the strategy, will have a major impact on our ability to meet our high level goals. Furthermore, we will continue to enhance our internal management information and statistical systems to help us to better meet the information and communication needs of the Office.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Maintain management information and IT systems to facilitate analysis of applications, the issue of recommendations and to meet other needs of the organisation with a view to, *inter alia*, protecting the integrity of the protection process.
- Liaise with IT Division, Department of Justice and Equality in maintaining and improving our ICT environment including the optimum use of the ORAC Management Live system and Asylum and Immigration Strategic Integration Programme (AISIP).

- Utilise other specialist systems to meet the needs of the Office.
- Provide suitable e-working and flexible working technological aids/solutions as required.
- Provide ICT training in organisation as required.
- Maintain website and keep up-to-date.
- Utilise existing systems to provide up-to-date statistical and management information to support business planning with particular reference to the use of the services of the ORAC/INIS Reporting and Analysis Unit.
- Engage fully in the business transformation process in the context of INIS shared services approach to the development and distribution of statistical and management information in the context of the ORAC/INIS Reporting and Analysis Unit.
- Engage fully in the INIS business transformation process to ensure that arrangements are in place for IT requirements in the context of the implementation of the International Protection Act, 2015.
- Maintain and support ORAC's IT and telecommunications infrastructure within the context of the CITRIX framework.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Maximum and effective use made of existing IT solutions (including ORAC Management Live system and AISIP) to support business needs of the organisation.
- Maximum and effective use of the ORAC website to deliver business needs and good customer service. Website information current and correct.
- Introduction and successful utilisation of other specialist systems as required.
- Successful implementation of e-working and flexible working technologies as required.
- Appropriate ICT training identified and provided.
- Management information and up-to-date accurate statistical information provided to support business planning.
- Full engagement in the INIS business transformation process from a statistical and management information perspective and in the context of the Reporting and Analysis Unit, INIS.
- Full engagement in the INIS business transformation process and arrangements put in place for IT requirements in the context of the International Protection Act, 2015.
- Secure and stable ICT infrastructure in place.

## **HLG 5 Objective No 4**

**Manage financial resources in the context of Public Sector Modernisation and Reform in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Office.**

### **Financial Management**

ORAC receives an annual allocation of funding from the Department of Justice and Equality for which the Secretary General of the Department is the Accounting Officer and the accounts for ORAC are included in the annual Departmental accounts. The Office will continue to:

- Utilise in an effective and efficient manner the resources allocated for the implementation of our work functions.
- Prepare budgets and estimates relating to our needs within the context of INIS Shared Financial Services framework.
- Ensure effective management and control of financial resources.
- Operate sound financial administration.
- Maintain, monitor and report on financial performance.
- Prepare ORAC's Appropriation Account.
- Comply with the requirements of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and liaise with the Shared Services Unit of INIS, the Internal Audit and relevant Finance Units of the Department of Justice and Equality, where necessary.
- Fully comply with public procurement requirements.

### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Implement sound financial planning, monitoring and administration to ensure most effective and efficient use of resources, having regard to the terms of Public Procurement Guidelines and prompt payments legislation.
- Continue to implement monitoring and control mechanisms to ensure value for money.
- Continue to use the ORACLE Financial Management System.
- Monitor expenditure and provide cost/benefit analysis of major expenditure.

### *Performance Indicators*

- Continued implementation, throughout all areas of ORAC, of the provisions of ORAC's Financial Policy Procedures Document.

- Public procurement and prompt payments requirements complied with.
- Government accounting requirements fully met.
- ORACLE Financial Management System used effectively.
- Effective and efficient management of ORAC's annual financial allocation.

### **HLG 5 Objective No 5**

**To effectively manage the services and facilities of the Office including Energy Awareness initiatives.**

#### **Organisation**

To ensure, within the INIS Shared Services framework, that all of ORAC's organisational, accommodation and other essential support needs are fully operational, maintained and serviced including the provision of a sound Health and Safety Strategy.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Implement a sound effective Health and Safety Strategy for the organisation in line with current legislation.
- Deliver all of ORAC's organisational, accommodation, cleaning and security and other essential support needs in a timely fashion.
- Ensure that Energy Awareness is monitored in line with commitments in the Energy Action Plan.
- Operate a timely and efficient internal and external mail delivery and distribution system.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Full compliance with Health and Safety legislation.
- Timely delivery of all of ORAC's organisational, accommodation, cleaning and security and other essential support needs.
- Energy Awareness monitored in line with commitments in the Energy Action Plan.
- Implementation of a timely and efficient internal and external mail delivery and distribution system.

## **HLG 5 Objective No 6**

### **To build a strong commitment to new ways of working through partnership.**

#### **Partnership**

As with the previous Strategy Statements, maintaining and developing partnership will be a priority during the period in which this Statement applies. Having due regard to the responsibilities of senior management in the organisation, we will continue to ensure that partnership is central to promoting internal dialogue and consultation in the process of change and improvement. We will further develop and progress initiatives including workplace learning, promoting diversity and work life balance having due regard to business needs. We will manage business transformation in a partnership way by building capabilities to proactively introduce and manage change as well as tackling challenges. We recognise that effective delivery on a challenging agenda and our targets requires a partnership approach.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Continue to promote partnership throughout the workplace.
- Ensure partnership involvement in the organisation's strategic and business planning process.
- Deepen the change process in all areas of the organisation and promote best practice.
- Develop a communicative and collaborative environment.
- Encourage the development of new ways of working through partnership aimed at increasing flexibility and improving performance having due regard to the statutory responsibilities of the organisation and business needs.
- Advocate a performance culture whilst maintaining a good workplace environment.
- Promote and create an environment which is responsive to the needs of staff, within the overall framework of the statutory responsibilities of the organisation and business needs.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Bi-monthly Partnership Committee meetings held with observers present and minutes available. Time allocated for unit meetings, PMDS, and business transformation at unit level.
- Partnership embedded and an integral part of the organisation's strategic and business planning and culture.
- Improved organisational performance as evidenced, for example, by Annual Reports and statistics.
- An efficient, modern and customer oriented organisation.
- Business transformation and modernisation delivered in a timely and effective manner.

- Increased staff involvement in the workplace through staff meetings, working groups and Business Plan meetings.
- Ongoing investment in workplace training and lifelong learning opportunities.

### **HLG 5 Objective No 7**

**To provide quality corporate support to the ORAC to discharge its statutory and non-statutory functions and also to effectively monitor the Office's communications, both internal and external.**

#### **Corporate Office**

The role of the Corporate and Customer Service Centre is to oversee the provision of quality administrative and secretarial support to the Refugee Applications Commissioner and the Senior Management Team to enable the discharge of statutory and non-statutory functions. The Office co-ordinates material in response to requests from, *inter alia*, the Department of Justice and Equality including the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, other Government Departments/agencies, other stakeholders and the media. It also prepares all corporate documents and is responsible for their circulation.

#### *Strategies to Support Objective*

- Provide quality administrative and secretarial support to the Commissioner, senior management and the Partnership Committee having due regard to the business transformation process taking place in INIS.
- Prepare and co-ordinate material in accordance with guidelines for release to other Government Departments and agencies, international fora and media as well as responses to Parliamentary Questions.
- Prepare and publish the organisation's corporate documents.
- Ensure that ORAC meets our commitments under the Official Languages Act, 2003.
- Ensure that ORAC meets our commitments under data protection legislation.
- Ensure that ORAC meets our requirements and commitments under freedom of information legislation.
- Ensure that internal communications objectives are included in all unit business plans.
- Ensure that external communications objectives are included in all unit business plans.

#### *Performance Indicators*

- Commissioner, senior management and Partnership Committee provided with quality administrative and secretarial support.

- All data prepared and released according to set guidelines.
- Corporate documents published in accordance with statutory stipulations and timeframes.
- Relevant corporate documents are available in Irish.
- Obligations under data protection legislation are met.
- Obligations under the freedom of information legislation are met.
- Quarterly review of internal communication objectives.
- Quarterly review of external communication objectives.
- Full engagement in business transformation process and successful transition of services to INIS.

### **HLG 5 Objective No 8**

#### **Internal support to the Office through the provision of a copying and registry service.**

##### *Strategies to support objective*

- Continued delivery of an effective copying and registry service.
- Copy files within prescribed turnaround times.

##### *Performance indicators*

- Files copied within the specified deadlines.
- General level of satisfaction with the level of copying and registry service provided to the Office.

**ORAC Management Staffing Structure**

<b>Commissioner</b>			
<b>Principal Officer*</b>			
<b>Assistant Principal Officer</b>			
<p>Corporate and Customer Service Centre***</p> <p>Judicial Review and Investigations Unit***</p> <p>Reporting and Analysis Unit (ORAC aspects)***</p> <p>Staff Support, COI/Research and Legal Analysis Unit***</p> <p>Training and Freedom of Information Unit ***</p>			
<b>Principal Officer</b>			
<b>Assistant Principal Officer</b>	<b>Assistant Principal Officer</b>	<b>Assistant Principal Officer</b>	<b>Assistant Principal Officer</b>
<p>Asylum Case Processing Unit</p> <p>Administration, Arrangements and Presenting Unit</p>	<p>Dublin Unit</p> <p>Reception Unit</p>	<p>Procedures, Training and Organisation Development Unit</p> <p>Single Procedure Planning Unit</p> <p>Subsidiary Protection Unit</p>	<p>Relocation Unit</p> <p>Family Reunification Unit</p>

\* 1 Principal Officer vacancy.

\*\*1 Assistant Principal Officer vacancy

\*\*\*These Units report directly to the Commissioner.

### ORAC's Main Contact Organisations

An Garda Síochána  
Chief State Solicitor's Office  
Comptroller and Auditor General's Office  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade  
Department of Justice and Equality (Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service)  
Department of Social Protection  
European Asylum Support Office  
European Commission  
European Migration Network (EMN)  
General Directors' Immigration Services Conference (GDISC)  
Health Service Executive  
Houses of the Oireachtas  
Intergovernmental Consultations on Asylum, Refugee and Migration Policies (IGC)  
Irish Prison Service  
Irish Refugee Protection Programme  
NGOs as represented on the Customer Service Liaison Panel  
Office of Public Works  
Office of the Attorney General  
Refugee Appeals Tribunal  
Refugee Documentation Centre  
Reception and Integration Agency  
Refugee Legal Service  
TUSLA – the Child and Family Agency  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

**Some Cross Agency Issues involving ORAC**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Dept / Agencies Involved</b>	<b>Action Required by ORAC</b>
Verifying the current address of protection applicants.	Dept of Social Protection and RIA.	Liaise with Dept. of Social Protection and RIA to verify current addresses.
Informing applicants of their right to seek help with their protection claim from legal representatives including the Refugee Legal Service (RLS).	Refugee Legal Service Law Society Private Law Firms.	ORAC encourages applicants to seek legal advice through the provision of appropriate information.
Representation of ORAC at oral appeal hearings of RAT.	Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT).	Provide effective representation at appeal hearings.
Provide replies to statutory requests from RAT under Section 16 of the Refugee Act, 1996.	RAT.	Provide timely and appropriate responses.
Fingerprints transmitted to Garda Headquarters in line with statutory framework.	Garda Síochána.	Garda HQ is responsible for storing and maintaining the fingerprints of asylum seekers and maintaining IT infrastructure to send fingerprints to the Eurodac database for matching purposes. They provide formal confirmation to ORAC on fingerprint matching.
Unaccompanied Minors.	TUSLA – Child and Family Agency	Liaise with HSE TUSLA – Child and Family Agency regarding the examination of applications from unaccompanied minors or for family reunification as required.
Effective operation of EU Dublin Process.	An Garda Síochána and Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS).	Liaison with GNIB and relevant INIS Divisions on effective implementation of the Dublin Regulation within statutory frameworks.
Implementation of INIS business transformation process including new legislation.	INIS Divisions.	To participate proactively in key INIS project groups.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Dept / Agencies Involved</b>	<b>Action Required by ORAC</b>
Facilitate appropriate access to information required for the investigation / prevention of crime and fraud.	GNIB, Dept. of Social Protection, HSE etc.	Operate agreed liaison arrangements with other bodies in compliance with Refugee Act, 1996, Data Protection and other relevant legislation.
Facilitate transfer of applicants' files in relation to Appeals, Withdrawal of Applications and Ministerial Decisions.	INIS and RAT.	Operate agreed secure file transfer procedures.
Development and implementation of IT Projects including AISIP.	INIS, RIA, RAT and RLS.	Participate in Asylum IT strategy development and implementation.
Cross Agency Training Groups.	UNHCR, RAT, RIA, RLS, INIS and training deliverer.	Participate in protection area and other training groups. Deliver and receive training courses as required.
EURODAC.	INIS, GNIB, EU Commission, other Dublin Regulation States.	Participate in training and other relevant initiatives.
Up-to-date, authoritative, relevant Country of Origin Information.	Refugee Documentation Centre, EASO, UNHCR, IGC, other States.	Participation in relevant working groups and committees.
Applicants in detention.	GNIB, Irish Prison Service.	Investigation of applications for asylum – prioritisation.
Preparation and publication of Corporate Documents.	INIS and Houses of Oireachtas.	Submit within the statutory timeframes.
Input into legislative development and practical cooperation in international protection at EU level.	European Commission, European Asylum Support Office, INIS.	Participate in and input into relevant meetings as appropriate.
Input into EU Relocation programme	Irish Refugee Protection Programme	Provide Liaison Officers and Seconded National Experts to EU Relocation programme. Operate relocation mechanisms and process asylum seekers who arrive through relocation.

Copies of this document can be downloaded from  
[www.orac.ie](http://www.orac.ie)

Queries should be addressed in writing or by phone to:

Customer Service Centre  
Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner  
79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2

Telephone: 01-6028000 Lo-call: 1890 202418

Fax: 01-6028122

Or by email: [oracmail@orac.ie](mailto:oracmail@orac.ie)